

## The Tekoite Wise Woman and Her Prophecy:

### A Reading of 2 Samuel 14:2-20 for Korean Reunification Feminist Theology<sup>1</sup>

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#### I. Introduction

In the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is personalized as a woman. According to Claudia Camp, one can directly assume that “the picture of a woman calling out in the public places of the city” in the book of Proverbs 1.20, this is a female metaphor for wisdom. Why does the author of the Wisdom Literature want to give us a sense of the femaleness of wisdom? This metaphor is related to women’s specialized gifts and is depicted by the wise woman who has been known “for astute counselor, persuasiveness, and tact.”<sup>2</sup> We have images of female wisdom not only in the Wisdom Literature but also in the monarchic stories. They are the unnamed wise women in Tekoa (2 Sam 14) and in Abel (2 Sam 20). These two women appear with the stories of Joab. The wise woman in Abel is clearly declared “wise” in the text so she definitely brings the genuine character of wisdom.<sup>3</sup> However, the scholars argue about whether or not the woman in Tekoa represents genuine wisdom.

In this paper, I would like to debate the identity of the wise woman of Tekoa based on the work of George G. Nicol and that of Claudia Camp. I argue that, why does Joab send the wise woman of Tekoa to the king? Why couldn’t Joab present himself before the king? What

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<sup>2</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities, Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), 121. Ji Eun Kim, “Yoksasuh,” (The Books of History), *Yeosung-ee Yilneun Sungsu: Kooyak Sungsu Kaeron (The Introduction to the Old Testament)*, edited by Kyung Sook Lee, et al., (Seoul: Tahankidokosuhoe, 2005), 120.

kind of ability does the wise woman have that Joab does not have? It is clear that, Joab needs the wise woman of Tekoa. The wise woman of Tekoa not only has the wisdom to solve the ambiguous question of David, but also she appears as a prophetic figure to appear before the king. In feminist studies of the Hebrew Bible, it is important to consider that the images of women have been covered over by the male-centered misleading interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. The wisdom and prophecy of the Tekoite woman are significant references for a feminist perspective regarding present day world's issues such as the reunification of the two Koreas.

## **II. Who Has Wisdom?**

Joab brings the wise woman from Tekoa to talk to David about “this thing.” The wise woman pretends to be a widow with two sons, one of whom was killed by the other. She asks David to protect her and her heir from the revenge of her family. The king grants her petition for protection from everyone. In verse 13, she speaks about the guilt that the king feels for not bringing his banished son home. Then, she uses the proverbial language<sup>4</sup> to remind the king of his son, saying “For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again” (NRSV). Then, she mentions that people make her afraid. In addition, she requests deliverance from the hand of the men who would destroy her and her son. In verse 18, the king notices that Joab is behind the wise woman. She praises the wisdom of the king after saying that Joab puts all these words in her mouth. The king, then, permits Joab to bring Absalom from Geshur.

Nicol's main thesis is that Joab is a wise man. Joab hires an agent from Tekoa to demonstrate his wisdom. According to Nicol, the narrative in 2 Sam 14 shows that “How Joab achieved his objective through the agency of the woman he hired, not by depending upon her

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<sup>4</sup> Camp, 121.

diplomatic skills or her wisdom, but by commissioning her to act, speak precisely according to his own careful direction.”<sup>5</sup> In Nicol’s literary criticism, he focuses on Joab’s main role and his function. In both 2 Sam 14. 1 and 33, Joab uses the woman from Tekoa to point out how David feels about his “heart” to Absalom. In addition, Joab manipulates David and the wise woman to restore the king’s exiled son to Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Nicol, then, points out that the woman’s words to the king are totally dependent on the instruction of Joab (v. 3). Verse 3, “Joab put words in her mouth,” is the key verse to suggest her dependency on Joab while she makes conversation with the king. Joab’s strategy is to use the Tekoite woman so that he can have a predictable conversation with David.<sup>7</sup>

However, does Joab know the “heart” of the king? (v.1) It is not clear what the king has in his mind. There are two implications for the “heart” of the king. First, in 13. 37-39, Absalom flees to the land of his grandfather, Geshur, after the killing of his half brother Amnon. David mourns “his son” in verse 37. Which son does the king mourn for: the fled one, Absalom, or the dead one, Amnon?<sup>8</sup> Larry Lyke suggests that “David, no doubt, wants both vengeance on Absalom and his safe return to the royal court.”<sup>9</sup> From the beginning of the story, the king himself is not sure of his “heart” regarding Absalom or Amnon. Second, “Joab knew the heart of the king,” can be read either as the heart of the king “against Absalom” or “concerning about Absalom” in the original Hebrew (v.1). These two possibilities come from the interpretation of the preposition, ‘*al*’.<sup>10</sup> David himself is in an ambiguous situation just like the story of the wise

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<sup>5</sup> George G. Nicol, “The Wisdom of Joab and the Wise Woman of Tekoa,” *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982): 97-104.

<sup>6</sup> Nicol, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Nicol, 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> Antony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel, The Form of the Old Testament Literature* 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 132.

<sup>9</sup> Larry L. Lyke, *King David and with the Wise Woman of Tekoa, The Resonance of Tradition in Parabolic Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 162.

<sup>10</sup> Lyke, 158.

woman who lost one of her son at the hand of the other, since David's one son killed his another son. However, during David's discussion with the wise woman, he realizes his desire for Absalom's safe return home and the wish of the people of God (v.13). Joab cannot know every thing in the beginning of the story, because the king himself is not aware of his own feelings. The wise woman enlightens the king with her own wisdom, which comes from the urgent situation that her only son is about to be killed by her family.

What is the role of Joab in the discussion of David and the wise woman? Nicol argues her dependency is on the wisdom of Joab who 'put the words in her mouth.' From the expression in verse 3, "And Joab put the words into her mouth," J. Hofstijzer evaluates the subject's superiority of verb "*šym*"<sup>11</sup> and suggests that it implies the superiority of the one who "puts" over the one who receives. In Exodus 4.15, the same expression is used when Moses puts the words in the mouth of Aaron. Hofstijzer stresses the subordination of Aaron to Moses. Based on the use of this expression, the wise character should be Joab rather than to the wise woman of Tekoa.

However, we need to look at the story of Moses and Aaron in detail. Why does Moses need to put his words in his brother Aaron's mouth? Moses could not speak well in front of people. Moses says to God (Exodus 4.10), "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (NRSV). God suggests to Moses that "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do (v. 15, NRSV). In contrast to Aaron, Moses does not have public speaking ability. Moses needs him. Without the help of Aaron, we would not know Moses' words. Putting words in someone's mouth does not imply the superiority of the one who put them there. Rather it shows

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<sup>11</sup> J. Hofstijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman" *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970), 419.

us who has the ability to speak easily in public and who does not. Even though Joab asks the Tekoite woman to pretend to be a mourner (v.2), she does not mimic his instruction. Nevertheless, she uses her wisdom in saying “I am a widow (v. 5, NRSV).” The Tekoite woman is independent as well as wise.

Joab does not present himself to King David. We do not have good reasons for this. Perhaps he does not speak well in public. For whatever reason, Joab wants to have the wise woman of Tekoa in this awkward situation with the king. Verse 3 gives the key words to show the relationship between Joab and the wise woman. This verse shows us Joab needs to use the Tekoite woman because Joab is not able, or does not want to talk with the king.

Joab says to the wise woman, *kadābār hazēh* (v. 3). “You will tell to him like this word/thing.” One cannot know what is “*kadābār hazēh*” nor have the content of the “word/thing.” The wise woman just starts to talk with the king in verse 4 about *kadābār hazēh*. One can just know the content of “this word or thing” from the discussion between the king and the wise woman. One cannot say she is repeating the words of Joab, because we know just “this word/thing.” We only get the content of the word/thing from what the wise woman says to the king. This narrator does not say if the wise woman is directly repeating the words of Joab.

Rather than repeating Joab verbatim, she follows the general directions given her by Joab. There are two reasons why we know that she does not follow the Joab’s directions, but follows her wisdom, instead. First, in other texts in the Hebrew Bible in which instructions are given, the first person tells the second person what to say then the latter repeats it.<sup>12</sup> For example, there is the instruction of Nathan to Bathsheba in consideration of the succession of her son, Solomon (1 Kings 1). Even though Bathsheba adds some extra words to what Nathan tells her to say (vv. 17-21), she also repeats Nathan’s words to emphasize that her son should

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<sup>12</sup> Lyke, *King David and with the Wise Woman of Tekoa*, 163.

become king. However, we do not have the precise repetition of Joab's words as spoken by the wise woman, rather we have only "this word/thing." Lyke assumes that, "Perhaps the instructions to say 'something like this' means that her instructions were general. After all, the woman's wisdom must be of some value."<sup>13</sup> She has been labeled "the wise woman" by her local town. Joab recognizes her wisdom so he uses her verbal and acting skills to present his case in a more persuasive way than he could have done.

Secondly, after she changes her theme from the concerns of her sons to the banished one (v. 13), and the good and the bad (v. 17), David knows that Joab is behind the wise woman (v. 19). This may have been the same theme that Joab had already talked about with the king, because the king recognizes it. Joab needs the wise woman to rephrase his "word/thing," since Joab failed in his first request with David. When the wise woman appears before the king, she builds the case for Absalom using her wisdom that Joab does not have. If she had repeated exact words, then perhaps David would not have allowed the return of Absalom.

### **III. Wisdom Literature and the Wise Woman of Tekoa**

As one can see from the two wise women of Tekoa and Abel in 2 Samuel, the wisdom of women is a theme from the early Israelite monarchy. From these two passages, William Irwin points out a transition in the Canaanite wisdom movement into early Israel.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that the two wise women know the proverbial terms and use them according to the culture of wisdom in early Israel (2 Sam 14.14, 20.18).

Camp points out that the originality and execution of female wisdom as literature figures came from the time of Solomon, and was finalized in form in the book of Proverbs in the post-

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<sup>13</sup> Lyke, 163

<sup>14</sup> William A. Irwin, "The Wisdom Literature," in *The Interpreter's Bible* 1 (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 213.

exilic period.<sup>15</sup> She also insists that the unnamed women of Tekoa and Abel before the reign of Solomon are “representatives of a non-regular but recurrent leadership role for women in pre-monarchic Israel, that they either were ‘real’ historical persons or, at least, could have been recognized by readers as types of such persons.”<sup>16</sup> What kind of leadership does the wise woman of Tekoa have? Her leadership comes from being not only being a wise woman but also from being a prophet figure.

#### **IV. The Role Model of the Wise Woman of Tekoa**

Before I present the figure of prophecy in the wise women of Tekoa, I will delineate the wisdom tradition in the wise woman of Tekoa. According to Camp, the wise woman of Tekoa has a role in her local town, which prepares her to deal with this delicate and even dangerous situation before the king.<sup>17</sup> She insists that “Wise women—of Tekoa in 2 Sam.14, and of Abel in 2 Sam. 20—were customarily granted a similar *kind* of authority on such a regular basis that it would not have been surprising for them to assume those roles when the need arose.”<sup>18</sup> One can see her wisdom from the use of the proverbial language in verse 14. She says to the king: “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up” (NRSV). Camp quotes R. B.Y. Scott to affirm this verse’s proverbial idiom. Verse 14 is “one of the proverb idioms or idea patterns characteristic of folk wisdom not only in the ancient Near East but also in the classical world and modern Europe.”<sup>19</sup> Even though one accepts the wise woman’s reference to Abaslom’s story by using her own son’s, one might be curious about the

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<sup>15</sup> Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Camp, 120.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia V. Camp, “The Wise Women of 2 Samuel, A Role Model of Women in Early Israel?” in *Women in the Hebrew Bible, A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 201.

<sup>18</sup> Camp, 201.

<sup>19</sup> Camp, 198.

correct meaning of this verse. Camp suggests that “the ambiguity may have been fully intentional. It is a characteristic of poetic speech to intend more than is actually stated, to carry a surplus of meaning.”<sup>20</sup> The wise woman of Tekoa uses her wisdom with the king so that he can realize his own situation and his own feelings. This openness does not come from Joab who puts in her mouth “this word/thing.” Rather this is in her ability “to speak the right word at the right time, to capture the essence of a situation in a few, but pleasing, words and thereby to redirect the course of events.”<sup>21</sup>

Camp also points out the mother’s role in the Book of Proverbs “in the training of her children, not only as infants and toddlers, but also in the proper attitudes and actions of adult life.”<sup>22</sup> The wise woman of Tekoa is a mother who lost her husband and her one son. John Rook explains the meaning of “widow,” in Hebrew. The widow is a woman who not only has lost her husband, but she “who has no male from the group of her dead husband who can take responsibility for her. She has no brothers-in-law or sons.”<sup>23</sup> If one follows his definition, the wise woman of Tekoa is not a widow. She has a remaining son and has the clan who wants to kill her son (v. 7). To identify herself as a widow is not a correct statement, unless one translates verse 5 as “indeed I will be a widow woman.” Then, what is the reason to refer to herself as a widow? By calling herself a widow, she emphasizes a situation after the death of her sole son. It is significant for her to let her son alive, because her son can keep her dead husband’s name and his line (v. 7). Her request to the king about an inheritance of God, (v. 16) is a concern for “the preservation of family name and for the protection of society’s weak—concerns that we would expect from a mother and a leader in the Yahwistic tribal-village

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<sup>20</sup> Camp, 199.

<sup>21</sup> Camp, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Camp, 201.

<sup>23</sup> John Rook, “When Is a Widow Not a Widow? Guardianship Provides an Answer,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28 (1999): 5.



setting, as well as from one of the first mouthpieces of Israel's wisdom tradition."<sup>24</sup> To introduce herself as a widow reminds David the lineage after his sons' death. David needs to call Absalom from Geshur in order to retain his name.

We can assume this woman has a leadership role in her village town, Tekoa. When Joab asks her to pretend to be a mourner, he uses *nā'* with the imperative verbs to ask (v. 2). As the chief commander of the army, Joab does not forcefully command the wise woman to pretend to be mourning but nicely asks by using *nā'*. Moreover, David uses *nā'* to the wise woman, when he asks her who is behind her (v. 18) in saying "Please, do not hide." In 1 Sam 30.7, King David also uses *nā'* with the imperative verb. The king asks Abiathar, the high priest to bring an ephod. When he wants to request something, the king respects the authority of the high priest. David also uses this term with Tamar, the princess, by saying "Please, go to the house of Amnon, your brother" (2 Sam 13.7). David recognizes the status of the wise woman as Joab does. The wise woman was a well-known person who had leadership and authority in the town of Tekoa.

## **V. Prophetic Figure of the Wise Woman of Tekoa**

I will begin with why Joab needs a prophetic figure. Joab needs a prophet in his political situation. Joab is David's chief military commander. Later, Joab stands by Adonijah's side, the son of Haggith, with the priest Abiathar (1 Kings 1.7). Adonijah wants to be a king before the succession of Solomon happens. There is the tension between the two sons of David, Adonijah and Solomon, concerning accession to the throne. The priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint Solomon choosing him as king (1 Kings 1.34). Solomon has the priest Zadok, the commander Benaiah, and the prophet Nathan, while Adonijah does not have a prophet. Joab's

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<sup>24</sup> Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel," 203.

group needs a prophet like Nathan. It is necessary for Joab to have a prophet in order to talk with King David. If this prophet has the wisdom, he or she would be a more effective person to present Joab's desires. The character of the wise woman of Tekoa has the right position to satisfy Joab's need.

McCarter affirms the prophetic writer in the "Succession Narrative" of 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2.<sup>25</sup> Nathan's narrative is among the prophetic stratum in 2 Samuel 12. Nathan tells the story of the ewe to condemn the king. In addition, Camp compares the story of Nathan and the wise woman of Tekoa in terms of a loyal advisor. Camp depicts the wise woman as a spinner who weaves "a dramatic yarn for the king very similar to two other tales in the historical writings (2 Sam 12.1-15 and 1 Kings 20.38-43)."<sup>26</sup> She also argues about the function of the narratives, that the narratives are not functioning as legally binding,<sup>27</sup> but in quoting David M. Gunn, are providing "a sufficiently apt parallel to the addressee's situation that he might make the right judgment (i.e., the one that suits the deceiver's purpose) and that when the key is provided he cannot escape the force of its application to his own case."<sup>28</sup> The wise woman of Tekoa uses this method of parallel during the conversation with the king. Thus, David realizes that Absalom's return home is the right judgment so he allows his son's return.

However, this woman participates in her prophetic confrontation as prophets often do. She places herself as the main character in the story she tells to evoke the king's situation. Nathan uses a parable about the ewe and the wicked rich owner keeping himself out of the matter. Telling a story is a dangerous situation before the king, if the king knows the true story. However, the wise woman participates in her prophecy much like prophet Hosea. Hosea takes

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<sup>25</sup> P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel, The Anchor Bible 9* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 306-308.

<sup>26</sup> Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel," 199.

<sup>27</sup> Camp, 199.

<sup>28</sup> Camp, 199. See David M. Gunn "Traditional Composition in the "Succession Narrative" *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 219.

Gomer as his wife to reveal the saying of God.<sup>29</sup> Like Hosea, the wise woman of Tekoa becomes the main character of the narrative revealing her prophetic voice. She conducts herself as a prophetess who is both brave and wise.

What kind of prophetic voice does she have? This answer comes from the situation involving the fight between the two brothers. In verse 6, the reader is not aware of the reason for their fight, while the response of the people is clear. They do not tear the two brothers apart, but instead watch two brothers' fight. While Nathan reveals the guilt of David from the parable of the ewe, the wise woman of Tekoa appeals to one allowed to fight, that the social structure may also be guilty of the death of her one son. The reason for the flight of Absalom to Geshur is the murder of his half-brother, Amnon, who raped Tamar, the blood sister of Absalom. It is not the murder of the innocent. It is the social structure that required Absalom to avenge the rape of his sister. If the king does not allow the return of Absalom, he would be finding fault in Absalom. David recognizes Amnon's fault without seeing the situation of the two brothers. However, by accepting the discourse of the wise woman about the banished one (v.13), the king is reminded about Absalom as well of the issue of justice and injustice relating to the rape of Tamar.

Now, one needs to focus on her hometown, Tekoa. Amos comes from Tekoa. According to Hans Wolff, Amos is in Tekoa where the distinctive wisdom regarding the wise woman originated.<sup>30</sup> This distinctive wisdom of Tekoa affects the prophecy of Amos. The wise woman lives in Tekoa where one may see the interaction between wisdom and prophecy. The

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<sup>29</sup> Even though there is scholarly argument if Gomer was the real wife of Hosea or not. I prefer to have the metaphorical relationship between Gomer and Hosea in the book of Hosea. For the their identities in the Israel historical study, see Marvin Chaney, "Agricultural Intensification as Promiscuity in the Book of Hosea," at the SBL (Washington D.C., November 22, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Amos' Geistige Heimat*, WMANT 18 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Netherlands: Neukircher Verlag des Erziehungsvereins G. m. b. H., 1964), 53-54.

wise woman of Tekoa is one of the role models due to the combination of wisdom and prophecy.

Patricia K. Willey agrees that the wise woman parodies the methods of Nathan as a parody regarding the moral confusion of the king.<sup>31</sup> However, she does not see the wise woman as a second Nathan. Willey argues that the wise woman fails because David does not want to see Absalom after his return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 14.28ff).<sup>32</sup> However, the command about David not seeing Absalom may be part of a different story, since the king finally kisses Absalom in 2 Sam 14.33. Within the context of the wise woman's talk with the king, she succeeds using her prophetic method. In verse 12, she wants to deal with the situation of David and his vanished son. This is a risky moment.<sup>33</sup> Her interest is no longer on her safety or her son's.

After verse 12, her themes are "the people of God and guilty (v. 13)," and "the good and the bad (v. 17)." Then, David realizes from her speech what she wants to talk with him about, as he does with Nathan before (2 Sam 12). David makes Joab bring Absalom from Geshur to Jerusalem (vv. 21-25). After this story, one does not hear about the wise woman of Tekoa. However, one can recognize her important wisdom from verse 20. She praises the wisdom of the king who knows Joab's involvement, in saying "But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth" (NRSV). She could have been killed for she is not an official prophet, like Nathan. And as a woman from a small town, the fact that she survives the confrontation with the king is enough to make her famous. Her last statement

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<sup>31</sup> Patricia K. Willey, "The Importunate Woman of Tekoa and How She Got Her Way," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1992), 128.

<sup>32</sup> Willey, 128.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," in *New Interpreter's Bible 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1314.

may be the reason why she was called the wise woman, since the local persons of Tekoa hear of her surviving and her meeting of the king.

## **VI. Conclusion: Toward Feminist Biblical Reading for Korean Reunification**

Korean feminist scholars have interpreted the biblical women as the models for Korean reunification over the last several decades. Young Sil Choi exams that the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John 4.1-42 can remove the obstacles of the division between the Jews and the Samaritans.<sup>34</sup> According to Choi, the Samaritan woman “asks us to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation and unification of all peoples in the world beyond the hatred and conflict among us.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the wise woman of Tekoa is the role model for Korean reunification with her wisdom as well as prophecy.

The mother, who lost her husband and experienced one son being killed by the other, is our prototype to keep the wisdom and to present the prophetic voice. According to Carol Meyers, the designation “mother” in early Israel (Judges 5:7) is not reference to “a biological maternal role but rather to her divinatorial leadership, her ability to provide answers to Israel’s problems.”<sup>36</sup> Also, she points out the oracular center in the wise woman of Tekoa. A mother has wisdom to solve problems so that she can say her words as an oracle of prophecy. The concept of “the mother of nation” in Korea plays a role of metaphor for Korean women education.<sup>37</sup> Motherhood brings up people with care and affection in importantly powerful ways. Mothers symbolically express the issues in a specific situation. Mee Hyun Chung

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<sup>34</sup> Young Sil Choi, “Mission for Reconciliation and Peaceful Unification, A Women Who Changed the Rise of Life-Giving Water,” *Madang* 7 (June 2007): 74-76.

<sup>35</sup> Choi, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Meyer, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 160.

<sup>37</sup> Sook Jin Lee, “Hankook Kendai Kashinkyo Minjok Damron-kwa Yeosung (Minjok Disclose and Women in the Korean Modern Protestants,” in *Minjok-kwa Yeosung Shinhak (Minjok and Feminist Theology)*, ed. by The Korean Association of Feminist Theology (Seoul: Handeulchulpansah, 2006), 181.

correctly points out that “the division of Korea is not a family tragedy on the Korean peninsula. It is a barrier to world peace.”<sup>38</sup> Mothers who love giving birth are subject to embrace world peace.

As biblical Israel needed wise mothers, today’s Korea needs mothers who have the wisdom to create the reunification of two divided nations, South Korea and North Korea. Korea came from the same mother. Soon Kyung Park has argued that the mother of *Minjok*<sup>39</sup> in Korea is suit with the subject of Korean reunification.<sup>40</sup> The mother of *Minjok* plays a metaphor for Korean reunification in her divided situation. According to Park, the mother of *Minjok* is the agent who deals the historically divided context in Korea beyond the family matters, and functions as the subject of the universal-spiritual atmosphere in the Korean future.<sup>41</sup> The reinterpretation of the biblical mothers shows the important references for Korean reunification feminist theology. They have already embraced the powerful narratives and attracted our attention in the world. The Tekoite woman is a significant mother for Korean reunification feminist theology.

When the sons of the Tekoite woman fight each other, there is no one to tear them apart and the one smote the other (2 Sam 14. 6). People watch the murder of one brother without doing anything. In addition, they want to kill the surviving. The murdered son is the victim of the social structure that stood by evil. Moreover, the atmosphere of the social

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<sup>38</sup> Mee-Hyun Chung, “A Korean Feminist Theology for Reunification,” *Madang* 3 (June 2005), 59.

<sup>39</sup> One may have a question about the differences between *Minjung* and *Minjok*. Mee-Hyun Chung classifies three *Mins* of the Korean language in terms of Korea’s social movement: “*Minju*=Democracy, *Minjung*=People, *Minjok*=Korean Nation” (Chung, 53). Furthermore, the major differences between *Minjung* and *Minjok* come from how to understand socio-political problems in the Korean peninsula from the past to the present. When one realizes that the reunification of Korea is the most important issue in Korea, he or she emphasizes the idea of one *Minjok* in order to reunify the two Koreas. On the contrary, the person who is conscious of class struggles in Korea focuses on the term *Minjung* liberation under the slogan of equal rights and distribution.

<sup>40</sup> Soon Kyung Park, “Minjok Tongil-kwa Minjung-ui Moonje (Minjok Reunification and the Problems of Minjung Theology,” *Shinhaksasang* 80 (Spring, 1993): 57.

<sup>41</sup> Soon Kyung Park, “Minjok, Kajok, Yeosung: Tongil Minjok Kongdongche-eulwihan Yeosung-ui Yeokhal” (Minjok, Family, Women: Women’s Roles for Reunification Minkjok Community), in *Tongil Shinkhak-ui Mirae (The Future of Reunification Theology)* (Seoul: Sakejeol, 1997), 274.

structure wants to get the benefit from killing the remaining son. As a result there would be nothing for the mother, no sons, no husband, and no inheritance. She will be forced to marry to have an inheritance just as South Korea has been forced into a relationship with the U.S.A. by the Korean War. South Korea by being involved politically and economically with the U.S.A. is losing her own identity. The two Koreas fought at the instigation of the powerful nations of the world. If they fight again, one nation will be killed by the other. Other nations will just watch their deaths, then they will take their benefits. Moreover, they may provoke the two nations to fight. The two Koreas need the wisdom of a mother, and they need her prophecy before one kills the other. The wise woman of Tekoa, who has the authority of wisdom and prophecy, is an important Biblical reference for the “mother” of two nations. Even now the mother of Korean wisdom is begging for the reconciliation of two siblings: North and South Korea.

## Abstract

In the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is personalized as a woman. Why does the author of the Wisdom Literature want to give us a sense of the femaleness of wisdom? This metaphor is related to women's specialized gifts and is depicted by the wise woman "who has been noted for astute counselor, persuasiveness, and tact."<sup>42</sup> We have images of female wisdom not only in the Wisdom Literature but also in the monarchic stories. They are the unnamed wise women in Tekoa (2 Sam 14) and in Abel (2 Sam 20). These two women appear with the stories of Joab. Scholars argue about whether or not the woman in Tekoa represents genuine wisdom. In this paper, I would like to debate the identity of the wise woman of Tekoa based on the work of George G. Nicol and that of Claudia Camp. I argue that, why does Joab send the wise woman of Tekoa to the king? Why couldn't Joab present himself before the king? What kind of ability does the wise woman have that Joab does not have? It is clear that, Joab needs the wise woman of Tekoa. The wise woman of Tekoa not only has the wisdom to solve the ambiguous question of David, but also she appears as a prophetic figure to appear before the king. In feminist studies of the Hebrew Bible, it is important to consider that the images of women have been covered over by the male-centered misleading interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. The wisdom and prophecy of the Tekoite woman are significant references for a feminist perspective regarding today's issues such as the reunification of the two Koreas. The Tekoite woman shows the significant role of mothers in the Korean *Minjok*, since she asks us to proclaim the urgent situation of the two Koreas surrounding the powers in the world. The Korean mothers willingly protect their children from the world dynamics that keep separating from one *Minjok*.

## Key Words

The Tekoite Woman, Wisdom, Prophecy, Korean Reunification, *Minjok*, Mother.

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<sup>42</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities, Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 42.



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