

Trauma, silence, and survival: Bathsheba's story as a theological resource for mental health

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Abstract

The story of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 1–2 confronts readers with themes of sexual violence, grief, silence, and resilience. Traditional or hegemonic interpretations have often minimized Bathsheba's experience, centring instead on David's sin and repentance, thereby perpetuating a theological culture that marginalizes the voices of the traumatised. Such readings not only obscure the psychological realities of trauma but also risk reinforcing patterns of silencing that echo in contemporary contexts of mental health struggles. This article proposes a re-reading of Bathsheba's narrative through feminist and womanist hermeneutics, drawing on the work of J. Cheryl Exum, Wilda C. Gafney, and Suzanne Scholz, among others. These approaches foreground Bathsheba's perspective, reframing her story not as a tale of passive complicity but as one marked by coerced vulnerability, survival, and enduring presence within Israel's royal history. This hermeneutical shift creates space for survivor-centred theological reflection, aligning the biblical text with contemporary insights from trauma studies and mental health discourse. By engaging the intersections of theology, psychology, and pastoral care, the study highlights how Bathsheba's story can inform a richer understanding of lament,

resilience, and healing. It argues that reclaiming silenced voices within scripture can foster theological practices that respond more compassionately to mental health crises today. In particular, it suggests that survivor-centred hermeneutics may serve as a resource for communities of faith seeking to support those navigating trauma, shame, and the long-term impact of abuse.



Introduction: Trauma, silence, and scriptural imagination

The story of Bathsheba, recounted in 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 1–2, confronts readers with themes of coerced vulnerability, grief, royal violence, and survival. Yet for centuries the interpretive tradition privileged David's moral drama over Bathsheba's lived experience. The hegemonic hermeneutical tradition, which is represented in patristic writing, medieval commentary and modern historical critical scholarship, consistently centres David's sin and his repentance and restoration. In contrast to this, Bathsheba, who is frequently considered a minor character in David's narrative yet plays a major role in the shift of the narrative plot, has been marginalised, with her suffering, trauma and long-term survival often ignored. Ignoring Bathsheba's suffering and trauma in the narrative serves to obscure the psychological and theological consequences of David's actions. This tapestry of interpretative marginalisation has contributed to broader ecclesial patterns of silencing victims of sexual violence, theological neglect of trauma, and practices ill-equipped to accompany those suffering mental distress. Contemporary feminist and womanist biblical scholarship has challenged these hegemonic readings by foregrounding Bathsheba's perspective. Feminist and womanist hermeneutics interrogate the patriarchal structures embedded in the narrative and how it is received today. Cheryl Exum in her exegetical work claims that interpreters have caused harm to the text, by repeating androcentric patterns that excuse David's behaviour, or worse, depict Bathsheba as complicit in David's actions. Exum describes this harm as committing 'rape by the pen'.¹ Wilda Gafney reads Bathsheba as a figure of coerced vulnerability

¹ J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 170.



and political survival, whose presence across Israel's royal history disrupts narratives that would reduce her to a passive victim.² Womanist frameworks such as Gafney's invite new ways of reading the narrative. These frameworks pay particular attention to trauma, lament, agency and resilience.

This article argues that Bathsheba's story offers a valuable theological resource for contemporary mental health discourse. Reading Bathsheba's story through feminist and womanist lenses, and dialoguing with trauma studies, shows both the nature of suffering and the possibility of survival. Trauma theory is a framework that helps readers to recognise narrative silence, fragmentation within the story, and repetition as markers of psychological trauma rather than as narrative deficiencies. Pastoral theology's engagement with lament, moral injury, and shame provides tools for understanding how the Bathsheba narrative speaks into contemporary mental health crises. Reclaiming Bathsheba's voice can be considered an invitation that can guide the church by cultivating survivor-centred approaches to pastoral care and theological reflection. No longer portraying Bathsheba merely as a victim, as a passive character, or as fulfilling a literary function within David's story, this article proposes that Bathsheba be read as a complex figure whose lament, endurance, and long-term presence in the royal narrative models a form of resilient survival. Bathsheba's story offers an occasion for communities of faith to confront the dynamics of power, shame, abuse and restoration that is found both within scripture and in lived ecclesial contexts. Reading Bathsheba in this light allows her to transition from a figure of ancient trauma to a heard companion for survivors today, inviting churches to speak, pray and act with greater honesty and compassion.



Hegemonic interpretation and the theological cost of erasing victims

Traditional interpretation of Bathsheba's story has long been shaped by patriarchal norms that prioritise male experience and authority. During the patristic and medieval eras, biblical commentary often portrayed Bathsheba as a seductress, or immodest, or as one who is complicit in David's sin. Augustine's reflection emphasises David's moral failure but rarely

² Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 211–21.

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considers Bathsheba as a harmed subject.³ Throughout the years, Bathsheba, rather than treated as a subject in her own story, has been used as a narrative device within David's story. Scholars such as Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg recognise and praise the artistic symmetry of the narrative but pay very little attention to Bathsheba's social or psychological suffering, instead focusing on irony, concealment and the moral complexity of David's sin. This however is carried out with androcentric assumptions that marginalise Bathsheba's subjectivity. Sternberg highlights the narrator's subtlety, yet reads Bathsheba largely through the lens of plot development rather than lived trauma. He argues that it is the task of the reader to ask a particular set of questions as they read to understand the world of the story. Sternberg claims:

To understand a literary work, we have to answer, in the course of reading, a series of such questions as: What is happening or has happened, and why? What connects the present event or situation to what went before, and how do both relate to what will probably come after? What are the features, motives, or designs of this or that character? How does he view his fellow characters? And what norms govern the existence and conduct of all?⁴

Sternberg's recognition of gaps and ambiguities in the story serves to demonstrate ways in which the narrative omits emotional detail. He argues that the whitewashing⁵ of the Bathsheba and David story by many scholars demonstrates how if they cannot ignore something they minimise it instead.

Interpreting tradition in this light has many theological consequences. First, it normalises the erasure of victims by narratively centring the perspective of the perpetrator. This we see with David and Bathsheba. Although we are not told explicitly that David is a perpetrator, we are told that 'what David had done displeased the Lord' (2 Samuel 11:27). Treating Bathsheba as one who is passive or insignificant in the narrative reinforces interpretive habits that silence women. Second, the narrative, by

³ Sara M. Koenig, *Bathsheba Survives* (University of South Carolina Press, 2018).

⁴ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 186.

⁵ By whitewashing, Sternberg means glossing over the fact that Bathsheba was already married and not available to David.

focusing on David's repentance in 2 Samuel 12, embodies what Phyllis Trible describes as forgiveness restoration, which when read between the lines allows the narrative to sideline the suffering and trauma endured by Bathsheba. Prioritising David over Bathsheba serves to show that hegemonic interpretation has normalised patriarchal authority. This readily accepted patriarchal authority and the disregarding of women's suffering is an example of the marginalisation of women to the periphery of sacred history. Traditional or hegemonic readings such as these mirror wider ecclesial patterns in which perpetrators' moral rehabilitation receives more attention than survivors' long-term healing. Another theological consequence of this interpretive tradition is that hegemonic readings often spiritualise these traumatic events. In Bathsheba's narrative, this has the effect of shifting the focus from her trauma to divine providence. Depicting Bathsheba's role in the narrative as one which secures Solomon's seat on the Davidic throne situates her suffering as a preface to Israel's royal stability. This form of theological framing erases the psychological and embodied realities of trauma. In contemporary mental health discourse, the minimization of trauma such as Bathsheba's, along with the centring of perpetrators' narratives, is recognized as a form of secondary harm that intensifies shame and creates further isolation and fragmentation for survivors.

Cheryl Exum's critique of interpretive violence exposes how biblical interpretation itself can replicate patterns of silencing. Exum believes that depicting Bathsheba as plotting, or as complicit, or as a seductress, as many scholars have, is to misunderstand her vulnerability within a coercive royal system. The power imbalance at play between David and Bathsheba – he is king and she is the wife of one of his soldiers – makes consent impossible. Particular verbs used in the narrative make clear that consent is not an option: 'Then David sent messengers to get her' (2 Samuel 11:4). 'Sent' and 'got' are indicators that the power imbalance is shifted toward David; there is no evidence of consent from Bathsheba. Feminist interpretation claims that the text does not indicate seduction on Bathsheba's behalf, but coercion on David's. When David-centred readings dominate exegetical studies they risk theological harms. These hermeneutical frameworks serve to legitimise abusive structures. These modes of reading also minimise victim trauma and aid in shaping pastoral cultures in which survivors' voices remain unheard. Hegemonic interpretations which emphasise David's repentance and divine forgiveness

cannot be permitted to overshadow Bathsheba's suffering and trauma. Traditional hegemonic readings often portray Bathsheba and David's story as a moral story of David's sin against the Lord and his subsequent repentance. What is not portrayed is the psychological, emotional and social consequences for Bathsheba. There is no emphasis placed on her pregnancy, her grief, her public shame, or the death of her firstborn child. These gaps and ambiguities reflect a broader pastoral problem. Churches, like Bathsheba and David's story, have historically prioritised sin and forgiveness over trauma and healing frameworks. Prioritising in this manner has led to church institutions failing to recognise that trauma and suffering is not resolved through moral repentance. To recognise trauma and suffering there needs to be both psychological and communal repair. A trauma-informed hermeneutical framework counters this imbalance by recognising the importance of Bathsheba's experience. According to Judith Herman, trauma theory teaches that silence, fragmentation and narrative gaps often signal the profound effects of violence.⁶ It is re-reading Bathsheba's story in this new light that allows interpreters to resist theologies that erase victims. It encourages practices which are attentive to the lasting impact of harm. Hegemonic interpretation prolongs silence where lament is needed and obscures survival where resilience should be honoured.



Feminist hermeneutics: Reframing Bathsheba's experience of trauma

Feminist biblical interpretation emerged as a challenge to patriarchal assumptions embedded both within the text and centuries of interpretive tradition. Feminist interpretation of Bathsheba's story pays attention to silences, ambiguities, gaps and lack of agency. Feminist scholars note that these are literary markers of trauma, vulnerability, and patriarchal control. Re-readings of 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 1–2 through a feminist lens challenge the interpretive habits that cast David as a sympathetic moral agent while reducing Bathsheba to a marginal figure within her own story. Exum's work exposes how commentary has often conspired with the text's patriarchal structures by centring David and his experience within the narrative. She notes that scholars have frequently focused on David's sin,

⁶ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 2015), 33–50.

repentance and forgiveness. Exum argues that by focusing on David, scholarship is neglecting Bathsheba, her forced sexual encounter and her trauma and suffering. This is what she has coined 'rape by the pen.'⁷ Exum, recognizing that the narrator remains silent while depicting Bathsheba in a particular way, argues that the narrator has made readers complicit in the violence inflicted on Bathsheba.⁸ She believes that if we are to read the text responsibly, we need to recognise that Bathsheba is subject to royal power, as she is summoned by the king, and is never in a position to say no. Feminist interpretation therefore centres Bathsheba's coerced position, treating her not as a willing participant but as one who endures sexual violence, which has been worsened by political vulnerability.

Susanne Scholz advances this line of research by analysing the rhetoric of biblical scholarship itself. She argues that what appears to be neutral academic language often reinforces androcentric assumptions. Like Exum, Scholz believes that when commentators claim that Bathsheba was an adulterer, they are reinforcing consent rather than coercion, or sexual exploitation. Scholz argues that biblical texts are not merely descriptive but are actively constructed to reinforce patriarchal order.⁹ The silencing of victims in these texts has profound theological implications, shaping how communities understand gender, power and justice. This neutral language and terminology carries ethical weight as it is what allows communities to shape how they understand gender, power and victimhood. Other feminist scholars, such as Phyllis Trible, Gale Yee and Kathleen O'Connor, situate Bathsheba's story within broader biblical patterns of violence against women. Trible's *Texts of Terror*¹⁰ testifies to horrific acts of violence in the scriptures. Though Trible does not explicitly discuss Bathsheba's story, her examination of the Levite's concubine and Tamar's story notes the landscape of gendered violence and suffering, and signposts the gendered violence which occurs in Bathsheba's story. Bathsheba's voicelessness in her own story is a marker of trauma. The trauma endured by Bathsheba manifests itself in her story through speechlessness, fragmentation and narrative absence.

⁷ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 170.

⁸ Exum, 172–76.

⁹ Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2010), 1–6.

¹⁰ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Fortress Press, 2022), 37–92.

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A feminist rereading of Bathsheba's story centres her trauma before David's. Hegemonic readings, which centre David's fasting and prayer after the death of his and Bathsheba's first son (2 Samuel 12:15–18), often neglect Bathsheba's suffering. In the whole of her story the narrator only once briefly acknowledges Bathsheba's grief: 'She lamented for her husband' (2 Samuel 11:26). Nowhere are we told that she mourned the death of her child. Feminist commentators recognise this not as a sign that Bathsheba's grief was not worthy of mention, but rather as an indication that patriarchal texts relegate women's suffering and trauma to the margins. However, the acknowledgement of Bathsheba's grief, as minimal as it is, signifies that Bathsheba bears a deep wound that the narrative does not fully articulate.

Integrating trauma studies deepens this insight. Scholarship, such as Judith Herman's¹¹ and Bessel van der Kolk's,¹² notes that it is often trauma that disrupts narrative coherence and produces silence. When viewed through this lens, the gaps and ambiguities found in Bathsheba's story, her lack of speech, the minimal portrayal of her emotions, the absence of her perspective, become readable as traces of trauma. Thus, feminist interpretation does not seek to fill these gaps with speculation; instead, it honours them as signs of unspoken suffering. Reading the narrative in this way allows the reader to resist the temptation to resolve or domesticate trauma prematurely. Instead, it affirms Bathsheba's lament as a legitimate and necessary response to violence.

Feminist hermeneutics also highlights Bathsheba's endurance in the narrative. Even after the trauma endured at the hands of David, Bathsheba remains in the narrative. She bears her son, the future King Solomon, and becomes a political force in the royal household. Feminist interpretation recognises that her survival in the narrative does not negate her suffering; instead, it complicates it. Re-reading through a feminist lens conveys the ongoing tension between vulnerability and resilience. It is this duality within the narrative that aligns with contemporary understandings of trauma. Recognising trauma in this fashion allows us to understand that survivors who have endured great trauma may exhibit agency, adaptation, and strength within oppressive systems. Feminist interpretation of Bathsheba's

¹¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

¹² Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Viking Penguin, 2014).

story demands that she be recognised as a figure whose trauma deserves recognition. Bathsheba is a biblical character who should be theologically reflected upon, and her survival in the narrative should challenge communities of faith to confront the realities of sexual violence in a more grounded and honest way. This hermeneutical shift opens the way for a more developed awareness of mental health when reading biblical texts. This new framework refuses to silence the traumatised and insists on centring survivor experience.



Womanist hermeneutics: Survival, agency and voice

While feminist biblical exegesis centre Bathsheba's suffering and vulnerability, womanist hermeneutics emphasise Bathsheba's survival and agency within the narrative. Womanist interpretation examines the lived experience of Black women who navigate intersecting forms of oppression. Womanist reading of biblical texts pays very close attention to race, gender and socio-political power, as well as being attentive to the strategies marginalised women use to endure and resist systemic violence. Reading Bathsheba's story through a womanist lens illuminates the modes of resilience, negotiation and long-term survival that feminist readings may gloss over. Wilda C. Gafney's work is a hermeneutical model that does just that.¹³ Gafney recognises that Bathsheba is more than just a passive victim. She believes that Bathsheba, although subjected to coercive royal power, is a woman who retains dignity and strategic intelligence. She states: 'Confronted with the possibility of losing her life and that of her son because of David's lack of planning and political impotence, Bathsheba agrees to partner with the prophet Nathan and takes her own life and fate and that of Solomon into her own hands.'¹⁴ Gafney believes that Bathsheba's entrance into the narrative is a forced encounter with David, and her final scene as queen mother, sitting at the right hand of her son King Solomon, conveys her sustained presence across the arc of Israel's history. Gafney recognises that Bathsheba, although not empowered by the system that restrains her, is able to navigate it with wisdom, thus ensuring her own survival and that of her son. Gafney declares that 'Bathsheba is at her most powerful in her final appearance in the scriptures. In 1 Kings 2:19,

¹³ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*.

¹⁴ Gafney, 220.

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Solomon gets up off of his throne, bows to Bathsheba, and enthrones her in majesty as his right-hand woman.¹⁵

Womanist interpretation challenges the idea that Bathsheba is merely a plot device in David's narrative. Womanist understanding argues that Bathsheba is a key political figure, as revealed in 1 Kings 1. It is here that Bathsheba advocates for her son. It is her liaison with the prophet Nathan that conveys her strategic awareness of palace dynamics. It is also this encounter which shows that Bathsheba has the ability to act decisively, even in a patriarchal environment. Womanist hermeneutics recognise her actions as a form of protection: she is protecting herself, as well as protecting Solomon's future. This behaviour is consistent with many womanist themes such as mothering and resisting erasure. Renita Weems argues that biblical narratives often portray women negotiating survival within systems that refuse to acknowledge their full humanity, as well as not offering equitable justice. Her work *Just a Sister Away* is an 'attempt to probe beneath the surface of biblical texts to discover a place for everyone in the Kingdom.'¹⁶ Negotiations such as these should not be considered a form of submission or surrendering, but understood as a means of maintaining agency under constraint. Examining Bathsheba's story through this lens allows the reader to understand that her silence does not equal intention. Instead it reflects the survival strategies of women who must navigate patriarchal power while preserving both life and legacy.

Womanist hermeneutics also highlight the communal dimensions of trauma and survival. While feminist interpretation leans toward individual experience, it is the task of womanist interpretation to attend not only to the suffering and resilience of the individual, but also to how communities as a whole share in the trauma. This is evident in Bathsheba's story. Her survival in the narrative was not only for her own good, but also for that of Solomon, the future king of Israel. Her confrontation with Adonijah, recounted in 1 Kings 2, reinforces her political significance. Symbolically her voice here carries much more weight. One who was once silenced by all around her, has now become queen mother. It is this shift in Bathsheba's story that parallels mental health insights regarding post-traumatic growth. It is through the long process of healing from trauma that some survivors

¹⁵ Gafney, 221.

¹⁶ Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection Between Women of Today and Women in the Bible* (eBook Edition, 2007), 8.

develop new coping strategies. Rather than romanticising these strategies, womanist interpretation recognises the emergence of resilience where vulnerability and suffering persist. Bathsheba's survival in the narrative does not erase her trauma; it instead testifies to a form of embodied wisdom that must be taken seriously during theological reflection.

Womanist readings offer unambiguous contributions to trauma-informed pastoral theology for faith communities. Rather than recognising survivors as those who are wounded, they recognise their persistence and strength. Womanist readings emphasise the importance of listening to voices that have been silenced. It is not enough to acknowledge harm; lessons must be learned from those who have been marginalised. This is done by recognising the strategies these marginalised women have put in place to help them endure suffering. Importantly, womanist interpretation challenges theologies that centre perpetrators or idealise hierarchical power. To counter this, womanist interpretation advocates for a theological imagination that is grounded in dignity, justice and the flourishing of the vulnerable. Feminist and womanist interpretations can unite and work well together to offer new models of interpretation and understanding when reading biblical narratives. Feminist analysis foregrounds Bathsheba's suffering and acknowledges the violence of patriarchal power. Womanist hermeneutics centres Bathsheba's survival and agency in the narrative. It also pays attention to her resilience within systemic oppression. Viewed through these lenses, Bathsheba becomes a key figure for mental health theology. Bathsheba's story is one which reflects the complexities of trauma. It is a story which demonstrates that there is a possibility of healing, a healing which does not erase the cost of violence.



Trauma studies and mental health: Integrating psychology and theology

Trauma studies have provided an essential interdisciplinary dialogue partner for biblical interpretation, particularly for narratives that involve sexual violence, prolonged suffering and coerced vulnerability. Scholars such as Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, Serene Jones and Shelly Rambo have demonstrated that trauma reshapes memory, identity, embodiment and relationality.¹⁷ These insights highlight narrative patterns

¹⁷ Herman, 1–2, 33–38, 51; van der Kolk, 21–26, 66, 87–88; Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Westminster John Knox,

within the Bathsheba story and foster theological reflection that is orientated toward healing rather than hermeneutical minimisation. Like feminist and womanist readings, trauma theory is the recognition that trauma disrupts narrative coherence. Herman argues that traumatic memories are not integrated into ordinary narrative memory. She claims that they are preserved in fragmented forms, the kind of fragmentation where 'trauma tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion'.¹⁸ Herman believes that silence is not an absence of meaning, but rather a sign of trauma, especially in contexts where speaking is unsafe. Thus, silence, gaps and compression within traumatic narrative function as markers of psychological rupture, rather than narrative deficiency.

Herman's framework, when applied to Bathsheba's silence in 2 Samuel 11–12, mirrors the silencing dynamics Herman identifies in situations of sexual violence shaped by power, shame and fear. Viewed through this lens, Bathsheba's silence is not a sign of consent, or passivity, but is a marker of trauma's disruption of speech. Trauma theory also pays particular attention to the role of shame. Herman identifies shame as a central effect of sexual violence, particularly when abuse is perpetrated by powerful figures and reinforced by social structures that disbelieve or blame victims.¹⁹ Although the biblical text does not name Bathsheba's emotions explicitly, David's actions, her pregnancy, and the death of her child, align closely with trauma research, adding to shame and social silencing. These are not morally neutral or neat theological elements of the narrative.



Toward a theology of healing: Bathsheba's story as pastoral resource

Bathsheba's narrative offers a powerful resource for trauma-aware pastoral theology. Notably, her story does not present healing as linear or complete. Instead, it reflects the uneven and ambiguous contours of survival. These contours are marked by grief, endurance and ongoing negotiation of power. Healing in this light can be understood not as the erasure of trauma but as the cultivation of resilience and communal support. Theological healing as grounded in Bathsheba's story begins by centring her as a survivor.

2009), 13–18; Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Westminster John Knox, 2010), 5–8, 23–27, 60–62.

¹⁸ Herman, 34.

¹⁹ Herman, 8–9.

Traditional/hegemonic readings that foreground David's repentance create patterns that prioritise the rehabilitation of perpetrators. Herman argues that such misalignment can deepen trauma by repeating dynamics of silencing and disbelief.²⁰ She claims that 'assurances of safety and protection are of the greatest importance',²¹ and that a victim 'needs clear and explicit assurances that she will not be abandoned'.²² A survivor-centred hermeneutic reverses this orientation. This shift is not a departure from Christian theology but emerges from it. Biblical theology presents God as one who sees the misery and suffering of God's people as well as hearing the cry of the poor (Exodus 3:7). Healing within this framework is not secondary to repentance, but instead a necessary condition for justice. As well as listening to those who have been violated, it honours their grief and resists premature reconciliation. Bathsheba's story urges the church toward ethical repair. Her story equips communities of faith to confront their own histories of harm and to dismantle practices that silence survivors. It also creates a space where dignity, safety and truth-telling are non-negotiable. Integrating trauma studies with feminist and womanist hermeneutics enables readings that honour silence without romanticising it, recognise survival, and pursue healing without demanding resolution. Ecclesial practices such as these respect complexity, accompany suffering, and remain attentive to the work of healing in the wake of violence.



Conclusion: Trauma, survival, and the work of theological healing

In this article, I have argued that Bathsheba's story, when read through feminist and womanist hermeneutics and placed in dialogue with trauma studies, offers a significant theological resource for contemporary mental health reflection. Rather than treating Bathsheba as a marginal figure within David's moral narrative, this approach centres her experience of coerced vulnerability, silence, grief and long-term survival. In doing so, it exposes the theological and pastoral costs of interpretive traditions that prioritise repentance and restoration while neglecting the enduring effects of violence on those who are harmed. Trauma theory has provided a critical lens for recognising silence, narrative compression, and absence

²⁰ Herman, 51–73.

²¹ Herman, 61.

²² Herman, 62.

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not as narrative failures but as markers of psychological rupture. Read in this light, Bathsheba's lack of speech and the sparseness of her emotional portrayal align with well-documented trauma responses, particularly in contexts shaped by power, shame and fear. Feminist interpretation names this silencing as violence, while womanist hermeneutics further illuminates Bathsheba's survival, strategic agency and enduring presence within Israel's royal history. Together, these frameworks resist reductive readings that either erase trauma or romanticise resilience.

Theologically, Bathsheba's story challenges communities of faith to reconsider how suffering is acknowledged, how healing is imagined, and whose voices are prioritised. Healing, as this narrative suggests, is not linear or complete. It unfolds through lament, endurance and communal responsibility. A trauma-informed pastoral theology shaped by Bathsheba's story therefore calls for practices that honour survivors' experiences, resist premature closure and address both personal and structural dimensions of harm. By reclaiming Bathsheba as a central theological subject rather than a narrative aside, this research invites a reorientation of biblical interpretation toward greater attentiveness to trauma and mental health. In doing so, it affirms that scripture can function not only as a site of ancient suffering but also as a companion for contemporary survivors, guiding faith communities toward more honest, compassionate and ethically responsible forms of care.