JOURNAL OF INCLUSIVE & INNOVATIVE PRACTICES (JOIIP)
ONLINE ISSN: 3005-9976

The Power of the Marginalised: A Feminist Reading of 2 Kings 5:1-14

Menard Musendekwa (PhD)
Reformed Church University
musendekwam@rcu.ac.zw, revmusendekwa@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper explores a feminist reading of 2 Kings 5:1-14, shifting the focus from Naaman, the prominent commander of the Syrian army, to the unnamed little girl servant who serves his wife. Captured from Israel, this girl is marginalised both by her status as a servant and by her youth, yet she possesses crucial knowledge about a prophet in Israel who is capable of healing Naaman's leprosy. Through the feminist lens, the paper examines how a feminist perspective can illuminate the inherent power dynamics in this biblical narrative, emphasising the agency of those typically relegated to the margins. This study used feminist biblical criticism to examine the text, paying particular attention to gender, voice, and the sociopolitical ramifications of servanthood in the ancient Near East. One important conclusion was the stark difference in understanding and faith between the monarch of Israel and the servant girl: the monarch reacts with helplessness and terror, but the servant girl exhibits theological assurance and provides a hopeful route to recovery. Her function as a driving force behind Naaman's change upends established hierarchies of power and validates the prophetic abilities of underrepresented groups. The paper reflects on Jesus' acknowledgement of Naaman's healing in Elisha's time (Luke 4:27), further underscoring the transformative potential of marginalised individuals within scriptural narratives. The study suggests that in order to elevate the voices of women and the oppressed as legitimate conduits of divine knowledge, academic and religious institutions should embrace more inclusive interpretive frameworks.

Key Word: Feminist reading, marginalisation, 2 Kings 5:1-14, Naaman, little girl servant, healing.

© 2024 This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which permits unrestricted use, distribution and production in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which permits unrestricted use, distribution and production in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

The biblical narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14 unfolds a powerful story of healing and transformation, primarily centred on Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who grapples with the debilitating effects of leprosy. As a figure of authority and military prowess, Naaman represents the complexities of power, status, and societal expectations. However, within this dramatic account lies the often-overlooked figure of the little girl servant, a captive taken from Israel who plays a crucial role in initiating Naaman's healing journey. This young girl, referred to only by her stature, embodies the experiences of the marginalised and vulnerable members of society, whose voices are frequently silenced in traditional interpretations.

This study seeks to re-contextualise the narrative through a feminist lens, emphasising the importance of marginalised voices and the potential for empowerment inherent in their stories. By focusing on the little girl's agency and knowledge, the research aims to challenge dominant interpretations that privilege prominent figures while neglecting the insights offered by those at the periphery. The little girl's declaration of the Prophet Elisha's ability to heal Naaman not only showcases her confidence and understanding, but also invites a broader exploration of power dynamics and social structures.

In examining this narrative through the lens of feminist biblical criticism, this study will reveal the complexities of agency, vulnerability, and the potential for transformation that exists within marginalised voices. By elevating the little girl servant's role, we can gain a deeper understanding of the text's implications for contemporary discussions around gender, power, and social justice, particularly in contexts like Zimbabwe, where marginalised individuals often navigate systemic barriers. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of biblical narratives, underscoring the significance of every voice in the quest for healing and justice.

BACKGROUND

The biblical narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14 unfolds against the backdrop of ancient Israel, a society characterised by rigid social hierarchies and patriarchal structures. Within this context, women, especially those in servitude, were frequently marginalised, their roles reduced to that of subservience. The little girl servant in this narrative epitomises this marginalisation; she is captured from

CC BY

Israel and forced into servitude within a foreign household, stripped of her identity and agency. Despite her lowly status, her knowledge and confidence in the Prophet Elisha's ability to heal Naaman demonstrate the potential for significant change that can arise from the most unexpected sources.

In ancient Israel, women were often excluded from positions of power and influence, their voices silenced in both public and religious spheres. Scholars have noted that the marginalisation of women in biblical texts reflects broader societal norms that prioritise male authority and control (Cooper, 2018; Longman, 2020). This systemic oppression not only affected their personal agency, but also limited their contributions to the wider community. Servants, similarly, were viewed as extensions of their masters, existing primarily to fulfil their masters' needs and desires. Consequently, their insights and experiences were seldom acknowledged or valued (Ramsay, 2021).

However, the narrative of Naaman's healing invites readers to rethink these established hierarchies and to recognise the importance of those who exist in the margins. The little girl's role serves as a poignant reminder that significant transformations often stem from the voices and actions of the overlooked and undervalued. By highlighting her knowledge about Elisha, the story suggests that wisdom and insight can reside in unexpected places, challenging the conventional understanding of power and authority.

This background sets the stage for a deeper examination of the implications of the little girl's role within the narrative. It invites a reconsideration of traditional interpretations of biblical texts, urging readers to acknowledge the complexity of agency, particularly for marginalised individuals. By centring the experiences of those on the fringes, this analysis seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and holistic understanding of biblical narratives, one that recognises the invaluable contributions of all individuals, regardless of their societal status.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While the focus of 2 Kings 5:1-14 has predominantly been on Naaman and his healing, the role of the little girl servant has been largely neglected in scholarly discussions. This oversight raises questions about the broader implications of power dynamics within biblical narratives, particularly regarding the voices of marginalised individuals. This section is incomplete. It should be developed fully and end by reiterating the research topic.

CC BY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the little girl servant's knowledge and agency challenge traditional power dynamics in the narrative?
2. In what ways do a feminist reading of 2 Kings 5:1-14 illuminate the experiences of marginalised individuals in biblical texts?
3. What implications do this reading have for contemporary understandings of power and agency?

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the role of the little girl servant in 2 Kings 5:1-14 through a feminist lens.
2. To explore the power dynamics present in the narrative and how they reflect broader societal structures.
3. To contribute to the discourse on marginalisation and empowerment within biblical studies.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Leprosy in Levitical Law

Leprosy, as defined in Leviticus 13, encompasses a range of serious skin conditions that signify a state of ritual impurity. According to Leviticus 13:2, leprosy is identified by various symptoms, including “a rising in the skin in the flesh, a scab, or a bright spot.” These manifestations suggest the possibility of a serious skin disease, which can escalate in severity, potentially covering the entire body, as noted in Leviticus 13:12. Such extensive affliction results in the individual being deemed "unclean", a status that carries profound social and religious implications (Holy Bible, NRSV, 1989).

The protocols established for individuals with leprosy reflect the severity of the condition in ancient Israelite society. Leviticus 13:45-46 prescribes that any person with a serious skin disease must adhere to strict guidelines: they are required to wear torn clothes, leave their hair unkempt, cover their upper lip, and publicly declare their status by crying out, “Unclean! Unclean!” This public declaration serves to alert others to their condition, thereby preventing the spread of ritual impurity within the community. Such measures underscore the stigma associated with leprosy, which was not only a physical affliction but also a social one (Freedman, 1992).

In the story of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, the narrative introduces a

CC BY

distinctive dynamic by centering the role of a marginalized Israelite servant girl, whose voice initiates the path to healing and underscores the subversive power of those at the social and political periphery (2 Kings 5:1–14). Despite being afflicted with leprosy, Naaman likely remained within the bounds of his family and community due to his high status and military position. This distinction may have allowed him certain privileges, contrasting with the experiences of the average person suffering from leprosy, who would be ostracised from society (Miller, 2002).

The implications of leprosy extend beyond the individual to include garments and housing, as addressed in Leviticus 13:47-49 and Leviticus 14:34. Leprosy can manifest on clothing, rendering it unclean, and can even affect houses, often interpreted as the presence of mould or fungus. These provisions illustrate a comprehensive understanding of leprosy as not just a physical ailment but a multifaceted issue that impacts the community as a whole (Holladay, 1986).

Thus, leprosy, in the context of Levitical law, serves as a powerful metaphor for exclusion, both socially and religiously. The stigma attached to leprosy highlights the precarious balance between health, purity, and community, emphasising the profound isolation experienced by those deemed unclean. The story of Naaman's healing, particularly through the intervention of the little girl servant, invites reflection on themes of healing, restoration, and the transformative potential of marginalised voices in biblical narratives.

Little Girl – (Hebrew קְטַנָּה נַעֲרָה)

The designation "little girl" within the context of 2 Kings 5:1-14 derives from the Hebrew phrase קְטַנָּהקְטַנָּה הנַעֲרָ (na'arah qatanah), which is translated as "young girl" or "little girl." This characterisation holds substantial significance, as it emphasises her stature rather than divulging her name, thus highlighting her identity as a vulnerable and marginalised figure within the narrative.

The narrative reveals that the little girl was taken captive by bands of warriors during a raid from Israel to Syria, signifying her status as a slave girl in the household of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army. This background is essential for understanding her position within the social hierarchy: she represents the many individuals who are often rendered voiceless in biblical texts, belonging to the oppressed and subjugated

CC BY

segments of society (Gafney, 2017; Mott, 2019).

By identifying her primarily by her stature and not by name, the author emphasises her youth and lack of agency, situating her within a framework of powerlessness. However, it is crucial to note that despite her marginalised status, the little girl plays a pivotal role in the narrative. Her knowledge about the prophet Elisha in Israel, who has the power to heal Naaman's leprosy, catalyses the healing that ultimately occurs. Thus, she embodies the potential for agency even within contexts of oppression, highlighting the complexities of her role as both a victim of circumstance and a source of significant influence (Blum, 2020).

The little girl's character serves as a poignant reminder of the countless unnamed individuals in history who, despite their marginalisation, contribute to pivotal moments in narratives and societal transformations. Her story invites reflection on themes of vulnerability, resilience, and the often-overlooked power of marginalised voices in biblical and contemporary contexts (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1992).

My Lord (Hebrew: אֲדֹנִי)

In the narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14, the little girl servant addresses Naaman as "My lord" (Hebrew: אֲדֹנִי, *'ădōnî*), a term that conveys a sense of respect and authority. The Hebrew word *'ădōn* translates to "master" or "lord" and is often used to denote someone in a position of power or leadership. This form of address not only reflects the social hierarchy in which Naaman, as the commander of the Syrian army, occupies a prominent status, but also indicates the power dynamics inherent in their relationship, given that the little girl is a captive and a slave in his household (Gafney, 2017; Mott, 2019).

The use of *'ădōnî* carries significant connotations within the Old Testament, as it is a term also employed to address God, reinforcing the notion of reverence and acknowledgement of authority (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1992). In biblical texts, addressing someone as "my lord" indicates recognition of their superiority and often reflects a servant-master relationship. By using this term, the little girl establishes a framework of respect while simultaneously positioning herself in a subordinate role.

However, the address also serves to highlight the complexities of the narrative. While she is in a marginalised position, her use of the

CC BY

term "my lord" does not diminish her influence within the story. Instead, it underscores her agency, as she directs Naaman to seek healing from the prophet Elisha in Israel. This juxtaposition of her vulnerable status and her pivotal role in the healing narrative invites deeper reflection on themes of power, authority, and the dynamics of relationships in biblical contexts (Blum, 2020).

In summary, the term *'ădōnî* signifies both respect and acknowledgement of power, illustrating the little girl's nuanced position within the story of Naaman's healing while emphasising the complex interplay of authority and agency in biblical narratives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs feminist biblical criticism as its primary theoretical framework, which offers a lens through which to analyse the intersections of gender, power dynamics, and societal structures within biblical narratives. Feminist biblical criticism seeks to uncover and challenge the patriarchal interpretations that have historically dominated biblical scholarship, providing a more nuanced understanding of the text by foregrounding the experiences and voices of marginalised individuals, particularly women (Trible, 1984; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992).

At its core, feminist biblical criticism examines how gender influences the interpretation of scripture, advocating for a re-evaluation of texts that have traditionally been viewed through a male-centric lens. By emphasising the significance of women and other marginalised figures in biblical narratives, this framework illuminates the complexities of agency, identity, and empowerment (Culpepper, 1993; Mott, 2019). The little girl servant in 2 Kings 5:1-14 serves as a case study for this analysis, representing the often-overlooked voices of those in subordinate positions.

This framework also recognises that power is not simply concentrated in positions of authority; rather, it exists in various forms throughout social relationships (Nash, 2004). In the context of 2 Kings 5:1-14, the little girl's knowledge and agency challenge the notion that power is solely held by prominent figures such as Naaman. By asserting her voice and knowledge about the prophet in Israel, she not only influences the narrative's trajectory but also exemplifies how those deemed powerless can effect significant change (Gafney, 2017).

Furthermore, feminist biblical criticism encourages a critical examination of how societal structures shape individual experiences and the interpretations of their roles within biblical texts. This approach underscores the importance of context, both historical and cultural, in understanding the dynamics at play (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1992). It invites readers to consider how power, identity, and agency are constructed and negotiated within the framework of the text, prompting a re-evaluation of the social hierarchies and relational dynamics depicted in scripture.

In summary, this study's use of feminist biblical criticism as its theoretical framework aims to reveal the complexities of agency and empowerment within biblical narratives. By focusing on the marginalised voices often silenced in traditional interpretations, it seeks to provide a richer understanding of the text and its implications for contemporary discussions around gender, power, and social justice. Through this lens, the narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14 can be reinterpreted to highlight the transformative potential of those on the margins, ultimately contributing to a broader discourse on empowerment and inclusion in biblical scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The combined scholarship of Dube Masenya, Oduyoye and Mbuwayesango offers a powerful reimagining of biblical interpretation through African feminist and postcolonial lenses. The authors critique the imperial and patriarchal biases in traditional hermeneutics by championing liberatory readings that prioritize the voices of the oppressed and affirm African epistemologies and languages (Dube, 2001, 2008, 2012; Dube & Wafula, 2017; Dube, Mbuvi & Mbuwayesango, 2013). Masenya complements this approach by reclaiming androcentric texts like Proverbs 31, using indigenous African frameworks to empower women and validate communal interpretation practices (Masenya, 2004; Masenya & Ngwa, 2018). Her contribution to *The Africana Bible* (Page, 2010) further reinforces the importance of contextual, African-centred readings that resist Western theological dominance.

Oduyoye builds on these insights by situating African women's lived experiences as foundational sources for theological reflection. Through works such as *Daughters of Anowa* and *Beads and Strands*, she interrogates both Christianity and African traditions, highlighting their dual potential to oppress or empower women depending on

CC BY

how they are engaged (Oduyoye, 1992, 1999, 2001, 2004). Mbuwayesango, in turn, addresses the intersections of gender, empire, and biblical narrative, revealing how figures like Tamar and the daughters of Zelophehad expose the socio-political forces that silence women — and how these same stories can be reinterpreted as narratives of resistance and justice (Mbuwayesango, 2004, 2007, 2009). Together, these scholars call for a shift in interpretive power toward African women at the margins, affirming their authority not only as theological subjects but as critical interpreters of scripture.

Similarly, there is significant gap in feminist interpretations of 2 Kings 5:1-14. Much scholarly attention has been directed toward Naaman, the prominent character whose healing narrative has been analysed from various theological, historical, and medical perspectives. Scholars have primarily focused on his status as a military commander, his leprosy, and the transformative impact of his encounter with the prophet Elisha (Tsumura, 1998; Habel, 2008). These studies often emphasise themes of power, identity, and divine intervention, leaving little room for the examination of secondary characters who play crucial roles in the narrative.

In contrast, the little girl servant, whose name remains unmentioned, has received relatively scant attention. This oversight is notable, considering her pivotal role as the catalyst for Naaman's healing. By providing critical information about the prophet in Israel, she initiates the chain of events that ultimately leads to Naaman's restoration. Feminist interpretations often highlight the importance of recognising marginalised voices within biblical texts; however, the little girl's agency and experience have not been sufficiently explored within the context of 2 Kings 5:1-14 (Carson, 2017; Mott, 2019). This neglect is particularly striking when considering the rich potential for feminist readings to uncover themes of resilience and hope, especially among characters who traditionally remain silent or are dismissed.

The absence of scholarly attention to the little girl servant can be linked to broader patterns of exclusion within biblical interpretation. Historically, women's voices in scripture have often been marginalised, leading to interpretations that prioritise male characters and perspectives. While some studies have addressed female figures in more prominent roles, such as Ruth, Esther, or Deborah, they tend to overlook the significance of the unnamed, marginalised characters like the little girl servant (Gafney, 2017; Schüssler

CC BY

Fiorenza, 1992). This oversight signals a missed opportunity to examine how the experiences of these lesser-known figures enrich our understanding of biblical narratives and the social hierarchies at play.

Furthermore, feminist biblical criticism advocates for an intersectional approach that considers how various forms of identity — such as gender, class, and ethnicity — interact within the text. The little girl's position as a captive Israelite in a foreign land underscores the complexities of her identity and experience, raising important questions about power dynamics, displacement, and agency (Gafney, 2017). The intersection of her gender and status as a slave creates a unique lens through which to analyse her actions and motivations, revealing the intricacies of agency in contexts of oppression and marginalisation.

Recent scholarship has begun to explore the significance of minor characters within biblical narratives, emphasising their contributions to the larger story (Blum, 2020). However, the specific case of the little girl servant in 2 Kings 5:1-14 remains largely unexplored. This gap highlights the need for a more intentional focus on how these characters serve as conduits for themes of healing, redemption, and the power of knowledge. The little girl's willingness to speak out about the prophet in Israel showcases her potential as an agent of change, contradicting the traditional narrative that positions power solely within the hands of figures like Naaman.

Additionally, the influence of cultural and historical contexts on interpretations of biblical texts cannot be overlooked. The prevailing patriarchal norms of ancient Israelite society likely shaped the narrative's emphasis on male characters and their experiences, further marginalising female voices (Pinn, 2010). By examining the cultural dynamics at play, this study seeks to contextualise the little girl's role and highlight the significance of her voice in the broader narrative.

By focusing on the little girl servant, this study aims to fill the gap in existing literature by providing a nuanced analysis that foregrounds the experiences of the marginalised. It seeks to demonstrate how her voice and agency not only challenge traditional notions of power but also enrich our understanding of the text as a whole. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions within feminist biblical criticism, emphasising the

CC BY

importance of inclusivity and representation in biblical narratives.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised textual analysis to examine the narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14. The choice was particularly suited for exploring the complexities of biblical texts, allowing for an in-depth engagement with the nuances of language, character dynamics, and thematic elements. Through close reading, the study focussed on the specific language and imagery used in the text to draw out the significance of the little girl servant's role in Naaman's healing story.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis involved examining the narrative structure, character development, and key themes present in 2 Kings 5:1-14. By paying attention to the diction and phrasing used to describe the little girl servant and her interactions with Naaman and his wife, the study aimed to uncover the implicit power dynamics at play. This analysis involved looking at how her unnamed status contrasted with Naaman's prominent identity, which served to highlight how marginalised voices contribute to the narrative's broader themes of healing, agency, and faith.

Critical Engagement with Feminist Theory

The study also engaged critically with feminist theory, drawing on key concepts such as intersectionality, agency, and voice. By applying these theoretical lenses, the research investigated how the little girl's character challenged traditional notions of power and authority within the text. Feminist biblical criticism emphasised the importance of reading scripture through the lens of gender dynamics, which enables a deeper understanding of how characters, especially women and marginalised figures, navigate their circumstances and exert influence despite societal constraints (Gafney, 2017; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992).

Incorporation of Scholarly Works

To contextualise the analysis within the existing body of feminist biblical criticism, the study incorporated relevant scholarly works. This involved reviewing literature that addresses the themes of marginalisation, agency, and healing in biblical texts, as well as specific studies focused on 2 Kings 5. By engaging with previous scholarship, the research

CC BY

demonstrated how the little girl's story contributes to ongoing discussions about the representation of women and marginalised voices in scripture (Mott, 2019; Blum, 2020). This review not only grounded the analysis in the current academic discourse but also highlighted the gaps in the literature that this study aims to address.

Ultimately, the methodological approach of this study sought to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the narrative of 2 Kings 5:1-14, emphasising the importance of the little girl servant's role in understanding power dynamics within biblical texts. By employing qualitative methods, engaging with feminist theory, and situating the analysis within the broader scholarly conversation, the research aimed to contribute to a more inclusive interpretation of scripture that recognises the value of marginalised voices.

Findings

This analysis of 2 Kings 5:1–14 demonstrates how marginalized voices, especially the small girl servant's, can challenge long-standing power structures. She demonstrated incredible agency by guiding Naaman toward Elisha and initiating his treatment, despite her vulnerability as a Jewish captive and servant in Naaman's home (Gafney, 2017; Mott, 2019; McKenzie, 2021). She demonstrated how knowledge may empower the marginalized over formal authorities by contrasting her bravery with the King of Israel's powerlessness (2 Kings 5:7) (Sweeney, 2018; Womack, 2022). In addition to highlighting how diaspora characters like Joseph and Daniel frequently influence power structures despite their outsider status (Murray, 2020; Hays, 2021), the girl's faith transcended societal taboos (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992; Holladay, 2020). Her testimony ultimately resulted in Naaman's acceptance of Israel's God (2 Kings 5:15), demonstrating that change frequently starts with unexpected people (Blumenthal, 2019; Mott, 2020). Biblical feminists emphasise how these minority voices challenge prevailing narratives and allow for divine intervention (Brenner, 2001; Masenya, 2004). According to the findings, the oppressed people's agency, faith, and divine knowledge are essential resources for preventing exclusion and promoting theological understanding (Dube, 2001; Masenya & Ngwa, 2018; McKenzie, 2018; Smith, 2020).

CC BY

The Healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1–14: A Feminist and Theological Analysis

Deep insights regarding societal norms, healing, diaspora, power dynamics, and marginalization can be gained from the biblical story of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5:1–14. The anonymous young girl servant, a seemingly inconsequential character whose role drastically changes the course of events, is at the centre of this story. Her stance is strengthened by feminist biblical criticism and cultural exegesis, which emphasises how marginalized people can have transformational power.

Marginalisation and Agency

The young, unidentified Israelite captive who works in the home of Naaman, a Syrian army commander, is shown as the young girl servant. Her marginalisation in the patriarchal and hierarchical world of the biblical narrative is highlighted by the reduction of her identity to her age, gender, nationality, and status as a slave. She demonstrates remarkable agency in spite of these constraints by sending her mistress — and consequently Naaman — to the prophet Elisha for cure.

Her behaviour defies accepted social conventions. As a foreign prisoner, speaking up is a daring act of defiance that subverts societal and gender norms. By using her understanding of divine healing to regain some degree of power, she implies that authority and influence in Scripture frequently come from unanticipated and marginalized sources. Characters like Ruth, Esther, and the Exodus midwives all exhibit this recurrent biblical theme.

Cultural Norms and the Stigma of Leprosy

In ancient Israel, the story of Naaman's leprosy highlights the severe cultural and theological stigma attached to illness. According to Levitical law (Leviticus 13:45–46), leprosy made a person ritually "unclean," necessitating their seclusion and public disclosure of their illness. Regardless of social standing, this marginalized those who were affected. Thus, Naaman's leprosy turns into a sign of fragility, depriving him of the power that comes with his military position. His physical condition calls into question the notion that social exclusion is prevented by power. The little girl, on the other hand, has knowledge that is essential to his recovery despite being doubly marginalised as a foreigner and a female slave.

CC BY

This inversion is where the story's irony resides: the strong are made helpless, while the weak have knowledge of salvation. It implies that marginalised voices, rather than institutional power, are frequently the source of healing, both social and physical.

The Little Girl and Jewish Customs

The girl's Israelite heritage is noteworthy. There were clear distinctions between the clean and the unclean in her cultural and religious background, especially when it came to leprosy. Her choice to interact with a leprous Gentile is against both social and religious norms.

She, nevertheless, exhibits a strong knowledge of and faith in the God of Israel and His prophet. Her act of faith in making the recommendation shows that, despite being in captivity, she maintains her religious beliefs and cultural identity. Her expertise serves as a bridge across religious and cultural barriers, illustrating the ability of diaspora people to act as spiritual and cultural intermediaries.

Knowledge and Power Dynamics

The story effectively demonstrates how information can subvert established hierarchies. The only one who originally understands the source of healing is the young girl. She has authority that even the king of Israel does not have because she is aware of Elisha's prophetic talents. This scene demonstrates a stark contrast: in response to Naaman's plea for recovery, the King of Israel tears his garments and bemoans his helplessness in a terrified and dejected manner. The girl, on the other hand, provides a straightforward and certain response.

Conventional notions of authority are challenged by the contrast between the powerful but uneducated monarch and the informed but marginalised girl. It recognizes that people on the periphery of society can have spiritual insight and leadership, not just the elites.

The Diaspora Experience and Transformative Potential

The role of the little girl has a strong connection to the diaspora topic. She is a displaced person in a strange country, much as Joseph in Egypt or Daniel in Babylon, yet she has historical influence. Her story serves as an example of how diasporic people can rise above victimisation and become change agents.

CC BY

This trend echoes a larger biblical theme: people who are exiled or captured frequently end up serving as conduits for divine intervention and as messengers of God's knowledge. The girl's tale is one of proactive faith that aids in healing and transformation in an unfamiliar setting rather than one of passive suffering.

Her encounter with Naaman turns into a cultural exchange, and her knowledge and faith set off a series of events that lead to Naaman's spiritual and physical rejuvenation. Her fortitude and skill in juggling her multiple identities as a captive and a messenger of heavenly truth highlight the diaspora people's capacity for transformation.

Testimony of Faith and Spiritual Transformation

A spiritual journey is at the centre of the story. At first, Naaman approaches Elisha with grandiose healing expectations and political bluster. Rather, Elisha suggests a modest deed: taking seven baths in the Jordan. Naaman's first opposition is a reflection of his unease with the simplicity and humility required of him; it also symbolises a larger human reluctance to follow unusual or modest healing paths.

But in the end, he experiences a significant bodily and spiritual metamorphosis. His recovery is a process of conversion rather than just skin repair. "Now I realise that there is no God in the entire world except in Israel," he declares (2 Kings 5:15). This recognition marks the beginning of a more profound redemptive journey that goes beyond his physical recovery. The beginning of this redemptive journey is greatly aided by the little girl's faith. Her courageous testimony affirms the ability of seemingly inconsequential witnesses to lead others to spiritual enlightenment and starts Naaman on his journey toward healing and transformation.

Broader Theological and Contemporary Implications

Rich theological insights can be gained from this tale. It highlights the value of faith, humility, and the role of outsiders while undermining established power structures and ancient Israel's purity codes. The young girl's act of faith serves as an example of how God's work frequently happens via the weak and disenfranchised rather than through monarchs or warriors.

This story prompts us to consider how we listen to people whose voices are frequently disregarded and how cultures treat the weak

CC BY

in contemporary settings. It forces religious communities to reconsider their presumptions on power, influence, and purity. The girl's bravery and wisdom highlight how crucial it is for religious communities and larger social organizations to accept and value different viewpoints.

All things considered, the account of Naaman's recovery in 2 Kings 5:1–14 — especially the part played by the unnamed young servant girl — is a potent tale of inversion, change, and trust. The girl fights her marginal status to become a bearer of knowledge that can change lives, as we can observe via feminist and theological research. In addition to Naaman's physical recovery, her deeds trigger a spiritual awakening that transforms his outlook on life.

This story demonstrates that heavenly truth and agency are frequently discovered in the disregarded and oppressed and are not just found in the mighty or the named. The small girl's voice and faith have endured throughout history as proof of the significant influence of marginalised people in God's redeeming tale. Her narrative encourages readers to pay closer attention to marginalised voices and to see the divine potential in all voices, no matter how tiny or muted.

DISCUSSION

The narrative of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5:1-14 serves as a rich text for analysis, particularly through the lens of feminist biblical criticism. By examining the characters within the narrative, primarily Naaman, the little girl servant, and Elisha, this discussion explores themes of marginalisation, power dynamics, and cultural context, while also engaging with contemporary Zimbabwean issues. The intersection of biblical narratives with Zimbabwe's socio-political realities offers valuable insights into the complexities of power, identity, and social justice.

The Role of the Little Girl: Marginality and Agency

The character of the little girl servant epitomises the marginalised within both biblical and contemporary contexts. Her identity, defined by her stature and lack of name, parallels the experiences of many young Zimbabweans who find themselves voiceless in the face of systemic injustices. In Zimbabwe, many children and young people are affected by socio-economic challenges,

CC BY

often experiencing displacement, violence, and exploitation.

Scholars such as Campbell (1996) and Brenner (1999) argue that the voices of marginalised characters in biblical narratives often serve as critical agents of change, despite their apparent powerlessness. The little girl's courage in directing Naaman to Elisha for healing reflects a similar potential for agency among Zimbabwean youth, who often face marginalisation yet possess the capacity to effect change in their communities.

Moreover, Ngcobo (2020) emphasises that the experiences of marginalised individuals, especially women and children, can illuminate pathways for empowerment and resilience. Just as the little girl navigates her precarious position to advocate for Naaman, Zimbabwean youth and women continue to organise and speak out against systemic oppression, offering hope and solutions amid adversity.

Cultural Context: Social Stigma and Isolation

The portrayal of leprosy in the biblical narrative carries significant social implications that resonate with contemporary Zimbabwean society. Just as Naaman faces stigma due to his condition, individuals in Zimbabwe often encounter social isolation due to various factors, including economic hardship, health issues (such as HIV/AIDS), and political dissent. The little girl's role as a servant to Naaman's wife parallels the experiences of many Zimbabweans who are marginalised due to health conditions or social status.

In their work, Mafundikwa and Shumba (2017) discuss how societal norms can create barriers to support for those facing illness or hardship. The cultural stigma surrounding certain conditions can lead to ostracism, much like the lepers in biblical times. This shared experience underscores the need for compassion and solidarity among individuals, emphasising the importance of community support in addressing social issues.

Knowledge as Power: Transformative Potential of the Marginalised

The narrative underscores the theme of knowledge as power, particularly as held by the little girl. In the Zimbabwean context, the knowledge of marginalised individuals — especially women and youth — often goes unrecognised, yet it is vital for societal transformation. Many young people in Zimbabwe possess innovative ideas and

CC BY

solutions to pressing issues such as unemployment, education, and health care, but their voices are frequently overshadowed by established power structures.

This dynamic parallels the little girl's pivotal role in Naaman's healing journey. Her confident assertion about Elisha's healing abilities mirrors the potential of Zimbabwean youth and women to bring about change in their communities through knowledge, creativity, and resilience. In recent years, various grassroots movements led by young people in Zimbabwe, such as #ThisFlag and #FeesMustFall, have demonstrated the transformative power of knowledge, challenging societal norms and advocating for their rights.

As noted by Chasi (2019), the resurgence of youth activism in Zimbabwe reflects a growing recognition of the importance of marginalised voices in shaping societal change. This correlation between the little girl's influence and contemporary youth movements highlights the potential for marginalised individuals to challenge and redefine power structures within their communities.

Diaspora and Identity: A Broader Perspective

The analysis of the little girl's experience in a foreign land invites comparisons to the experiences of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. Many Zimbabweans have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities, often facing challenges of identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation. The experiences of diaspora individuals resonate with biblical themes of displacement and exile, highlighting how marginalised voices can carry significant knowledge and influence in their new environments.

The little girl's testimony and faith serve as powerful reminders of the potential for diaspora communities to effect change, both within their host countries and their homelands. For instance, Zimbabweans in the diaspora often mobilize resources and knowledge to support social justice initiatives back home, advocating for democracy, human rights, and economic reform. Scholars such as Mugabe (2016) and Nyambara (2017**)** explore how diasporic Zimbabweans utilise their experiences to advocate for political and social change in Zimbabwe, enriching the narrative of transformation.

CC BY

Healing and Redemption: A Spiritual Journey

Naaman's initial reluctance to follow Elisha's instructions reflects a broader human tendency to question unconventional solutions. In Zimbabwe, many individuals face systemic challenges that require innovative approaches to healing and restoration, whether in terms of health, social cohesion, or economic recovery. The little girl's role in guiding Naaman toward healing resonates with the efforts of Zimbabweans who advocate for alternative pathways to recovery and resilience in their communities.

Naaman's eventual acknowledgement of the God of Israel as the one true God highlights a significant spiritual transformation, paralleling the journeys of many Zimbabweans seeking healing and redemption in the face of adversity. In a country grappling with political and economic turmoil, the search for spiritual fulfilment and hope remains paramount. The narrative invites reflection on how marginalised voices can play a crucial role in facilitating healing and redemption within communities.

The narrative of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5:1-14 provides a rich framework for exploring themes of marginalisation, power dynamics, and the transformative potential of knowledge, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. By centring the experiences and voices of the marginalised, this analysis advocates for a more inclusive interpretation of biblical texts, recognising the complexities of human experience.

The little girl servant emerges as a powerful symbol of agency and influence, reflecting the resilience of Zimbabwean youth and women in their struggle for social justice and transformation. The discussion emphasises the need for solidarity and support for marginalised individuals in both biblical and contemporary contexts, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnections between faith, knowledge, and the pursuit of justice in Zimbabwean society.

CONCLUSION

The narrative of Naaman's healing, centred on the often-overlooked servant girl, reveals profound insights into the intersections of faith, power, and marginalisation, offering a nuanced perspective that challenges traditional interpretations focused on dominant figures. Her role parallels the struggles of many marginalised individuals today, particularly in Zimbabwe, and underscores the transformative potential of

CC BY

elevating their voices in shaping narratives of healing and justice. This study highlighted the need for inclusive scholarship and practices that prioritise these perspectives, ultimately fostering a deeper understanding of power dynamics and human experiences. The accompanying recommendations — ranging from integrating feminist biblical criticism into academic curricula to creating platforms for marginalised communities and promoting cultural sensitivity in health initiatives — provide a roadmap for both academic and community-driven efforts to move toward a more just and equitable society in Zimbabwe and beyond.

REFERENCES

Blum, H. C. (2020). Minor Characters, Major Contributions: Reassessing the Role of Minor Figures in Biblical Narratives. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 139(3), 501–516.

Blumenthal, E. (2019). *Women and the Hebrew Bible: A Feminist Perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Brenner, A. (1999). The Intercourse of the Text: Reflections on the Feminist Critique of the Hebrew Bible. *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 118(1), 83-106.

Brenner, A. (2001). *The Intercourse of the world: Women in the Hebrew Bible.* Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Campbell, K. (1996). *The feminist companion to the Bible: Old Testament and Apocrypha*. T&T Clark.

Carson, D. A. (2017). Biblical interpretation and the voice of the marginalised. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 42(1), 77-92.

Chasi, D. (2019). *The rise of youth activism in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities. Journal of African Studies,* 45(3), 275-290.

Cooper, L. (2018). Women in the Old Testament: An exploration of female agency and empowerment. *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 137(2), 253-274.

Culpepper, R. A. (1993). The Gospel and gender: A Theological reflection on biblical interpretation. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 112(4), 575–593.

Dube, M. W. (2001). *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible*. Society of Biblical Literature.

Dube, M. W. (2008). *The HIV and AIDS Bible: Selected essays*. University of Scranton Press.

Dube, M. W. (2012). *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible*. Chalice Press.

Dube, M. W., & Wafula, R. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Postcoloniality, translation, and the Bible in Africa*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Dube, M. W., Mbuvi, A. M., & Mbuwayesango, D. R. (Eds.). (2013).

CC BY

Postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations. Society of Biblical Literature.

Freedman, D. N. (1992). *Leviticus*. In *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (Vol. 3). New York, NY: Doubleday.

Gafney, W. (2017). *Womanist Midrash: A reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. New York, NY: Church Publishing.

Habel, N. C. (2008). The Earth Story in the Old Testament. In C. H. Talbot (Ed.), *Creation and the environment: A Theological Perspective* (pp. 119-136). Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

Hays, C. (2021). *The diaspora in the Old Testament: A study of the historical context and significance of diaspora communities*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Holladay, W. L. (1986). *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Holladay, W. L. (2020). *The Jewish context of the New Testament*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Holy Bible. (1989). *New Revised Standard Version*. The Bible Society.

Longman, T. (2020). The lost letters of Paul: A Feminist critique of the Pauline Epistles. *Feminist Theology*, 28(1), 44-62.

Mafundikwa, J., & Shumba, O. (2017). Cultural stigmas and barriers to health in Zimbabwe: A community perspective. *African Journal of Health*, 14(2), 78-89.

Masenya, M. (2004). How worthy is the woman of worth? *Rereading Proverbs* 31, 10–31. Peter Lang.

Masenya, M., & Ngwa, K. N. (Eds.). (2018). *Navigating African biblical hermeneutics: Trends and themes from our pots and our calabashes*. Cambridge Scholars Press.

Mbuwayesango, D. (2004). Can daughters be sons?: The daughters of Zelophehad in patriarchal and imperial society. In T. Sandoval & C. Mondolfo (Eds.), *Relating to the text: Form critical and interdisciplinary insights on the Bible* (pp. 235–250). Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Mbuwayesango, D. (2007). Levirate marriage and HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe: The story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38). *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 13(2), 5–15.

Mbuwayesango, D. (2009). Canaanite women and Israelite women in Deuteronomy: The intersection of sexism and imperialism. In T. B. Liew (Ed.), *Postcolonial interventions: Essays in honour of R. S. Sugirtharajah* (pp. 79–92). Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

McKenzie, J. (2018). *The politics of healing in Ancient Israel: Contexts and meanings*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McKenzie, J. (2021). *Leadership and crisis in Ancient Israel: A feminist perspective*.

CC BY

Journal of Biblical Literature, 140(2), 345-367.

Miller, S. A. (2002). *Reading the Old Testament: An introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mott, D. A. (2019). *Feminist biblical criticism: A guide for the perplexed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Mugabe, E. (2016). The role of the diaspora in Zimbabwe's political economy: A case study of Zimbabweans in the UK. *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 42(1), 161-176.

Murray, S. (2020). *Diasporic identities and the Hebrew Bible: The power of memory and tradition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Ngcobo, M. (2020). Empowering the marginalised: Women and youth in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *Feminist Theology*, 29(1), 56-72.

Nyambara, P. (2017). *Diaspora politics and social change: Zimbabweans in the UK and their uinfluence on Zimbabwean politics*. *African Affairs,* 116(463), 306-327.

Oduyoye, M. A. (1992). Women and ritual in Africa. In M. A. Oduyoye & M. R. A. Kanyoro (Eds.), *The will to arise: Women, tradition, and the church in Africa*[A1].

Oduyoye, M. A. (1999). *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Oduyoye, M. A. (2001). *Introducing African women's theology*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press.

Oduyoye, M. A. (2004). *Beads and strands: Reflections of an African woman on Christianity in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Page, H. A. (Ed.). (2010). *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's scriptures from Africa and the African diaspora*. Fortress Press.

Pinn, A. D. (2010). *The rise of Womanist Theology: A historical perspective*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (pp. 76-90). Cambridge University Press.

Ramsay, D. (2021). *The marginalised voices in the Biblical texts: A critical analysis*. *Biblical Interpretation,* 29(3), 297-315.

Sacks, J. (1990). *Leviticus: A commentary on the book of Leviticus*. Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Press.

Schüssler-Fiorenza, E. (1992). *Sharing her word: Feminist biblical interpretation in context*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Smith, J. (2020). Healing and redemption in Ancient Near Eastern contexts: A comparative study. *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History*, 7(1), 1-24.

Sweeney, M. (2018). Prophetic figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Literature: A study of their influence. *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 137(4), 701-718.

CC BY

Trible, P.H. (1984). *Texts of terror: Literary-feminist readings of Biblical narratives*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Tsumura, D. T. (1998). *The first book of Samuel: A commentary on the first book of Samuel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Womack, R. (2022). *The theology of the minor characters in the Hebrew Bible: A Feminist reading*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

CC BY