WOMEN IN THE PENTATEUCH

WOMEN IN THE PENTATEUCH

A FEMINIST AND SOURCE-CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, the idea for which began to develop during Professor Marc Z. Brettler's graduate seminar on methodology in biblical interpretation at Brandeis University. In that course, I noticed the significant gap between source criticism and feminism not only in scholarship, but in the minds of many of my fellow students as well. I began to wonder what a feminist source-critical analysis would look like, and suspected that I would likely find some differences between the sources where material about women was concerned. My interest in bridging these two methods stems from a conviction that both are valuable: my graduate program was based on the premise that rigorous historical-critical method forms the most solid foundation for interpretation. Likewise, a long-held affinity for the ideas of feminism made me reluctant to push that method to the side in order to focus solely on the traditional modes of reading and understanding the Hebrew Bible.

As I note in the Introduction, I had to limit the quantity of material covered in the dissertation in order ever to finish my degree, and thus I decided to focus only on the narrative of the books of Genesis–Numbers. This still left a considerable amount of material, and because no one has attempted to conduct such a study before, my analysis involved much detail. I have trimmed this down significantly in the present version of the work, but I refer the reader to the dissertation where more detail, if desired, can be found. The present version is also lacking a (very) long chapter on the history of Pentateuchal source criticism, which was a necessary part of the dissertation but which was sacrificed for this version, as significant parts of it can be found in other places. I hope to make this chapter available online at some point in the not-too-distant future.

I am deeply indebted to all the people who have aided me along the way, foremost among them being my graduate advisor, Marc Brettler. The teaching of Professors Brettler, Tzvi Abusch, David Wright, Bernadette Brooten, and Baruch Schwartz has been instrumental in developing my approach to the biblical text. The influence of Susan Ackerman, who graciously served as the outside reader for my dissertation, will be evident throughout, as is, in particular, the work of Phyllis Bird and of Carol Meyers,

on whom I draw heavily and frequently. Even where I disagree with them, I am deeply indebted to the work they have done.

Many people have been involved in the production of this book: my thanks to David Clines and the editorial board at Sheffield Phoenix Press, who accepted my manuscript for publication. Ailsa Parkin, also of Sheffield Phoenix Press, and Duncan Burns, of Forthcoming Publications, have been most gracious and helpful in handling the publication process, which was a mystery to me at the outset.

My family and friends have been stalwarts through my graduate and early post-graduate years, and I thank them for their support from the bottom of my heart. Foremost, my love and thanks go to my partner, Chad, who has supported me through the years and of whom I am a particularly big fan. I dedicate this book to him.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANQ	*Andover Newton Quarterly*
AusBR	*Australian Biblical Review*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BARev	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).
BerOl	Berit Olam
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibLim	Biblical Limits
BibRes	*Biblical Research*
BibSem	Biblical Seminar
BibW	Bible World
BInt	Biblical Interpretation
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BR	*Bible Review*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CC	Continental Commentaries
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament
CRBR	*Critical Review of Books in Religion*
EcRev	*Ecumenical Review*
FAT 2	Forschungen zum Alten Testament, Second Series
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCB 2	Feminist Companion to the Bible, Second Series
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch, revised and trans. A.E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship

HALOT	Ludwig Koehler *et al.* (eds.), *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (revised and trans. W. Baumgartner and J.J. Stamm; 5 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967–1995).
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HWSR	Harvard Women's Studies in Religion
IBHS	Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
IDB	George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962).
IFT	Introductions to Feminist Theology
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
Joüon	Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (revised and trans. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991).
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
MLBS	Mercer Library of Biblical Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Translation
OBS	Oxford Bible Series
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RadRel	*Radical Religion*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RL	*Religion in Life*
SBLBSNA	Society of Biblical Literature Biblical Scholarship in North America
SBLCP	Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Publications
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SIH	Studies in the Humanities

SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
TSR	Texts and Studies in Religion
TTod	*Theology Today*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
UCNES	University of California Near Eastern Studies
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
WCom	Westminster Commentaries
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis in 1878,[1] source and redaction criticism have been a mainstay of historical-critical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Feminist biblical interpretation as an academic discipline, on the other hand, is a product of the last decades of the twentieth century. Beyond this chronological divide, there has long been an ideological divide between these approaches as well. Practitioners of historical-critical methodologies remain wary of feminism, especially as it often begins with a rejection of traditional conclusions as well as the methods used to reach those conclusions. While their subject matter often overlaps, neither group tends to engage with the other. This means that no scholar has undertaken a systematic analysis of how the Pentateuchal sources differ in their treatments of and attitudes toward women.[2]

The Pentateuchal narrative is generally considered to have originated separately from the law, and it is easily differentiated from it in most cases. Treating both the narrative and the law would be unwieldy in a single study, and given that the legal material concerning women has received somewhat more treatment,[3] this study will focus on the narrative material. As for the secondary literature, there are numerous overviews of trends and developments within Pentateuchal source and redaction criticism. This Introduction will include only a brief summary on the topic. On the other hand, no one has written a history of the methods, findings, and developments in biblical feminist scholarship. Thus, a longer discussion of feminist interpretation of the Bible appears in Chapter 1, although it is limited to works that focus

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1. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (ed. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Enzies; trans. W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 2nd edn, 1885).

2. Various works have been written on women's status in the legal codes of the Pentateuch, although none yet that synthesizes all the available material. See, for instance, Mayer I. Gruber, 'Women in the Cult according to the Priestly Code', in Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernst Frerichs (eds.), *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 35-48; Carolyn Pressler, *The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Law* (BZAW, 215; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1993).

3. See, e.g., Gruber, 'Women in the Cult', pp. 35-48; Pressler, *Deuteronomic Family Law*; Deborah L. Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis* (LHBOTS, 458; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

particularly on the Pentateuch or that bear methodologically on the larger textual questions addressed in this study.[4]

1. *A Brief Overview of Source and Redaction Criticism*

Although Wellhausen was not the first to notice many of the features of the sources, or to posit redactional activity in bringing the independent sources together, he was the first to lay these arguments out systematically and thoroughly.[5] Wellhausen based his Documentary Hypothesis on four pillars of the cultic system: the location of the sanctuary, the system of sacrifices, the festivals, and the priesthood.[6] The sources JE, P, and D, according to Wellhausen, each had a different view of what these institutions entailed. Wellhausen's theory garnered many adherents, who largely follow Wellhausen in dating J and E before the other sources, between the ninth and seventh centuries.[7] As for D and P, even scholars of a traditional bent debate both the relative and the absolute dating of these sources. Some place P in the period of the monarchy, after J but before D,[8] while others place it in the exilic or postexilic period and consider it to be the latest of the sources.[9]

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4. For an engaging, if selective, overview of feminist biblical criticism, see Cullen Murphy, *The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998). See also Susanne Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible* (IFT, 13; London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), pp. 12-32; Pamela J. Milne, 'No Promised Land: Rejecting the Authority of the Bible', in Phyllis Trible *et al.* (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to the Bible* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995), pp. 47-73.

5. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 3-13.

6. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 17-167.

7. See, for example, Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1972), p. 230; Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History* (trans. W.H. Carruth; New York: Schocken, 1964), p. 138; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB, 1; New York: Double-day, 1964), p. xxviii; Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw–Hill, 1966), pp. 68-73; Richard Elliott Friedman, 'The Recession of Biblical Source Criticism', in Richard Elliott Friedman, and H.G.M. Williamson (eds.), *The Future of Biblical Studies* (SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 81-101 (83-91).

8. See, e.g., Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, from its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 205; Jacob Milgrom, 'The Antiquity of the Priestly Source: A Reply to Joseph Blenkinsopp', *ZAW* 111 (1999), pp. 10-22; Ziony Zevit, 'Converging Lines of Evidence Bearing on the Date of P', *ZAW* 94 (1982), pp. 481-511 (510); Avi Hurvitz, 'Once Again: The Linguistic Profile of the Priestly Material in the Pentateuch and its Historical Age', *ZAW* 112 (2000), pp. 180-91 (191); Friedman, 'Recession', p. 97.

9. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 6-13; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 230-31; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the*

Likewise, the dating for D ranges from the monarchy to the Persian period, with redactions of the source posited at various stages.[10]

In general, most of the individual elements of Wellhausen's four pillars are not disputed, but there is some debate over the significance of these findings and what they mean in terms of dating. This is particularly true of the debate over whether P assumes centralization, and of the question of the division between priests and Levites.[11] Most scholars acknowledge the clear differences between the sources (although not necessarily according to a Wellhausenian model), as witnessed in particular by the durability of P as a source: very few scholars who accept multiple sources reject the idea that one of these sources, or editorial layers, is of a priestly nature. The material assigned to this P is also largely agreed upon.[12] The debate focuses, rather, on dating, on the way in which the narrative developed and came together, how the sources relate to one another, where the boundaries between sources are, where there are redactional layers or layers of accreted tradition, and where there are sources as opposed to editorial layers. Much of this relies on a study of the development and form of the traditions and on redaction criticism, rather than strictly on source criticism.

The first wave of post-Wellhausen Pentateuchal criticism, while generally accepting his findings, aimed to explore the development of the traditions behind the text. While this work is generally categorized as form criticism or tradition history, the works of Gunkel, von Rad, and Noth, to name a few, not only took source criticism as their starting point, but also had important results for source and redaction criticism.[13] These scholars' findings were

Religion of Israel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 323-24; Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'An Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date of the Priestly Material in the Pentateuch', *ZAW* 108 (1996), pp. 495-518.

10. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, pp. 368-75; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 9-84; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp. 274-89; John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* (Trajectories, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 87-111; Thomas C. Römer and Marc Zvi Brettler, 'Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch', *JBL* 119 (2000), pp. 401-19; Raymond F. Person, *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (SBLStBL, 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

11. See, e.g., Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*; Friedman, 'Recession', pp. 81-101; Friedman, 'Some Recent Non-arguments Concerning the Documentary Hypothesis', in Michael V. Fox (ed.), *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 87-101.

12. For some disagreement, see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup, 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 136-70, esp. pp. 154-56.

13. For a critique of this approach, see Rendtorff, *Problem*.

generally remarkably close to Wellhausen's, offering nuances and fine-tunings of his hypothesis without overtly challenging it.

These traditional views and arguments remained fairly stable for nearly a century, with scholars filling in details rather than overhauling Wellhausen's entire concept. Even some of the first major challenges to Wellhausen's work, initiated by scholars like Frank Moore Cross and Yehezkel Kaufmann, remained within the traditional articulation of the sources. Kaufmann primarily disagreed on the relative dating of P, which for Wellhausen was based on an evolutionary model of Israelite religion in which prophetic religion was the earlier, 'higher' form and priestly religion the later, 'lower' form. Kaufmann argued the opposite. According to Kaufmann, the Torah (by which he meant P) reflects the earliest of Israel's traditions.[14] Kaufmann thus bases his work on the same source-critical principles as Wellhausen and others; the differences in his theory of dating stem not from his view of the sources but from his view of the development of Israelite religion.

The past few decades have seen a trend to revise more radically both the relative and the absolute dating of the sources, in some cases pushing the dates forward by centuries. Frank Winnett was one of the first to argue in favor of a serious revision of the documentary approach, advocating a late dating of J,[15] but this idea did not garner serious attention until the work of his student, John Van Seters. Van Seters's approach is inherently suspicious of source criticism. His primary conclusion is that the Yahwist, who dates to the late exilic period, was a historian most akin to ancient Greek historians, rather than a collector of tradition or a theologian as, for example, Gerhard von Rad envisioned him. Van Seters places J in the late exilic period and likewise argues that the Covenant Code, usually deemed the earliest of the biblical law collections, is in fact the latest and is integral to the Yahwist's work.[16] Similarly, Joseph Blenkinsopp dates J to the Persian period, arguing that it expands on P.[17]

Erhard Blum also argues for a later date for J, placing most of J (his pre-P) after D; however, he maintains some overlap in the dating of these two sources.[18] Blum argues for a particularly different vision of the sources,

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14. Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*, pp. 176-77.

15. F.V. Winnett, 'Re-examining the Foundations', *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 1-19.

16. John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 310-11; Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

17. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992); Blenkinsopp, 'P and J in Genesis 1.1–11.26: An Alternative Hypothesis', in Astrid B. Beck *et al.* (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes That See* (Festschrift for David Noel Freedman; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 1-15.

18. Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW, 189; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990).

especially in his conception of the priestly material. He sees P as a conscious reworking of the text, not as an independent narrative, nor as simply a redaction.[19] He criticizes other scholars for being too limited in the options they see available for the nature of the P work: in places, P may not be an independent source, but calling it solely a redaction, as scholars like Cross have done, is also inadequate.[20] Rather, Blum sees P as a 'reworking' (*Bearbeitung*) that depends on and interacts with the pre-P traditions (K^D), often responding to and even correcting the previous material. Blum's remarkably different models for the composition of Genesis and for the composition of Exodus–Numbers are also a departure from previous scholarship, and may prove to be particularly useful. The prevalence of J (or 'non-P') material in Genesis, and of P material elsewhere in the Tetrateuch, and the fact that Genesis covers millennia while Exodus–Numbers cover forty years, allows for the possibility that we are dealing with very different composition histories in these books. Blum's theories take this into account.

Shifts in the conception of E as an independent source have been even more radical than such reevaluations of J and P. E is frequently left out of the discussion or included only in the conveniently ambiguous JE. This siglum acknowledges that there are at least two strands combined in the non-P, non-D material, while also recognizing the near impossibility of separating the threads completely. (Even Wellhausen was aware of this difficulty and spoke of JE as a combined work.) Among scholars who accept that there is E material,[21] some have noted its ties to the north, to prophetic circles, and to D/tr, which in turn leads to a re-envisioning of this material as a Deuteronomistic layer in the first four books of the Pentateuch.[22]

Related to the shifting conceptions of what the sources of the Pentateuch are and how they came together, scholars have also turned to a focus on *why* this material came together, especially as the use of sociological models is becoming more common in biblical studies. Although source criticism has been something of a holdout, there is a growing recognition among source critics that the social environment of the Pentateuchal writers and editors played a role in their work, including activity at the scribal level.[23] In taking a step back from Wellhausen's model, many scholars have questioned its

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19. Blum, *Studien*, p. 229.

20. Blum, *Studien*, pp. 221-22.

21. Alan W. Jenks, *The Elohist and North Israelite Traditions* (SBLMS, 22; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Joel S. Baden, 'Rethinking the Supposed JE Document' (PhD diss.; Harvard University, 2007).

22. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, p. 19; Robert K. Gnuse, 'Redefining the Elohist?', *JBL* 119 (2000), pp. 201-20 (209).

23. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

underlying assumptions about social construction and its role in authorship. In particular, scholars have an increased understanding of the impact of the Babylonian exile and the effect it would have had on the development of Israelite traditions and practices in the Persian period.[24] Some have also turned to a theory of Persian imperial authorization, which posits a Persian administrative apparatus that gave local law codes binding legal status, to explain the creation and promulgation of the Pentateuch. Despite a number of documents that seem to attest to Persian authorization of various legal systems, however, the evidence for such an institution remains inconclusive. The difficulty of proving such a thesis is further complicated by the nature of the Pentateuch, which is inherently different from contemporary law codes not only in terms of what it includes (both legal as well as considerable narrative portions), but also in terms of what it lacks, namely an accounting of the reason for its composition. Furthermore, the theory of Persian imperial authorization takes an overly literal interpretation of the term 'torah' as law. Much of the Pentateuch is not legal material in the strict sense, nor is it clear how such a collection would make the transition to be understood as law.[25]

The aforementioned reconceptions of the sources include some fairly serious departures from Wellhausen's original theory. Because of this, some scholars have claimed that the Documentary Hypothesis is in crisis.[26] It is true that many of the new theories offer significantly different conclusions from those of the first century of source analysis, rejecting much of Wellhausen's delineations of J, E, D, and P. Yet, although some interpreters are drastically revising Wellhausen's theory, and some are moving toward synchronic treatments of the text, for many of these scholars, the idea of separate sources is still the basis of Pentateuchal analysis. What they miss, therefore, is not only that elements of traditional (Wellhausenian) source criticism remain in their work, but also that *a* documentary hypothesis does not need to correspond exactly to *the* Documentary Hypothesis of Wellhausen. These 'crypto-documentarians' have divorced themselves from a tradition that they see as obsolete, without noting their indebtedness to its findings, which lie at the root of their work. Such scholars consider themselves to be acting

24. Charles E. Carter, 'Opening Windows onto Biblical Worlds: Applying the Social Sciences to Hebrew Scripture', in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.), *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), pp. 421-51 (438-39). Cf. also Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (SBLStBL, 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003).

25. See the essays in Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (eds.), *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

26. Rolf Rendtorff, 'The Paradigm is Changing: Hopes—and Fears', *BibInt* 1 (1993), pp. 34-53 (44).

independently of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis and of nearly a century of traditional source criticism, but the opposite is true: the work of traditional source critics frequently remains the basis of their assumptions about the sources. The particulars of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis may no longer hold among the majority of biblicists, but documentary hypotheses still provide some of the best models for the composition of the Pentateuch.

What is necessary is a re-evaluation of the possible models of composition that acknowledges the strengths of the documentary model but is not limited to it. The work of Erhard Blum is compelling in this regard; leaving aside for now the particulars of his methodology and conclusions, he has taken something of a novel approach to the text. Moreover, he has created strikingly different compositional models for Genesis and for Exodus–Numbers. It is his recognition that perhaps the material did not all come together in the same way that is Blum's most valuable contribution. Blum's work is emblematic of a reemergence of fragmentary and supplementary models, which suggests that Winnett was correct when he said that a 'purely documentary approach to the Pentateuch is not enough'.[27] It is time to take a step back, and to search for compositional models on a case-by-case basis, admitting that thus far, we have not found one that provides an acceptable portrait of the process that gave us the final form of the Pentateuch.

2. *A Few Methodological Parameters*

Despite the ever-increasing number of models for the composition and nature of the sources, many of which do not posit independent documents in the Wellhausenian sense, even the most revisionist source critic is hard-pressed to abandon P entirely.[28] While there is some debate over which material belongs to it, and whether this material is an independent narrative or a redactional framework, no scholar who accepts a source-critical approach doubts the existence of a lengthy priestly corpus in the Pentateuch.[29] Similarly, D has remained remarkably steady, despite much debate over the existence of a Dtr redaction elsewhere in the Pentateuch. D's dating has remained even more fixed, and to an extent it is the hinge around which the other sources move. J and E are the most contentious of the sources, and the most

27. Winnett, 'Re-examining', p. 3.
28. Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 125.
29. Rolf Rendtorff, 'L'histoire biblique des origines (Gen 1–11) dans le contexte de la rédaction "sacerdotale" du Pentateuque', in Albert de Pury (ed.), *Le Pentateuque en question: les origines et la composition des cinq premiers livres de la Bible à la lumière des recherches récentes* (trans. Samuel Amsler; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2nd edn, 1989), pp. 83-94 (85), has noticed this.

difficult to pin down. E has proved the least enduring, and has been abandoned completely by many scholars. J sometimes devolves into a catch-all for everything that is not demonstrably P or D.

As a result of these trends, I have chosen to treat the material traditionally attributed to J and E together under the siglum non-P. However, I freely admit that this source is composed of traditions from varying times and places, perhaps including other sources. It will most likely be worthwhile at some future point to try to separate this material into smaller component elements, to see if there are differences there in the treatment of women as well. The relationship of P to this non-P material suggests that P is the later of the two; this is particularly evident in redactional passages. The fact that non-P does not know (or acknowledge) centralization, as Wellhausen and many others have noted, is a strong argument for its dating in the pre-exilic period. Likewise, arguments for an exilic or postexilic date for P remain the most compelling and are followed by the majority of scholars. Thus, I will take as my starting point the assumption that non-P is pre-exilic and that P is exilic or postexilic. These are fairly broad ranges of dates; it is difficult to pinpoint them more specifically, but as I will show, the material on women is also useful in this regard.

The historical split between the traditional historical-critical and the newer feminist schools of biblical interpretation also needs to be addressed. The inquiry into women's status in the Pentateuch should not be separated from the complex issues of source and redaction and the development of the text. My own methodology brings a feminist perspective—in the general sense of focusing on the depiction of women in the text—to these traditional models. This study looks at the material about women on a source-by-source basis and isolates differences between the sources in their attitude toward and treatment of women. Admittedly, there is not enough material pertaining to women to independently justify a comprehensive, source-critical model for the composition of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless the differences in depictions of women support conclusions that others have drawn based on a broader study of the material. This evidence adds a level of nuance to the understanding of the sources and their authors, as well as our understanding of the changing status of women in Israelite society.

1

FEMINIST STUDY OF PENTATEUCHAL NARRATIVE

Feminist biblical scholars have taken a variety of methodological approaches to the task of interpretation.[1] However, whether they are taking a modern, theological approach, or trying to access the ancient context for historical reconstruction, feminists have used source and redaction criticism only to a limited extent in their work, tending instead to utilize literary and narrative criticism.[2] In part, this is because historical-critical methods were seen as tools of the very type of interpretation that feminists were trying to overturn. Moreover, feminism's concern with many of the same issues that were important for narrative criticism may explain why feminists tended to be drawn in that direction. However, source analysis is also the basis of much modern biblical interpretation and as such, it often lies behind feminist interpretation, for example in the delimitation of literary units within the text, even when it is not brought to bear directly on the interpretation of the text. In discussions of narrative, however, the sources are seldom more than a way to separate out two different stories. The greater ramifications for the development of Israelite traditions and theology are not often explored. Source criticism is found less often in feminist discussions of narratives and more often in treatments of legal material, where the source boundaries are generally clearer both ideologically and chronologically.

1.   See the discussion of Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?', in Harding (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-14; Harding, 'Conclusion: Epistemological Questions', in Harding (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology*, pp. 181-90; Janice Capel Anderson, 'Mapping Feminist Biblical Criticism: The American Scene, 1983–1990', *CRBR* (1991), pp. 21-44.

2.   It is worth noting that while feminist biblical criticism is not a purely American phenomenon, it has generally been dominated by American scholars. German scholars, although they have been publishing on New Testament for some years, have only begun to explore feminist criticism of the Hebrew Bible fairly recently. Source and redaction criticism, on the other hand, are dominated by European scholars, particularly those in German institutions. The reader is referred to the bibliography for examples.

One exception to this general lack of source-critical analysis is in treatments of Genesis 2–3. These chapters have received a disproportionate amount of attention, and are one place where feminists make much of the source differences.[3] However, these analyses do not discuss how the texts fit into the larger ideological picture of their respective sources, and how in that regard the two creation stories may thus be read in relation to each other on a larger (redactional) scale, not only in their immediate context. Many feminist scholars are interested less in how the texts reflect the larger source's ideology and are more concerned with how the texts have been used through the course of post-biblical history to justify the status of women vis-à-vis men. Feminism is never employed as a method in developing source-critical arguments, for instance by using the depiction of women in the text to construct a picture of a source's ideology, or to compare it with other sources. Rather, source-critical analysis is used only in a cursory fashion by feminists, primarily in order to differentiate between units of text and occasionally to demonstrate the contradictory nature of the Bible where women are concerned. Once we leave the first few chapters of Genesis, source criticism largely ceases to be a tool employed by feminist scholars in narrative analysis, although in the legal material it is employed to a greater degree.

Feminists are not the only ones responsible for the split between older and newer methods of biblical interpretation. Scholars adhering to traditional historical-critical models have largely avoided feminist criticism as well, perhaps owing to the fact that traditional scholars were often under attack from feminists. Employing feminist methodologies in their own work might have undermined the very conclusions they hoped to draw. In addition, a general cultural wariness of feminism as radical, angry, or militant and the association of feminism with a postmodern rejection of objectivity have likely served to deter scholars who still espouse a more traditional historical endeavor. Certain themes noticed by feminist biblicists have occasionally been treated by more mainstream, traditionally male, scholars.[4] Mostly, however, these studies are not explicitly concerned with the status of women in biblical or ancient Israel.

Reading biblical stories about women with an understanding of the ancient context as well as the specific narrative contexts is critical for developing an accurate picture of the past and for understanding the legacy of the Hebrew

3.   See, for instance, the essays in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (FCB, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). On the legacy of these chapters for women, see, e.g., Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 175.

4.   E.g. Ronald S. Hendel, ' "Begetting" and "Being Born" in the Pentateuch: Notes on Historical Linguistics and Source Criticism', *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 38-46; Timothy D. Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (FAT, 2/12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Bible in Jewish and Christian cultures. A part of this task is recognizing that the narratives stem from different times, places, and authors, whose ideas are embedded within the text. I am not concerned here with reconstructing a history of women in ancient Israel or with reclaiming the Bible for women, although this study will certainly be relevant to those who are interested in those subjects. Rather, my concern is with the history of all ancient Israel, men as much as women, and specifically with the history of the composition and redaction of the Pentateuch. The treatment of women in the texts is fundamental to this larger project, in that it reveals something about the authors' worldviews. This is a narrower vision than a history of women in ancient Israel, and is tied to the situations of the authors and the creation of Israel's literary traditions. In this respect, my analysis is generally quantitative rather than qualitative: what matters most to me is the amount of material devoted to women, rather than the positive or negative treatment of women within that material, particularly as such judgments are so subjective. Feminism, for my purposes, then, does not imply a specific treatment of women, or one of the many methodologies, such as postmodern literary criticism, that are so often associated with feminist interpretation.

1. *An Overview of Feminist Biblical Scholarship*

Historically, the Bible has in many ways dictated the place of women in western society. Feminism from its inception has thus involved biblical interpretation, primarily because the rights of women were based on and justified through biblical teachings for over two millennia. Prooftexts for women's status have frequently been drawn from biblical texts like Genesis 2–3, which see the woman as weak, gullible, and ultimately responsible for the removal of humans from their Edenic existence and for the introduction of sin into the world.[5]

   Even at a very early date, however, some women were taking issue with such interpretations and offering alternatives. In 1589 the English polemicist Jane Anger wrote: 'Then lacking a help for [the man], God, making woman of man's flesh that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show how far we women are more excellent than men'.[6] In a sense, then, feminism and feminist biblical interpretation are synonymous, in that the Bible was the logical place to begin for early feminists: it was well known, influential, and the primary source for moral guidance. Even in the modern period, many feminists start

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   5.   Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, 'Early Feminism', in Sarah Gamble (ed.), *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-15 (6).
   6.   From Jane Anger's *Her Protection of Women*, as cited in Hodgson-Wright, 'Early Feminism', p. 6.

with a critique of the Bible: Elizabeth Cady Stanton,[7] Mary Daly,[8] and Gerda Lerner[9] are all concerned with the Bible, often rejecting it because of its role in perpetuating woman's secondary status.

Although feminism, including biblical feminism, is traditionally considered a phenomenon of the 1970s, it was Elizabeth Cady Stanton who began the modern movement in feminist biblical scholarship in the late nineteenth century with her groundbreaking book, *The Woman's Bible*.[10] Trained in law by her father but unable to practice because she was a woman, Stanton was a lifelong advocate for women's rights. In 1848, with Lucretia Mott, she convened the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, and with Susan B. Anthony founded the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1868.[11] Stanton was frustrated by traditional interpretations of the Bible, which she felt hindered women's rights,[12] and thus she conceived the Woman's Bible project, bringing together a committee of women to offer their critical commentary on the text. None of the contributors was professionally trained as a biblicist, access to such academic training being largely unavailable to women at the time, but some of them were aware of trends in biblical scholarship; several read Hebrew or Greek as well.[13]

The Woman's Bible is largely a work of suffragist propaganda, with many comments relating the biblical text to the nineteenth-century struggle for women's rights. But Stanton's critique, in particular, of biblical passages about women is sharp and often cutting. Although she offers a positive reading in places,[14] she largely rejects the biblical portrait of womanhood,

7.   Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (New York: Prometheus, 1999).

8.   See, for instance, Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

9.   Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

10.   Dorothy C. Bass, 'Women's Studies and Biblical Studies: An Historical Perspective', *JSOT* 22 (1982), pp. 6-12 (6), notes that this early feminist movement coincided with the rise of critical biblical scholarship in the wake of Wellhausen's work.

11.   Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, p. vii.

12.   Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, pp. vii –viii; James H. Smylie, 'The Woman's Bible and the Spiritual Crisis', *Soundings* 59 (1976), pp. 305-28 (305-307). For more on Stanton, especially within the continuum of feminist biblical interpretation, see Murphy, *Word*, pp. 19-23.

13.   Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, pp. 5, 9; Smylie, 'Woman's Bible', p. 309; Linda K. Pritchard, 'The Woman's Bible: Women in Religion in Historical Context', in Joan Arnold Romero (ed.), *Women and Religion, 1973: Pre-Printed Papers for the Working Group on Women and Religion* (Tallahassee, FL: AAR, 1973), pp. 44-50 (46). One of the contributors to *The Woman's Bible*, Ellen Battelle Dietrick, mentions the work of Jean Astruc and divides the Creation account into two sources, the Elohistic and the Iahoistic (Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, pp. 17-18).

14.   So, for instance, she sees the creation in Gen. 1.27 as depicting the equality of the sexes (Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, p. 15).

saying it provides a poor model for women of her own era.[15] Stanton was ahead of her time,[16] and her ideas were rejected even by contemporary women's rights activists.[17] Her work experienced a resurgence of interest in the 1970s, however, when feminism began to emerge within the discipline of academic biblical studies. In addition to various articles on *The Woman's Bible*,[18] the 1973 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion featured a session devoted solely to Stanton's work, the output of which was published in a special volume.[19]

While there were works dedicated to the position of women in the Bible in the period between Stanton's work and the feminist movement of the 1970s, these were largely concerned with reinforcing traditional interpretations of women's status and thus offered little groundbreaking criticism. Edith Deen's *All the Women of the Bible*, published in 1955,[20] provides a thorough catalogue of women in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Essentially a dictionary, Deen's book treats both named and unnamed women. However, Deen's analysis continues in the traditional vein, primarily treating women in relation to men, and cannot truly be deemed feminist.[21]

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, published in 1962, contains an article by Otto Baab entitled 'Woman' that covers women in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.[22] While the article notes something of the variety of treatments of women, it is still a fairly traditional discussion; the section on negative attitudes to women is remarkably short. Clarence Vos's 1968 work, *Woman in Old Testament Worship*,[23] undertakes to discuss

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15. Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, p. 53.

16. See Elaine Huber, 'They Weren't Prepared to Hear: A Closer Look at The Woman's Bible', *ANQ* 16 (1976), pp. 271-76.

17. At their 1896 meeting, the National American Woman Suffrage Association repudiated *The Woman's Bible*; see Stanton, *Woman's Bible*, p. 215; Pritchard, 'Woman's Bible', pp. 47-48.

18. See, e.g., Huber, 'They Weren't Prepared', pp. 271-76; Suzan E. Hill, 'Woman's Bible: Reformulating Tradition', *RadRel* 3/2 (1977), pp. 23-30; Stanton is also frequently mentioned in other works.

19. Romero (ed.), *Women and Religion*.

20. Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955).

21. Christine G. Allen, 'Who Was Rebekah? "On me be the curse my son!"', in Rita M. Gross (ed.), *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 183-211 (189).

22. *IDB* IV, pp. 864-67. Notably, in the *IDB Supplement*, published in 1976, the material on women is expanded to three articles, one on women in the ancient Near East, one on women in the Old Testament, and one on women in the New Testament. The section on women in the Old Testament, by Phyllis Trible, is as long as the original *IDB* article on women, and explores the biblical treatment of women more generally, not role-by-role, noting specific instances as necessary.

23. Clarence Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: Judels & Brinkman, 1968).

women's roles in cultic and non-cultic religion in ancient Israel. While Vos admits that men had a superior social status in the biblical period,[24] he offers traditional apologies for this fact, centering on woman's inherent disadvantage owing to pregnancies and child-rearing.[25] In the fashion typical for the time, Vos argues that this does not denote any true disadvantage or oppression of women, but rather that various cultic restrictions, for instance, are 'a *means of grace* for man and woman'.[26]

Feminist Biblical Criticism since 1970

Modern feminist biblical study began to develop in earnest with the rise of Second Wave[27] feminism in the 1970s. At the vanguard of this development in biblical studies was Phyllis Trible, whose 1972 article 'Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread'[28] set out in a preliminary fashion the theories developed more extensively in her groundbreaking article 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation' a year later.[29] Trible expanded on these themes again in her 1978 book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.[30] All three of these works explore the biblical text in order to peel away the centuries of primarily male interpretation and to reclaim the text for women. Specifically addressing texts that bear on the construction of gender-based social roles, Trible argues that the biblical God is depicted in terms both male and female, and that this is reflected in the biblical portrait of the equality and mutuality of the sexes.[31]

To combat the charge of eisegesis, Trible says that 'depatriarchalizing', that is, interpreting the Bible in a non-sexist fashion, is a principle already at work within biblical texts. The task is for scholars to identify the texts with this potential.[32] Trible also argues that new historical situations reveal new

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24. Vos, *Woman*, p. 48.

25. Vos, *Woman*, pp. 48-50.

26. Vos, *Woman*, p. 87 (italics original). For a summary of this type of scholarship, see Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 82.

27. See, e.g., Sue Thornham, 'Second Wave Feminism', in Gamble (ed.), *Routledge Critical Dictionary*, pp. 29-42. The ascription 'Second Wave' refers to the women's rights movement in the second half of the twentieth century, as distinct from 'first wave' feminism, which was centered largely around the suffragist movement.

28. Trible, 'Eve and Adam: Genesis 2–3 Reread', *ANQ* 13 (1972), pp. 251-58.

29. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation', *JAAR* 41 (1973), pp. 30-48; this important article was translated into German in 1978 ('Gegen das patriarchalische Prinzip in Bibelinterpretationen', in *Frauenbefreiung: Biblische und theologische Argumente* [ed. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel; Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1978], pp. 93-117).

30. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (OBT, 2; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

31. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing', pp. 47-48; Trible, *Rhetoric*, pp. 200-202.

32. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing', p. 48.

interpretations, thus allowing for a feminist reading of the text.[33] In her approach, Trible is dealing with theological issues, with showing the relevance of the text for women of faith today in light of today's attitudes about women. She is not concerned with reconstructing ancient Israelite history for its own sake, or with applying feminism to the text in order to more accurately reconstruct Israelite history by including women where they have been ignored previously.[34]

This theological approach is characteristic of much of the feminist biblical scholarship of the 1970s.[35] This is not surprising: traditional biblical interpretation had been used for centuries to justify certain roles for women, and many feminists of Trible's era rejected the Bible outright as so deeply sexist that it was beyond redemption.[36] For the first half of the decade, nearly all feminist biblical criticism was theological in nature, attempting to bring the ancient text into a modern context in which it was relevant for contemporary women, allowing women not to have to abandon their beliefs, either religious or feminist. This sort of theology developed first among Christian women and, to a lesser extent, men.[37] In large part this theological focus was a result of the greater presence of women at theological, rather than secular, institutions.

While the majority of feminist biblical scholarship in the 1970s takes this theological approach, the work of feminist scholars like Phyllis Bird,[38] who takes a more historical approach, began to appear around the same time. Bird covers various biblical treatments of women without overtly relating her

33.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 202.

34.   It is significant that Trible was teaching at Andover Newton Theological Seminary when she published her first works of feminist biblical interpretation. At the same time that Trible was at Andover Newton, feminism was an increasingly popular topic in the Boston academic-theological scene, led in large part by Mary Daly of Boston College. Trible's work in 'Depatriarchalizing', for instance, is a response to Daly's radical rejection of the Bible's authority; see Murphy, *Word*, pp. 48-49, 51-52.

35.   See Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 82-83, esp. n. 10; Murphy, *Word*, pp. 38-61.

36.   Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing', p. 30, esp. nn. 1-2.

37.   While Trible's work was generally non-sectarian, she and many of her contemporaries were concerned with Christian theology; see, e.g., Letha Scanzoni, 'The Feminists and the Bible', *Christianity Today* 17/9 (1973), pp. 10-15; Samuel Terrien, 'Toward a Biblical Theology of Womanhood', *RL* 42 (1973), pp. 322-33; Anne M. Bennett, 'Overcoming the Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women', *RadRel* 1 (1974), pp. 26-31; Paul D. Hanson, 'Masculine Metaphors for God and Sex-discrimination in the Old Testament', *EcRev* 27 (1975), pp. 316-24; Katherine D. Sakenfeld, 'The Bible and Women: Bane or Blessing?', *TTod* 32 (1975), pp. 222-33; Trible, 'Biblical Theology as Women's Work', *RL* 44 (1975), pp. 7-13; Virginia Mollenkott, 'Women and the Bible: A Challenge to Male Interpretation', *Sojourners* 5 (1976), pp. 20-25. While several of these authors are men, then, as now, men were still in the minority of biblical feminist scholars.

38.   For her collected essays, see Bird, *Missing Persons*.

arguments to modern, theological concerns about woman's status; she keeps the texts she discusses almost entirely in their ancient context. Susan Niditch[39] and Carol Meyers[40] also step outside of the theological mindset in their works, focusing more on reconstructing ancient history than on contemporary issues. Of course, even the reconstruction of ancient history has ramifications in the present, but the fact remains that such works are not so openly concerned with the modern theological implications.

Notably, nearly all the feminist biblical scholarship from the first half of the decade, and much from the second half, focused primarily on Genesis 1–3.[41] This prominence of the Creation/Garden of Eden stories in feminist scholarship is in direct proportion to those stories' influence over the centuries, no doubt owing in large part to their position at the beginning of the Bible (indeed, we might wonder what the world would look like today had those first three chapters been tucked away in the middle of the books of Kings, or among the aphorisms of the book of Proverbs). The account of human origins in Genesis has been given pride of place for so long that it hardly seems possible to diminish its importance. As a result, it was the text that had to be tackled first and foremost by scholars arguing that woman's subordination was not dictated by the biblical text. In particular, such discussions focused on Gen. 1.27, which seems to describe the creation of man and woman as simultaneous and equally 'in the image of God'. As Bird observed, Gen. 1.27 became the 'text upon which a corrective anthropology of equality might be built'.[42]

Besides overturning specific traditional interpretations, biblical feminists of the 1970s were also writing about more general methodological issues, especially the question of how the integration of women into religious studies

39. Susan Niditch, 'The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38', *HTR* 72 (1979), pp. 143-49.

40. Carol Meyers, 'The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel', *BA* 41/3 (1978), pp. 91-103; Meyers continues in this vein a decade later with *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also the section on Meyers in Murphy, *Word*, pp. 62-85.

41. In addition to works already cited, see also Trible, *Rhetoric*; Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 13-51; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Interpreting Patriarchal Traditions', in Letty M. Russell (ed.), *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 39-61; A. Maillot, 'Misogynie et Ancien Testament', *Foi et vie* 75/2 (1976), pp. 36-47; Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977); John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); Walter Vogels, '"It Is Not Good that the 'Mensch' Should Be Alone; I Will Make Him/Her a Helper Fit for Him/Her" (Gen 2.18)', *Eglise et théologie* 9 (1978), pp. 9-35; Maryanne Cline Horowitz, 'The Image of God in Man—Is Woman Included?', *HTR* 72 (1979), pp. 175-206.

42. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 127.

should be pursued. Some of this scholarship treats religion in a broader fashion, while some is focused specifically on biblical studies. Many works, of course, discuss methodology in the course of positing new interpretations of specific texts. Some of these studies are more secularly academic, while others have a faith-based focus. However, the latter often include arguments that can be, and are, used in scholarly literature as well.[43]

In the 1980s feminist biblical scholarship began to proliferate, and by the mid-1990s the corpus of feminist biblical scholarship had become nearly unwieldy.[44] Not only were more women and men writing on the topic, but the field was both expanding in scope and narrowing its specific analyses to include ever-smaller topics or units within a text. Especially with the proliferation of postmodern thinking, the possibilities for interpretation became nearly limitless. In these decades there was still plenty of theological inquiry, but more secular analyses began to appear as well, both in feminist as well as general biblical studies.[45] More women were being trained in traditional (historical-critical) biblical studies and finding teaching positions on university faculties, and a growing number of men were also drawn to the topic of women in the Bible and ancient Israel. Theological treatments remained, but whereas these were dominated by Christians in the 1970s, in the 1980s Jewish feminists began to enter the debate.[46] In the 1990s the Feminist Companion series,[47] edited by Athalya Brenner, appeared, as did Carol

43.   For examples of both, see Russell (ed.), *Liberating Word*; Gross (ed.), *Beyond Androcentrism*.

44.   See Pamela J. Milne, 'Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism', in Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 39-60 (42).

45.   For an overview of this development, see Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, 'The Modern Study of the Bible', in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 2090-96.

46.   See, e.g., Judith Plaskow, 'Standing Again at Sinai: Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective', *Tikkun* 1 (1986), pp. 28-34, as well as her 1990 book of the same title; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (BibSem; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985); Susannah Heschel (ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983). See also the discussion of Jewish feminist biblical scholarship in Adele Reinhartz, 'Jewish Women's Scholarly Writings on the Bible', in Berlin and Brettler (eds.), *Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 2000-2005; note that the works she cites begin around the mid-1980s. For a very brief, but informative, overview of Jewish biblical feminism, see Marie-Theres Wacker, 'Part One: Historical, Hermeneutical, and Methodological Foundations', in Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective* (trans. Martin and Barbara Rumscheidt; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 3-82 (60).

47.   The first volume of this series is Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (FCB, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); it is telling that

Newsom and Sharon Ringe's *Women's Bible Commentary*.[48] Studies of goddesses and goddess religion became popular in the 1980s and 1990s as well.[49] In addition to more specific analysis of individual texts, feminist scholars also continued to explore methodological issues, particularly narrative and postmodernist approaches to the text.[50] A collection of essays on feminist methodology appeared in conjunction with the Feminist Companion series in 1997,[51] and in 2000, Carol Meyers edited a comprehensive dictionary of women in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.[52]

Over the decades, feminist biblical scholars have tended to fall into two general categories: those who seek to reclaim the text for women, and those who seek to demonstrate the sexism inherent in the Bible, most often illustrated by the victimization of the women in the text.[53] Both trends stem from the recognition of androcentric biases in the Hebrew Bible, but each with a different end in view: one to show that the text may nevertheless

the first volume is on a book that features a strong female narrator, and that has sometimes been attributed to a female author; see A. Bloch and C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 20-21, for a brief summary. The Feminist Companion to the Bible is now in its second series.

48.   Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

49.   See Carl Olson (ed.), *The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Jo Ann Hackett, 'Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern "Fertility" Goddesses', *Semeia* 5 (1989), pp. 65-76; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992); Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris (eds.), *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (London: British Museum, 1998). This period also saw the practice of goddess religion and Wicca rising in popularity, especially in the United States; see Charlotte Allen, 'The Scholars and the Goddess', *Atlantic Monthly* (January 2001 [cited April 26 2004]); available from http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2001/01/allen.htm.

50.   The methodological material is too voluminous to repeat in detail here; instead the reader is referred to the bibliography, in particular to the items from Brenner and Fontaine (eds.), *Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible*.

51.   Brenner and Fontaine (eds.), *Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible*. Many other feminist books contain essays on methodology as well; I mention this one primarily because it is associated with the Feminist Companion series.

52.   Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

53.   For summaries of this phenomenon, see, for instance, Alice Bach, 'Introduction: Man's World, Women's Place: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', in Bach (ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. xiii-xxvi (xv); Alice Ogden Bellis, 'Feminist Biblical Scholarship', in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, pp. 24-32; Wacker, 'Foundations', pp. 37-43.

contain something positive for women, and the other to show that it is only negative in this regard. Trible's work provides an illuminating example of these trends: in her first book, Trible gives a close reading of the creation of humans in Gen. 1.27 in order to demonstrate that men and women were created equal.[54] Her second book, *Texts of Terror*,[55] however, is concerned with stories of victimized women: Hagar, David's daughter Tamar, the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, and Jephthah's daughter—women for whom we can feel sympathy, but whose stories show an overwhelmingly negative treatment of women. A more extreme application of this second method sees the biblical text as so irredeemably sexist that it cannot be accepted as authoritative; Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* and Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* are two examples of this approach, although the former is far more extreme than the latter. It should be noted that most feminist biblical scholars do not fall into this extreme category, but, like Trible, instead offer a mix of rejection and reform.[56] What all of these approaches have in common is a tendency to employ narrative, or new literary, criticism, reading the text as a narrative whole and seeking out its message for or about women.

Narrative criticism began to permeate biblical studies in the 1970s, around the same time that feminist biblical studies was emerging.[57] The two movements were parallel in that both were dissatisfied with the old theories and conclusions, and were grappling with some of the same questions about the text. Narrative criticism, which is a literary-critical rather than a historical-critical endeavor, focuses on literary elements like character and plot, and tends toward analysis of the final text as the reader has it.[58] More importantly, this approach focuses on the relationship between the text and the reader,

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54.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, pp. 1-23.

55.   Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT, 13; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

56.   In a related vein, feminists have also made forays into looking for female authorship of biblical texts; besides the well-known work of Harold Bloom, *The Book of J* (trans. David Rosenberg; New York: Vintage Books, 1990), see Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (BibInt, 1; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

57.   See, e.g., Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 253-55, especially the works (and dates) in the footnotes.

58.   John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2nd edn, 1996), p. 146; David M. Gunn, 'Narrative Criticism', in Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 171-95 (171); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 20.

rather than the text and its author.[59] A main tenet of most narrative criticism is that the author's intention cannot be ascertained.[60] The implication is that meaning in literature changes based on who is doing the reading, and therefore recovering the history of the text or its author is impossible.

Narrative (or 'new') criticism frequently seeks to rebuild what traditional criticism is seen as having broken apart, and thus it often involves a rejection of source criticism. David Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, for instance, argue that for ancient works like the Hebrew Bible, modern readers cannot accurately discern what sources and methods an author may have had available, and how such authors may have differentiated between history and fiction.[61] This argument points to a fundamental problem in the debate over method, one of definitions: is the Hebrew Bible history or literature? Robert Alter, who belongs firmly in the literary-critical camp, calls the Hebrew Bible 'historicized prose fiction',[62] a definition that illustrates the difficulty in categorizing its genre.[63] Literature may have a historical component, whether directly in the events related, or indirectly in attitudes or ideologies reflected in the text. It is this latter that is most problematic for narrative critics, who argue that it is impossible to reconstruct what an author was thinking. Such scholars choose to treat the entire text as purely literary, thus solving the problem of historical reconstruction and authorial intent. Historical-critical scholars, on the other hand, treat the Hebrew Bible, if not as history, then as something akin to history, something that is useful in historical reconstruction.

As this brief overview indicates, feminist biblical criticism falls largely into three categories of analysis, with a roughly corresponding chronological development: theological; historical; and literary. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the major contributions and trends in each of these areas, with a focus on Pentateuchal criticism specifically. I will, however, branch into other areas where scholars have made significant methodological contributions that bear on larger trends within the discipline.

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59. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 147.

60. This question of authorial intention is somewhat unfairly contrasted with historical-critical attempts at redaction criticism; see Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 170.

61. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 6.

62. Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, p. 24.

63. For a general overview and critique of New Criticism, see Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 14-79. For more on the problems of defining history in relation to biblical accounts, see also Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 1-7, 209-353; Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 3-32; Marc Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 8-19.

Feminist Theological Criticism

Trible applies the methodological principle she developed in 'Depatriar-chalizing in Biblical Interpretation' further in her 1978 book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Using rhetorical criticism, she determines that Gen. 1.27 uses synonymous parallelism to create a metaphor that includes both male and female in 'the image of God'.[64] Thus, according to Trible, men and women are equals in creation, and God is no more one than the other. Following this conclusion, Trible seeks other examples in the biblical text where descriptions of God include female imagery. A primary example is the use of the root רחם, including the noun רֶחֶם, 'womb',[65] which Trible takes as a feminine metaphor for the motherly love of God.

Turning from what she sees as an egalitarian depiction of creation in Genesis 1, Trible calls Genesis 2–3 a 'love story gone awry'.[66] According to Trible, the being (הָאָדָם) created in Genesis 2 is originally sexually undifferentiated. It is only with the quest for a mate and the creation of woman that sexual differentiation occurs and the terms אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה, 'man' and 'woman', appear. Trible also argues that being taken from something does not imply subordination to it—just as the first being is taken from earth but is not subordinate to it, neither is woman subordinate to man by virtue of being taken from him. That this creation is one of equality and complementarity is also indicated by the description of the woman in relation to the man as עזר כנגדו, 'a companion corresponding to him'. However, this initial equality is spoiled by the episode in Genesis 3, which ultimately ends in the woman's subordination to the man.

As compelling as Trible's vision of equality may be, though, her interpretation of Genesis 2–3 does not account for the etiological nature of the story.[67] The use of אִישׁ and אִשָּׁה after the creation of the woman is best explained as a wordplay appropriate only at this stage of the text, just as the word אדם is used earlier for the wordplay on אדמה, from which the man is made. The use of these terms is not a statement about a change in the essential nature of the beings they describe from one part of the story to the next. Furthermore, Trible's synchronic reading of Genesis 2–3 in light of Genesis 1 misses the very different contexts in which the respective authors wrote these texts. As my own discussion of these chapters will show, a source-critical analysis of this material achieves very different results.

64. Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 17.

65. Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 32. Cf. Mayer I. Gruber, *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (SFSHJ; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 3-15.

66. Trible, *Rhetoric*, pp. 80-119.

67. See, e.g., Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 80.

In other studies, Trible discusses individual figures, including Miriam, whose roles as prophet and leader she highlights.[68] While the quantity of material on Miriam is small, Trible is able to construct a fairly vivid picture of her. Trible also deals with some of the Bible's more troubling portrayals of women, including Hagar, whom she sees as a symbol of oppression.[69] Trible takes a generally negative view of Sarah for her treatment of Hagar. In pointing out the negative portrayals of female characters, and the ways in which texts may abuse women, Trible hopes to free women from those portrayals.

Trible's work was methodologically and theologically groundbreaking when it appeared. Many of the conclusions cited here have become part of the canon of feminist biblical interpretation, in particular those concerning Gen. 1.27.[70] Trible does an excellent job of overturning long-standing interpretations that have bolstered arguments about the inferior status of women in relation to men.[71] While the import of her work has been felt by historians and literary critics, and incorporated into the work of both, Trible herself is more concerned with theology than with history or with reconstructing the status of women in ancient Israel. She refers to the Bible as a pilgrim—its meaning does not change but rather is revealed differently in different times.[72] In this regard, her work made significant contributions toward developing a feminist biblical methodology that acknowledges shifting social and cultural paradigms. As a theologian, however, Trible is open to the charge of selectively accepting positive texts and rejecting negative ones, which exposes the inherent contradiction in arguing the historical timelessness of the text while simultaneously rejecting negative elements of the text as historically conditioned.[73]

Whereas Trible treats the elements 'image of God' and 'male and female' in Gen. 1.27 as an instance of synonymous parallelism, Phyllis Bird argues that the parallelism is progressive.[74] In other words, Bird sees the second element as adding a new component to the first, rather than elucidating or expanding it. The verse makes a statement about the humans (they are male and female), not about God (God is therefore not male and female). The idea

68.   Phyllis Trible, 'Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* (FCB, 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 166-86.

69.   Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 28.

70.   See, for instance, the treatment of the verse in Newsom and Ringe (eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary*, p. 16.

71.   See also her useful list of these presuppositions (Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 73).

72.   Phyllis Trible, 'Eve and Miriam: From the Margins to the Center', in Trible *et al.* (eds.), *Feminist Approaches*, pp. 5-24 (9).

73.   Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OTS; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), p. 17.

74.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 144-73.

that God shares this aspect of human biology is completely foreign to P, who maintains the separate and unique nature of God. P's creation reflects only the sexual dimorphism of humans (that is, the existence of two sexes), not the androgynous creation that Trible envisions. In making this argument, Bird reads Gen. 1.27 not only within the context of Gen. 1.26-28, but within the context of the whole P creation story, the aim of which is to show creation's order and reliance on God. The creation of male and female in P is therefore related to the command to be fruitful and multiply, which necessitates both male and female. Interpreting the verse as reflecting P's supposed concern with the equality (or the inequality) of the sexes goes beyond the bounds of the author's intent. However, whereas the P account is a 'cerebral' list of creative acts, J's creation story, according to Bird, contains an etiological narrative whose premise depends on the initial equality of the sexes.[75] Bird points out that the woman is not singled out for punishment in proportion to her role in the transgression: although the woman is dominant in the fruit-eating episode, all three (snake, woman, man) are punished equally. In this interpretation, Bird set the stage for much feminist criticism to come.[76]

Like Trible, Bird is a theologian, but she introduces a decidedly more historical focus into her work. While Trible is concerned with the changing possibilities for interpretation through the course of history, Bird recognizes the importance of the historically conditioned origins of the biblical text. Bird's approach thus stands in contrast to Trible's, in that Bird is interested in the author's intentions, insofar as they can be recovered. As a result, her conclusions regarding Genesis 1 do not always look particularly feminist: she is neither reclaiming nor rejecting the text for women. Neither does Bird expect the Bible to have a consistent view of women, and her approach takes into account the multiplicity of authors and the long history of development behind the biblical text. However, like many feminists to follow, Bird finds more evidence for women's active leadership and participation in the cult in the premonarchic period. This is a pitfall of many feminist reconstructions of early Israelite women's religion, which posit cultic roles for women for which there simply is no evidence.[77]

Perhaps one of Bird's most important conclusions, however, and one to which I will return, concerns the impact of centralization on women: with the advent of the monarchy and the increased centralization of both the government and the cult, women's status and role in the cultus in ancient Israel was increasingly diminished, despite a concurrent move (notably in D) to include women within the religious community. However, as Bird notes, the purpose here is not to be inclusive of women, but rather to strengthen the division

75.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 165-91.
76.   See in particular the work of Carol Meyers.
77.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 91-101.

between priest and laity.[78] These historical observations will reappear in the works of some of the historians to be discussed in the following pages; remarkably, such observations are seldom connected to issues of source and authorship.

Feminist Historians

It was not until the very late 1970s, and especially the early 1980s, that a feminist biblical historiography began to appear. Attempting any historical reconstruction with the Hebrew Bible is a difficult task, made more complicated when one is concerned with the history only of women. Most of the usable texts are not concerned with women's history.[79] Theological and literary interpreters have more latitude to question the texts and to fill in the gaps, but historians, while they must fill in some gaps as well, are constrained by the limits of historical methodology. In addition, feminist historians are often caught between the feminist rejection of objectivity and the historian's desire to chronicle some kind of historical reality.

Bird's work marked the beginning of a more historical examination of women in the Hebrew Bible, which in other scholars' works often became a reconstruction of the history of women in ancient Israel. Such reconstructions also made use of social-science methods and archaeological evidence. At the forefront of this type of research stands the work of Carol Meyers. Meyers explores women's performance and cultic/religious involvement, but her largest body of feminist work focuses on women in premonarchic Israel, corresponding to the Late Bronze and Iron I periods (c. 1550–1000 BCE). Using comparative evidence concerning women in subsistence economies and sociological models for Israelite society in this period, Meyers argues that conditions in early Iron Age Palestine were such that women would have been necessary contributors to the subsistence economy of the family.[80] Drawing on the evidence of the archaeological record, she also notes the less-centralized character of social structures in this period, and the commensurate emphasis on local family structures. Such a focus on family life emphasizes women's roles and thus results in higher social status for women, drawing as near to gender equality as is generally possible in subsistence-based societies.[81] However, the Bible, according to Meyers, imposes a 'myth' of inequality over this underlying reality of near equality.

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78.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 102.

79.   Carole R. Fontaine, 'A Heifer from Thy Stable: On Goddesses and the Status of Women in the Ancient Near East', in Bach (ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 159-78 (159).

80.   Carol Meyers, 'Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male–Female Balance in Early Israel', *JAAR* 51 (1983), pp. 569-93 (580); Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 56.

81.   Meyers, 'Procreation', pp. 575-76.

Meyers follows Bird's interpretation of the Genesis 1 account of creation with little comment, but she offers a more detailed discussion of Genesis 2–3. According to Meyers, Adam and Eve are archetypes rather than prototypes. They are not the first historical humans, but instead symbolize all humans, meaning that their story is symbolic as well. In this vein, Meyers interprets the punishment of the woman in Gen. 3.16 in terms of the situation she has reconstructed for early Israel: in order to increase the population of the struggling Israelite communities, women needed to bear more children, in addition to their other subsistence-related work. The punishment is thus an etiology meant to describe life in ancient Israel, and is not intended as a historical precedent for all women who follow.[82]

There are several problems with Meyers's conclusions, however. First, they are based on theoretical constructions of the division of labor in subsistence economies, which may or may not have applied to ancient Israel.[83] Second, the only biblical support that she adduces for her argument for near equality comes from the redemption values given in Leviticus 27, a text that most likely postdates Iron I by well over half a millennium. Meyers offers arguments for why she thinks Leviticus 27 may be early,[84] but these arguments only permit an early date; they do not require it.

Meyers's argument about the allegorical nature of Genesis 3 is more convincing, if for no other reason than the fact that it does describe human life in the ancient world (so far as we know) fairly accurately: it was a difficult life in which daily toil and the dangers of childbirth were constants. But Meyers's conclusions are also based on a hypothetical reluctance of women to have sex given the high mortality rate of women in childbirth, and women's necessary subordination to men's sexual urges in this regard in order to ensure a high birth rate, ideas not evidenced in the text. The risk of dying during childbirth, for example, is not enough to deter most women from trying to have children. Meyers has already argued that having more children was in the best interest of the family, since children could help with the work, and because of the high infant mortality rate, women would have needed to have more babies. It is more likely that the end of the Gen. 3.16 refers to the fact that women were under men's control generally, not only in terms of sexual urges.[85] Even in Meyers's nearly equal subsistence world, men predominate, and as she points

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82. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 79-80, 94-121.

83. Cf. the criticism of Esther Fuchs, 'The History of Women in Ancient Israel: Theory, Method, and the Book of Ruth', in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (eds.), *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (GPBS, 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), pp. 211-31 (219).

84. Meyers, 'Procreation', p. 584.

85. The root משל elsewhere refers to ruling in general, not to sexual interactions; see *HALOT* II, p. 647.

out, even when women achieve relatively high social status, there is still the myth of male domination laid over the social structure.

Although Meyers is more than willing to use the evidence of Genesis 2–3, she dismisses the patriarchal narratives as purely literary constructions with no historical or sociological value. This seems to be an arbitrary distinction on her part, particularly in light of the fact that elsewhere she uses material from the book of Judges in historical fashion.[86] Nevertheless, she notes the active roles often played by women in the ancestral narratives and concludes that, at least for the premonarchic period, women enjoyed a powerful place in Israelite society. Like Bird, Meyers argues that things change with the rise of the monarchy and the increased centralization of Israelite society throughout the first half of the first millennium BCE, resulting in a loss of power for women.

Another problem with some of Meyers's work is her assumption that the female figurines found at many archaeological sites denote the prevalence of goddess worship, accompanied by a greater role in the family-oriented religious cult and higher overall status for women.[87] This claim has come under attack by other scholars.[88] Additionally, there are almost no texts in the Hebrew Bible that any scholar would reasonably argue were physically written (as opposed to existing as oral traditions) before the tenth century BCE.[89] Although Meyers never makes this assertion, she argues that some texts reflect traditions from the late second millennium, at the same time that she admits that they bear the stamp of their later author. Meyers's assumption that, for instance, Genesis 2–3 reflects an early period of Israelite tradition is therefore problematic, particularly in light of the recent developments in source criticism mentioned in the Introduction.

This leads to the last point, which is that many of the problems that Meyers posits for the Late Bronze and Iron I Israelite populations are problems that could easily be argued for later periods, in particular for the exilic or post-exilic periods, when the Israelites once again found themselves in crisis. In

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86. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 158-59.

87. Meyers, 'Roots of Restriction', p. 93.

88. See, for example, Shmuel Ahituv, 'Did God Really Have a Wife?', *BARev* 32/5 (2006), pp. 62-66; Ryan Byrne, 'Lie Back and Think of Judah: The Reproductive Politics of Pillar Figurines', *NEA* 67 (2004), pp. 137-51.

89. One possible exception is the song of Deborah in Judges 5, which could date to the late second millennium. See Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (OTR; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 62-65, who voices certain reservations but generally admits the antiquity of the tradition; Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (WCom; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), p. 159; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (BerOl; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 85; J. David Schloen, 'Caravans, Kenites, and *Casus belli*: Enmity and Alliance in the Song of Deborah', *CBQ* 55 (1993), pp. 18-38.

particular, the need for population increase and for reestablishing a community would have been very strong during the exile and after the return.[90] Thus, while Meyers's conclusions still largely hold true, in that women's contributions to daily life were critical in certain periods, and perhaps even that woman's status was commensurately increased as a result, it is not clear that this state of affairs must have obtained (only) in the premonarchic period.

Susan Niditch follows closely on Meyers's heels in advocating the use of sociological analysis for the study of women in ancient Israel. Much of Niditch's work focuses on oral traditions and folklore, where comparative models offer strong evidence for types of characters, themes, and narratives.[91] In the context of a larger study of folklore, she discusses the wife-sister stories (in Gen. 12, 20, and 26) and concludes that each was written by a different author. While normally the versions in Genesis 12 and 26 are assigned to J and that in Genesis 20 to E, based on her studies of oral and folkloristic structures, Niditch does not believe that any two of the three stories can be by the same author.

Niditch largely rejects the Documentary Hypothesis as incompatible with her ideas about orality,[92] but notes that she nonetheless agrees that the Hebrew Bible is the product of many authors working over many time-periods. She points out that while a narrative may not be historical itself, it may betray certain attitudes that help pinpoint its date and author. She even goes so far as to pose a question central to this dissertation, about different authors varying in their treatment of women, although she couches it in a slightly different presentation of the term *source*. However, Niditch seems only to present this as a methodological question, and does not follow through on tracing or comparing these different attitudes. Overall, Niditch views biblical laws as negative toward women and narrative as positive. She looks at the various types or roles of women: matriarch, warrior, and wise woman, among others. Niditch also distinguishes between roles in the private realm (mothers) and public realm (warriors, wise women, queens), as well as depictions of women as victims.

90. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 72-96, 247-57. On the postexilic, see Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, 'Demography and Diatribes: Yehud's Population and the Prophecy of Second Zechariah', in Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager (eds.), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 278-83.

91. Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (SIH, 6; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (GBS; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

92. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), p. 111.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, whose early work was in the field of Assyriology, uses comparative Mesopotamian evidence to great effect in her analysis of the Hebrew Bible. Frymer-Kensky devoted particular attention to the study of goddesses and how goddess religion affected Israelite religion.[93] She concludes that the Bible was the product of a sort of post-goddess gap that left early Judaism (and Christianity) open to the misogynist influences of Greek and Hellenistic culture. But the Hebrew Bible itself, Frymer-Kensky argues, is not sexist—it is, rather, sex*less*, in that the loss of goddess worship created an inability to adequately deal with sexual characteristics. Israelite religion, in moving to worship YHWH exclusively, was left with aspects of goddess worship that could not entirely be incorporated into the image of the male deity. In particular, YHWH became solely responsible for fertility, a responsibility that had been divided among a number of deities in the surrounding polytheistic ancient Near Eastern pantheons.

This change resulted in a biblical view of YHWH's power over fertility in which fertility was a natural property of the earth, requiring only rain from YHWH for growth. This is the view found, for example, in Genesis 1, and it carries with it the message that humans have no direct, active role in fertility or the perpetuation of life. However, human behavior is still essential for maintaining the natural world. In other ancient Near Eastern religions, Frymer-Kensky says, gods are the mediators between nature and humans, whereas in biblical thought, people mediate between God and nature. Human behavior, not just in ritual and prayer, but in numerous other areas, influences God's behavior toward nature and ensures or denies the continuation of natural forces. Frymer-Kensky observes that such a 'theology of reactivity' results in Israel assuming the guilt for failures in mediation between YHWH and nature. Such an idea is overtly evidenced in P, particularly in the legislation, although it is questionable whether such a statement can be so broadly applied to biblical theology.

Furthermore, Frymer-Kensky argues, without the goddesses ('in their wake'), biblical theology did not offer its audience a comprehensive theological system, and thus was unable to resist certain changes when it came in contact with Greek religion. While this may be true of biblical religion, that is, religion based on biblical interpretation once the canon was closed, it is dangerous to assume that this was true of Israelite religion on the whole in the biblical period, especially because that religion changed over the course of the centuries during which there was an Israel to speak of and during which the Bible was composed. Ancient Israelites may well have believed different things about goddesses at different times. Indeed, it is clear from much biblical evidence that there was goddess worship going on throughout the

93. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*.

pre-exilic period, as evidenced by the frequent polemics against it in the books of Kings. In the end, Frymer-Kensky could have been more careful in differentiating between the different periods of composition of the Bible; her 'biblical monotheism' is situated largely in later texts, particularly ones with a priestly stamp.

Similarly, Frymer-Kensky does not note the impact that historical events like the exile might have had on the theological developments she posits, noting only that the exile might have exacerbated problems resulting from the theological shortcomings of the shift to monotheism. Although she adduces much evidence that stems from later texts, Frymer-Kensky never explicitly discusses the dating of the texts or the development of Israelite monotheism over the years. The chronological separation between strong goddess worship in Israel and the move to real monotheism could be large, and thus it is not always clear whether her evidence is directly linked to compensation for goddess worship or to other circumstances. For instance, is the shift toward seeing humans as mediators between YHWH and nature a natural result of the move away from the closeness and direct involvement of a polytheistic pantheon, or can it be ascribed to the stress of a catastrophe like the exile on a people who are already largely monotheistic? Or is it perhaps a balance of the two? Showing something more of a diachronic development would have enhanced Frymer-Kensky's observations, which are otherwise often quite compelling.

As for the biblical portrait of women, Frymer-Kensky argues that women in general are depicted even-handedly and in much the same way that men are, a development that she sees as radical within an ancient context.[94] Genesis 3, for example, notes the subordination of women to men, but does not blame it on women's inferior nature in relation to men.[95] Biblical women want the same things—marriage, children, land—that biblical men want. There is no 'battle between the sexes' and no 'female rage', nor do women use seduction in order to further their goals for power; rather, women use seduction only as a means to obtain sex. Women are associated with the private realm and men with the public. When in public, women act as men in public do, just as men in private act as women in private do. Here, however, Frymer-Kensky begs the question of why those are the powers of those worlds, and why one world is dominated by men and the other by women. Another flaw in her argumentation is that she discusses 'mother goddesses', 'goddesses', and 'fertility goddesses' interchangeably, without defining what she means. Is a mother goddess any goddess who has children? If so, Ishtar

94. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, p. 121. Frymer-Kensky is also careful to note that the biblical portrait of women is not the same as the actual situation for women in ancient Israel (p. 119).

95. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, pp. 122-23.

should be excluded (she is not). Do they have to create humans? If so, Enki should be included (he is not). A more careful discussion and definition of terms is necessary for this type of argument, especially inasmuch as many of the observations Frymer-Kensky makes are so valuable.

Frymer-Kensky has also treated women in the Hebrew Bible more generally, discussing female characters according to type: victors, victims, virgins, and 'voice' (the latter referring to women as oracles of God).[96] Here, Frymer-Kensky makes the observation that women have more power and prominence under less-centralized circumstances. As we are seeing, feminist historians frequently mention this fact and yet never put it in a source-critical context; conversely, no source critics ever mention it. And yet, it could be very helpful information in terms of dating, if it could be demonstrated that certain sources have a more negative or restrictive attitude toward women, one that presupposes or is influenced by either political or cultic centralization.

In response to Frymer-Kensky's treatment of goddess worship as something of an ideal, the absence of which left a hole in the spiritual life of ancient Israel, Jo Ann Hackett has offered a strong counterpoint.[97] Hackett notes that feminists have reclaimed so-called fertility cults and fertility goddesses, partly in connection with the rise of neopaganism. But in reality, both are the mostly fictional creations of male scholars, and are primarily an attempt to deal with 'scary' feminine aspects of cult and deity by pigeonholing. Hackett notes the tendency of many studies, even those by women, to treat women primarily in relation to their roles in bearing and raising children.[98] This tendency is reflected in treatments of goddesses within biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies, where the focus is likewise on the goddesses' roles in fertility and fecundity, rather than other aspects of their powers.

However, as Hackett goes on to point out, there is almost no evidence for this type of fertility cult.[99] The modern, scholarly construct of fertility goddesses is typified in the work of William Foxwell Albright, one of the founders of the American school of biblical studies in the early twentieth century. According to Hackett, Albright calls goddesses who conceive but never give birth 'perennially fruitful without ever losing their virginity'.[100] But, as Hackett astutely points out, a goddess who conceives but does not give birth is neither a virgin nor fruitful, and thus the appellation mother-goddess makes no sense in this context. Hackett also points out that in the

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96.   Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002).

97.   Hackett, 'Sexist Model', pp. 65-76. Cf. also Fontaine, 'A Heifer from thy Stable', pp. 159-78.

98.   Hackett, 'Sexist Model', pp. 66-67.

99.   Hackett, 'Sexist Model', p. 68.

100.   Hackett, 'Sexist Model', p. 72.

Canaanite pantheon, such constructs concerning fertility easily break down. Most strikingly, these alleged fertility features are not restricted only to goddesses but may be characteristics of male gods as well.

As with this discussion of the reconstruction of goddess worship, Hackett's feminist work has tended to focus on the history of women in ancient Israel. Like many other historians, she observes that texts considered by most scholars to be early reflect a higher status for women, as compared to later texts where women's status often declines and their roles are more restricted. Hackett also notes the correlation between centralization (in both a general and a specific sense) and women's status.[101] Conversely, in times of crisis, centralized institutions may break down or become temporarily disabled, allowing women's status to increase as they take on roles that might be restricted to men otherwise. The question arises, however, as to when this situation obtained in ancient Israel, and what degree of centralization might have been enough to affect women's status. In contrast to Frymer-Kensky, who saw the period of the judges as one in which increased centralization caused women's status to decline, Hackett sees the period before the establishment of the monarchy as a turbulent time of social upheaval when 'ad hoc leaders', including women, could rise to power.[102]

Hackett further suggests that the stories from the book of Judges, in which women are so prominent, may well stem from original women's traditions. If this is the case in Judges, then we might wonder if the same is true of books like Genesis where women are also central characters. While it is problematic to argue that Judges, alone of the books of the fairly late DtrH composition, preserves original women's traditions, the fact remains that Genesis and Judges, books that deal with the prehistory of the people of Israel and with the prehistory of the nation of Israel, respectively, feature women so prominently. An early date is not required for these traditions, but rather only a perception that such stories are realistically situated in those respective periods, thereby rendering them believable. Furthermore, the exile should be considered as a possibility for the 'period of severe dysfunction' to which Hackett appeals as the matrix for these traditions; no feminist has seriously considered the idea that the traditions in either the Pentateuch or Judges originated in the exile, or experienced a period of renewed popularity and were subsequently included in the text in this period. If feminists are to

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101. Jo Ann Hackett, 'In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel', in Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (eds.), *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (HWSR; Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 15-38 (17).

102. Hackett, 'In the Days of Jael', p. 26. See also Hackett, 'Women's Studies and the Hebrew Bible', in Friedman and Williamson (eds.), *Future of Biblical Studies*, pp. 141-64 (150-51).

remain current in biblical scholarship, this option deserves consideration, even if it is ultimately rejected.

Like Hackett and Meyers, Susan Ackerman also uses historical and social-scientific models, although she is more interested in the history of religion than in reconstruction of women's daily lives and social roles.[103] Ackerman's work covers women's religion in the sixth century BCE as well as the role of the queen mother in the Israelite monarchy. She has also examined the annunciation type-scene, a collection of narratives that may reveal much about attitudes toward women because of the role women have in them. For example, these scenes indicate that a formerly barren woman's ability to conceive was perceived as an act of YHWH. However, although she acknowledges the existence of separate sources in this material, for example in Genesis 17 and 18, Ackerman does not inquire into the potential significance of this fact.[104]

Ackerman argues that times of political instability result in heightened status for women, but unlike other scholars who make similar observations, she notes the impact of the Babylonian exile and its implications for women's status, evidenced in particular by the rise of female prophets like Noadiah.[105] Ackerman also observes that the story of the exodus, although historically questionable, nonetheless relates to a period during which Israel was in a liminal state, with no centralized institutions to speak of. In this period a female prophet, Miriam, appears in the biblical tradition as well. Ackerman concludes that in periods of social liminality (and even in fictive accounts of such periods), gender roles become increasingly fluid, with the result that women may assume leadership positions usually denied them. The liminality of the exodus ends at Sinai with the law and covenant; notably, the episode in which Miriam is punished for challenging Moses' leadership (Num. 12) comes very soon after the Israelites leave Sinai. Although Ackerman does not make the specific connection, the increase in centralized power that results from the laws and covenant at Sinai could mark the beginning of the decrease in women's status. Ackerman brings together her observations regarding increased centralization (or perhaps better, increased stability and decreased

103.   Susan Ackerman, '"And the Women Knead Dough": The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah', in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 109-24; Ackerman, 'The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 112 (1993), pp. 385-401; Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998); Ackerman, 'Why Is Miriam Also among the Prophets? (And Is Zipporah among the Priests?)', *JBL* 121 (2002), pp. 47-80; Ackerman, 'Digging Up Deborah: Recent Hebrew Bible Scholarship on Gender and the Contribution of Archaeology', *NEA* 66 (2003), pp. 172-84.
104.   Ackerman, *Warrior*, p. 187.
105.   Ackerman, 'Is Miriam Also among the Prophets', pp. 47-80.

liminality) and her work on women's religion in a discussion of Josiah's reform. Because women's religion revolved around Asherah in particular, Ackerman sees the Josianic reforms as the proverbial nail in the coffin of Israelite women's active participation in the cultus.

In addition to reconstructing specific elements in the history of Israelite religion, especially women's religion, Ackerman has made more broadly methodological contributions to feminist biblical study as well. While she admits the difficulty of relying on the biblical text for historical accuracy, she notes that this does not mean that the text has no value for historical endeavors. Rather, the texts reflect something of the reality of their authors and audiences and thus provide insight into the social structures of the times in which they were written. Indeed, feminists have paid considerable attention to those authors' androcentrism and patriarchal bias, yet such an approach has hardly been applied to a discussion of the Pentateuchal sources, and to their larger ideologies.

Like Meyers, Hackett, and Ackerman, Naomi Steinberg also discusses the impact of centralization on women's status. Steinberg undertakes a socio-political analysis of the effect of the monarchy on family structures in Israel, and the impact this had on other institutions, including legal systems like those evidenced in Deuteronomy. Whereas some see the Deuteronomic laws as protecting women's rights in many situations,[106] Steinberg argues the opposite. She observes that Deuteronomic law moves the locus of legal activity away from the family toward the centralized monarchy. Whereas the premonarchic Covenant Collection granted more authority to the father (*paterfamilias*) and protected the extended family, Deuteronomy gives more authority to the elders, who enforce monarchic law.[107] The laws that ostensibly protect women's rights, like the levirate, are really protecting the nuclear family, at the expense of extended-family and community structures and at the expense of the individual. Furthermore, some of the sex and rape laws

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106.   See, e.g., Pressler, *Deuteronomic Family Law*, pp. 95-114; Eckart Otto, 'False Weights in the Scales of Biblical Justice? Different Views of Women from Patriarchal Hierarchy to Religious Equality in the Book of Deuteronomy', in Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (eds.), *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup, 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 128-46. Pressler specifically argues against those who see Deuteronomy as promoting the equality of men and women, asserting that the family in Deuteronomy is still hierarchically structured and only protects women's interests in certain cases. Her argument focuses instead on the fact that the Deuteronomic law is protecting the family, and this is the specific point that Steinberg addresses.

107.   Naomi Steinberg, 'The Deuteronomic Law Code and the Politics of State Centralization', in David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman Gottwald on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 161-70 (165-69).

disadvantage women, indicating that women's interests are not as important in Deuteronomy as some maintain.

The political beginnings of this shift, Steinberg says, appear in Solomon's creation of fiscal districts, based on tribal territories, in an attempt to strengthen the monarchy. Shifting focus from local (tribal) authority to the monarchy decreased the power of the larger kinship units like the clan and the extended family, which could threaten the monarchy or, if they grew large enough, could potentially overthrow it. The monarchy thus had a vested interest in emphasizing the importance of the smaller nuclear family unit, a unit that was much less likely to pose a direct political threat. Such a move meant that while the monarchy (and its cultic/legal arm centered in the temple) might appear to be safeguarding the rights of women within individual families, they were more interested in minimizing the power of the *pater-familias*. Rather than promoting certain rights for women, Deuteronomy was simply shifting authority over women as well as men from the family to the central government, a move intended to strengthen monarchic control.[108] As other feminists argue concerning centralization, here too women's rights decrease with an increase in centralized power.

Steinberg argues that an accurate assessment of ancient Israelite society requires the study of both men and women and how they interact within their larger social system. In this vein, she uses social anthropology and household economics to examine kinship, inheritance, and marriage structures in Genesis. Because she is looking at both male and female social roles, Steinberg argues that this is not a specifically feminist study, although it certainly has implications for feminist study of the Bible. Steinberg's primary conclusion concerning the stories in Genesis is that they are concerned with tracing the proper (or approved) lineage of Israelites. More specifically, the stories in Genesis 11–50 are concerned with the right lineage not only for the father, but also for the mother: both must be in the lineage of Terah. Because Steinberg believes that the focus on correct lineage is essential to the narrative, she disagrees with scholars like Martin Noth, who argues that the genealogies were secondary and unrelated to the narrative. Rather, she says, the genealogical lists are integral to the narrative. Although she does not discuss literary sources, Steinberg posits a final postexilic redaction of Genesis that was concerned with establishing that only the group in exile, the descendants of Terah, are the true Israel.[109]

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108. Steinberg, 'The Deuteronomic Law Code', p. 169. See also Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 138-43; Moshe Weinfeld, 'Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry', *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 249-62 (256-62).

109. Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 146-47.

   Steinberg's study raises the question, which she does not fully address, of why all the material concerning people who are not of the correct lineage should be preserved in the narrative. She does note that the story of Ishmael, for instance, could be included because, according to kinship theory, Ishmael would be a proper heir until someone with the correct mother was born. Steinberg notes that according to this theory, the reason for Ishmael's exclusion is that Isaac is the proper heir, not that Ishmael marries an Egyptian rather than a Terahite woman. However, both of these reasons for Ishmael's not inheriting are given in the text, and Steinberg's explanation that these are internal versus external perspectives is not satisfactory. Steinberg's argument that the shift to centralization begins with Solomon is also problematic. Many scholars doubt the historicity not only of this conversion of tribal territories to fiscal ones, but of most of the details of Solomon's reign.[110] However, even if Steinberg is wrong in tracing the development of centralization back to the early period of the monarchy, she is nevertheless correct in seeing the centralizing trend in ancient Israel, in the rise of both the monarchy and the Jerusalem temple, and in noting its effects on women.

   Hennie Marsman's study of the status of women in ancient Israel, Ugarit, and, to a lesser extent, Mesopotamia and Egypt, began as a response to allegations that women's status would be better in polytheistic cultures that worshipped goddesses.[111] Marsman assumes in her work that Israelites primarily worshipped YHWH, with Asherah playing a minor and diminishing role at times and the religion generally moving toward monolatry and ultimately monotheism in the exilic period. This shift is well supported by scholarly opinion,[112] although Marsman may understate the prevalence of Asherah-worship in the pre-exilic period.[113] Whether the dates Marsman proposes need to be shifted by a few decades, perhaps into the postexilic period, is less critical. The important point is in recognizing that monotheism is not an early movement in Israelite religion. The biblical record, especially DtrH, indicates that worship of deities beside YHWH was widespread before

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   110.   See Paul S. Ash, 'Solomon's? District? List', *JSOT* 67 (1995), pp. 67-86; J. Maxwell Miller, 'Separating the Solomon of History from the Solomon of Legend', in Lowell K. Handy (ed.), *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium* (SHCANE; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 1-24; J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 205-7.
   111.   Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*.
   112.   See Robert K. Gnuse, 'The Emergence of Monotheism in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Recent Scholarship', *Religion* 29 (1999), pp. 315-36, although cf. Stephen L. Cook, *The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism* (SBLStBL; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).
   113.   That Asherah worship was commonplace before the exile is amply attested in the diatribes against it; see, e.g., Deut. 7.5; 12.3; 16.21; Judg. 3.7; 1 Kgs 15.13; 18.19; 2 Kgs 21.7; 23.4.

the exile, and that Asherah was among the deities worshipped. The fact that there was any worship of a goddess in Israel would also seem to weaken Marsman's comparison between Israel and Ugarit.

Marsman then compares various social and religious structures to see how they relate to and affect women. She argues that the extended family and clan structures (the בית אב and the מִשְׁפָּחָה) survived in the monarchic period, but that their influence in this period lessened owing to economic and political factors. This decrease in local familial autonomy influenced the role of women in the family. The situation became particularly acute in the exilic and postexilic periods, when the rise of the nuclear family unit caused further restrictions on women's roles, especially as the division of public from private became more entrenched. Like Steinberg, Marsman sees this shift as limiting for women, although she is cautious not to conclude too much based on minimal evidence.

As concerns sexuality and marriage, Marsman argues that young women in ancient Israel were not treated as property, as has been argued elsewhere.[114] The laws governing penalties for the sexual violation of a woman belong to family rather than property law. Marsman bases this conclusion on the differences in the penalties for sexual violation of a female slave versus a free woman. However, Marsman's conclusion here is problematic for two reasons. First, although other ancient Near Eastern laws do mention penalties for the sexual violation of slave women, the Bible has nothing to say on this particular topic. Second, it is not clear that the payment of dowries or brideprices excludes the commoditization of a woman's sexuality.[115] Differences in payment could simply indicate that certain women were considered to be more valuable commodities, with certain social niceties attached to their betrothals and marriages.

Marsman's study is diachronic in the sense that it looks at non-biblical sources from a range of time periods, although it does not often make much of the chronological differences and developments. As concerns the Bible, though, Marsman treats the texts largely synchronically, despite offering an occasional nod to differences in the dating of texts as an explanation for differences in their attitudes toward women. She mentions different sources on one occasion as well, noting that in J women often name children whereas in P men more commonly perform this task.[116] While Marsman notes the P preoccupation with male lineage as a likely explanation, she also posits a possible shift from the mother to the father as the one responsible for naming,

114.   See Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

115.   Wegner, *Chattel or Person*, pp. 38-39.

116.   Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, pp. 236-37. This is an understatement on Marsman's part; in P, *only* men name children.

perhaps having to do with legitimation of the child as heir. However, in the end Marsman concludes simply that both parents could name children.

Rather confusingly, given that she has noted differences in both social and religious status that denote a worse situation for women in Israel than in Ugarit—for instance in a sometimes negative view of female sexuality and in the fact that a man in some senses owned his wife—Marsman concludes that women in Israel had roughly the same social status as women in Ugarit, but that their religious status was lower, especially as the Yahwistic cult became more firmly monotheistic. Marsman also cautions that the types of literary evidence generally available pertain mostly to women of the upper social strata, which makes their general application somewhat questionable. Nonetheless, her work is quite useful, not least because her comparative approach offers something to measure the biblical account against, within a similar cultural context. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Ugaritic material does not involve the same sorts of chronological issues that the biblical material does.

As should be evident from the preceding discussion, most feminist historians employ social-scientific models rather than using historical-critical tools in their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and reconstructions of life in ancient Israel.[117] Frank Frick, a leading proponent of social-scientific analysis, notes that sociological criticism, especially the idea of 'social location', has been used in particular by feminists and liberation theologians (whose work is also often combined). Frick maintains that the combination of social location with sociological study is a useful tool for combining various perspectives,[118] and thus its utility for feminists seeking to work within a historical context is unsurprising. Notably, certain source critics have also begun to integrate social-scientific methods into their work, taking the social locations of their posited authors and editors into account.[119] Social-scientific approaches, then, may provide a common ground on which source critics and feminist critics could meet—namely, the acknowledgement that if source analysis is going to account for the authors' social (as well as religious and historical) setting, then the social situation of women needs to be accounted for as well.

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117. Norman Gottwald was among the first to advocate the use of social-scientific methods in biblical criticism; see Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

118. Frank S. Frick, 'Sociological Criticism and Its Relation to Political and Social Hermeneutics: With a Special Look at Biblical Hermeneutics in South African Liberation Theology', in Jobling, Day, and Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, pp. 225-38 (229).

119. See in particular Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*.

Feminist Literary Critics

Looking back at the progress of feminist biblical criticism since the early works of Trible and Bird, Susan Ackerman observes that feminists have more often followed in Trible's footsteps, offering literary readings of texts, rather than taking Bird's historical approach.[120] In part, the trend Ackerman notes arises from the links between general feminist studies and literary studies, especially in the formative period of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. But in part it is also a response to the difficulty of finding reliable historical evidence about women in ancient Israel. This has led many feminists to abandon all attempts to reconstruct the history of women in ancient Israel, choosing instead to focus on literary approaches to the text. Literary approaches, in this context, include narrative criticism, as well as postmodernist approaches like deconstructionism and reader-response criticism.[121] While all biblical interpretation is literary at some level, as it involves the reading of narrative texts, the issue is the extent to which other methods are employed. Feminist literary readings tend to exclude historical methods or context, although this is not unilaterally the case.

Mary Callaway begins her study of the literary motif of the barren woman by offering some comparative evidence.[122] She notes that in the Bible, childlessness is always the result of a barren woman, not an infertile man, unlike examples from Mesopotamian and Ugaritic texts. Barrenness in biblical narratives is not a curse or a punishment, and with the exception of Isaac, the woman is the one who acts to change the situation. YHWH then intercedes and the woman gives birth to an important male character. Callaway does offer some discussion of sources; she notes the priestly editing of the motif in Genesis 17, arguing that this chapter knows the Yahwistic tradition found in Genesis 18.[123] She concludes that barrenness is a Yahwistic element, added to show YHWH's role in Israelite history, although she does not use this as an opportunity to discuss the Yahwist's attitude toward women or larger issues of women's status; she also takes a fairly traditional view of the Yahwist as an author and source.

Rita Burns's study of Miriam is in many ways similar; she is looking not for a historical figure but rather for the author's conception of Miriam.[124] She notes that Miriam never engages in typical prophetic behavior and suggests that calling Miriam a prophetess in Exod. 15.20 is anachronistic, possibly an

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120.   Ackerman, 'Digging Up Deborah', p. 172.

121.   See Gunn, 'Narrative Criticism', pp. 171-78.

122.   Mary Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash* (SBLDS, 91; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

123.   Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One*, p. 20.

124.   Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (SBLDS, 84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

element added by the Elohist, who is concerned with prophets. Burns also concludes that all the references to Aaron where Miriam is present are later P additions, added to validate Miriam's cultic role. Her relationship to Aaron, reflected in Exod. 15.20 and Num. 12.1-15, indicates her alliance with the priesthood rather than the prophets, represented by Moses. The tradition of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam being siblings is also late, according to Burns. Miriam is an exception to the general biblical pattern of women appearing as daughters, wives, or mothers and Burns concludes that Miriam must have had significance of her own fairly early on. She may also have been linked with the town of Kadesh, where her tomb was located according to tradition, and which was later an important wilderness city.[125] While Burns discusses layers of tradition, she does not address the historical concerns related to the accretion of traditions or what deeper attitudes toward women the changes may betray.

Much attention has also been devoted by feminists to discussion of the matriarchs in Genesis. This is common among historical critics, especially those who employ social-scientific models centered on family dynamics, but attention to the matriarchs is even more common among literary critics, as the narratives are rich with fodder. Some feminists isolate a matriarchal cycle in Genesis parallel to (and ultimately included in) the patriarchal cycle.[126] Often, these scholars hedge their arguments when discussing the formation of the text, where the stories came from and how independent they originally were, so that it appears at times that they are only speaking of a matriarchal cycle that they have isolated as a theme in the final text, rather than an originally independent but fairly fixed cycle of traditions.

Beginning on a smaller scale, rather than a cycle including all the matri-archs, Lieve Teugels focuses on the character of Rebekah. She examines characterization in Genesis 24 and argues that while Isaac is a weak character about whom little material survives, Rebekah is a very strong, stable character. According to Teugels, Rebekah is a 'divinely sent helper';[127] however, it is not clear that such a character exists in the Hebrew Bible, besides perhaps the messenger/angel (מלאך), a title never used of Rebekah. (The title of עזר attached to Eve in Genesis 2 is no exception. This term is usually used of God and, in its application to Eve, it is not clear that 'helper' is an appropriate translation;[128] nor is this term ever applied to Rebekah.) Teugels also argues

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125.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 120; however, cf. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 182-83.

126.   Lieve Teugels, 'A Matriarchal Cycle? The Portrayal of Isaac in Genesis in Light of the Presentation of Rebekah', *Bijdragen* 56 (1995), pp. 61-72; Ina Willi-Plein, 'Genesis 27 als Rebekkageschichte: Zu einem historiographischen Kunstgriff der biblischen Vätergeschichten', *TZ* 45 (1989), p. 315-34.

127.   Teugels, 'A Matriarchal Cycle', p. 70.

128.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 90, opts for 'companion' instead.

that Rebekah's conception of Jacob and Esau, after having been barren, demonstrates her narrative importance, although this could be said of most major female figures in Genesis, and so is not really particular to Rebekah.

Teugels concludes that there is a separate Isaac–Rebekah cycle, independent of the Isaac cycle, that has survived more completely than the Isaac cycle.[129] While she is particularly drawn to Rebekah as the matriarch who appears in vivid narrative tones while Isaac is depicted much more mutedly, Teugels is selective in her reading. As noted above, certain claims that she makes concerning Rebekah could be made of any of the matriarchs. Teugels also ignores Genesis 26, where Rebekah is endangered and seems to have bad fortune as well. Ultimately, there is no way to prove that there was originally a Rebekah or Rebekah–Isaac cycle, especially as Rebekah is never mentioned outside of Genesis, unlike Sarah, Leah, and Rachel.

Ina Willi-Plein also argues that a matriarchal history has been added to the patriarchal history, although she sees it as a unifying element, bringing the older oral stories found in J and E together.[130] By mediating between individual characters and plot elements, the matriarchs act as a 'plot device' (*Kunstgriff*) that enables the individual elements of the patriarchal history to be turned into a cohesive family history. Willi-Plein bases her conclusions on Rebekah only, but then speaks about matriarchal history as though it includes the others, without ever mentioning them specifically.

The discussion thus far has included a few examples of fairly traditional literary analysis pertaining to women in the Pentateuch, mostly involving close readings of narrative style, plot, and characterization. To some extent, this kind of literary criticism can be freely blended with historical observations, in a similar fashion to the works of Bird and others treated above. This trend has changed in the past two decades, though, spurred in large part by the work of J. Cheryl Exum and Athalya Brenner. The result is a major increase in the use of new literary criticism and postmodern approaches to the study of women in the Bible. The rejection by both literary critics and feminist critics of the concept of objectivity has made the methods well-suited to each other. According to this approach, recovering any historical content is impossible because the author is inaccessible. Each reader brings his or her own experience to the text, and those experiences color the reading of the text. In particular, female readers may relate to female characters, who are frequently a low priority in the text and have likewise been a low priority in

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129. Teugels, 'A Matriarchal Cycle', p. 70. It is worth pointing out here that an 'Isaac–Rebekah' cycle is not in fact a matriarchal cycle, as it includes both the matriarch and patriarch.

130. Willi-Plein, 'Genesis 27', pp. 315-34.

biblical criticism.[131] This type of close reading is not always overtly feminist, but because such gaps tend to occur around female characters, literary readings may include feminist ones nonetheless. Brenner points out that this shift toward literary criticism is also partly owing to the fact that feminist biblical study has branched out into non-traditional disciplines. Brenner calls this a 'transdisciplinary preference and practice',[132] although feminist biblical interpretation is currently so largely focused on literary readings that it can hardly be called transdisciplinary.

In some of her earliest work, Brenner groups biblical women by category, including queens, wise women, and prophetesses.[133] While this at least in part involves a study of literary characterization, Brenner also includes elements of historical reconstruction. Like many such studies, however, she is synchronic in her overall treatment. She does not distinguish between different phases of Israelite history and corresponding changes in women's status. Although Brenner recognizes that in certain, limited circumstances women may break out of traditionally female roles, she argues that for the most part women are limited in the Hebrew Bible to such roles. Thus, unlike many of the feminist historians discussed above, Brenner tends more toward rejection of the biblical account and its depictions of women. Ironically, this rejectionist stance sometimes puts Brenner in league with traditional interpretations, the same ones branded androcentric by many feminists.

Although Brenner agrees with scholars like Trible that Eve is 'the source of human learning', she differs from Trible in accepting the traditional reading of Eve (and all women) as responsible for human sin and suffering. Brenner is equally critical of the negative characterization of the matriarchs as women who just cannot get along.[134] Brenner's interpretation is a radical departure from other feminists who see the matriarchs as strong figures who play an active and positive role in tradition, and such an analysis illustrates the relativity of interpretation. As will become increasingly apparent in the following discussion, the biblical text is never clear on issues concerning women, and one critic's positive portrayal is another's negative one.

Brenner also differs from Trible in her assessment of YHWH, whom she sees as decisively male.[135] The creation of male and female in Genesis 1 is

131.   Danna Nolan Fewell, 'Feminist Reading of the Hebrew Bible: Affirmation, Resistance and Transformation', *JSOT* 39 (1987), pp. 77-87 (77).

132.   Athalya Brenner, 'Introduction', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (FCB 2, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 13-20 (14).

133.   Brenner, *Israelite Woman*.

134.   Brenner, 'Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the "Birth of the Hero" Paradigm', *VT* 36 (1986), pp. 257-73.

135.   Brenner, 'The Hebrew God and his Female Counterparts', in Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (eds.), *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and The Book* (BibLim; London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 56-71 (56-69).

not meant to imply that God is somehow genderless or bi-gendered; on the contrary, Brenner emphasizes the fact that even in the first account woman is created after man. She sees Y<small>HWH</small> as devoid of feminine aspects, and argues that the worship of Asherah in ancient Israel was a borrowed practice meant to compensate for Y<small>HWH</small>'s lack of female traits. Because there are no goddess and/or fertility rites in (official, biblical) Israelite religion, Y<small>HWH</small> becomes the husband and Israel the wife, only in this way providing a feminine element for the religion.

Brenner has also written a volume, with Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, on gendered voices in narrative.[136] In an earlier work Brenner posited that the Song of Songs, which depicts seemingly genuine female attitudes, may have been written by a woman,[137] but later she notes that such arguments are necessarily speculative.[138] Thus, Brenner (along with van Dijk-Hemmes) writes about gendered *texts*, rather than *authors*. It is not entirely clear why it should be less problematic to look for women's voices—remnants of traditions created by women—in texts, though. It may often be a possibility, but it is always an unprovable one.

Van Dijk-Hemmes's contributions to the volume are noteworthy as well, and deal more directly with texts relevant to this study. In discussing 'women's texts', van Dijk-Hemmes attempts to reconstruct female voices, although she acknowledges that such texts were probably not written by women, nor based on the actual words of real women, despite the fact that women most likely did contribute to Israel's oral traditions. The prominence of female characters in a text is not reliable evidence of female authorship of that text and, unfortunately, it is often difficult to reconstruct what might be genuine women's words because the women are muted by the (male) author or literary tradition. Van Dijk-Hemmes believes that biblical naming scenes, in which women predominate, provide a more compelling example of possible women's texts. Van Dijk-Hemmes is also careful to distinguish between texts that might reflect original women's traditions and texts that the author conceives as possible to place in the mouth of a woman. She even cites examples of differences between P and J in some of these scenes, although van Dijk-Hemmes limits her source-critical discussion to this observation.

Danna Nolan Fewell's work moves in a more concretely postmodern direction.[139] She frequently collaborates with David M. Gunn, and both

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136.   Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*; see also Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (BibInt, 26; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997). Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes authored *On Gendering Texts* together, but each is responsible for a discrete section of the book.

137.   Brenner, *Israelite Woman*, p. 50.

138.   Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, p. 6.

139.   Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (LCBI; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press,

favor the types of counter-readings that overturn traditional interpretations. However, Fewell turns to a socio-historical perspective in her discussion of the impact that the Babylonian exile had on the ancient Israelites.[140] She notes that groups in transitional phases undergo significant changes, and such periods have a massive impact on subsequent traditions. In the case of ancient Israel, this is reflected in the writings of the Hebrew Bible. Fewell intersperses her historically based observations with quotations from Julia Kristeva and apparent autobiographical anecdotes. Fewell's inclusion of explicit historical discussion is fairly rare in such types of literary interpretation.

The work of Mieke Bal also belongs to this postmodernist school. Bal, a Dutch literary and cultural critic, has been enormously influential in feminist biblical literary interpretation. Although very little of her scholarship is on the Pentateuch (most of it is on Judges), her methodological contributions are important. Bal's training is in literary theory, not in biblical or ancient Near Eastern studies, and it is a mark of the fluidity of feminist interpretation that someone without the standard biblical training—especially in biblical languages—would be so influential. Bal is particularly interested in what she calls the 'cultural function' of the Hebrew Bible, especially in how it relates to constructions of gender.[141]

Bal uses the text as a starting point to read into the gaps in the narrative. Her particular narratological method is something akin to reader-response criticism, in that she believes readers' exposure to different ideologies influences the ways in which they will read or receive a text. For Bal, interpretation is concerned with the reader's experience, rather than with the history of composition of the text.[142] In contrast to Fewell, she is concerned with the value system of the reader rather than that of the text. She advocates ignoring issues of unity or disunity within the text, treating Genesis 1–3 as a single unit, in line with her claim that unity is what the reader makes of it. However, because of her lack of training in biblical languages, and her disregard for

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1990); Fewell and Gunn, 'Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 193-211; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Fewell and Gunn, 'Shifting the Blame: God in the Garden', in Beal and Gunn (eds.), *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, pp. 16-33; Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative*.

140.   Fewell, 'Imagination, Method, and Murder: Un/Framing the Face of Post-Exilic Israel', in Beal and Gunn (eds.), *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies*, pp. 132-52.

141.   Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (ISBL; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 1.

142.   See Ann Marmesh, 'Anti-Covenant', in Mieke Bal (ed.), *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 81; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), pp. 43-60.

contextual readings, at times her arguments take extreme liberties with the text.[143]

The work of J. Cheryl Exum follows closely on Bal's. Like Bal, Exum claims that her goal is neither to reject nor to reclaim the biblical text.[144] Although in her earliest work Exum sees a positive portrayal of women in the beginning of the book of Exodus, she reverses this view in a companion article written ten years later.[145] She notes that the active female characters of the first two chapters all but disappear in the following narrative (although she does not mention that the father disappears as well). Moses is the only character with a prominent role in the ensuing narrative. When women are depicted positively, according to Exum, it is only insofar as they further the ends of the male characters and, ultimately, of the male authors of the text. The high status granted some women in the text is simply part of a patriarchal 'reward' system; the reward most often bestowed on biblical women is motherhood. In addition, Exum argues, the narrative depicts women as complicit in this patriarchal system by showing them wanting to have children.[146] The obvious problem with this theory is the idea that women only have children because patriarchy forces it on them.

At times Exum seems strangely unwilling to see anything positive in biblical portrayals of women, which emphasize divine action over human (female) initiative. Exum chooses to focus on what women are *not* doing, rather than on what YHWH *is* doing, ignoring biblical theology, in which YHWH is the primary actor in human history, outshining both women and men. As an example, Exum argues that the motif of barrenness and the use of surrogates (which Exum believes are a male fantasy, despite ancient Near Eastern parallels indicating the existence of surrogacy as a legal institution[147]) degrades the matriarchs' status. Rather than reading it as a narrative heightening of drama and suspense, as others have done,[148] or seeing YHWH's actions toward the women as parallel to his actions in elevating men like Abraham and Moses,

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143. For example, in Gen. 2.3, Bal reads מֵאִישׁ לֻקְחָה־זֹּאת as 'differentiated from' rather than 'taken from' (Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 117). This interpretation is not supported by the use of לקח (passive) + מִן elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; cf. Gen. 3.19, 23; 2 Kgs 2.10; Isa. 49.24; 53.8; Jer. 29.22; Ezek. 15.3; Job 28.2.

144. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup, 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 11.

145. Exum, '"Mother" in Israel: A Familiar Figure Reconsidered', in Russell (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 73-85; Exum, 'Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 75-87.

146. Exum, 'Second Thoughts', p. 81.

147. On surrogacy in the ancient Near East, especially in Nuzi and Babylon, see *ABD* IV, pp. 561-62; cf. CH §144-46, and perhaps also §192-93.

148. See, for instance, Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One*, pp. 32-33.

Exum argues that the matriarchs, like the women in Exod. 1.8–2.10, only appear when they are serving patriarchal interests.

Despite her generally negative appraisal of the Hebrew Bible where women are concerned, Exum does manage to find positive elements hidden deep within the text, elements that can be revealed only through feminist analysis; these she calls '(sub)versions' of the text. So, for instance, she notes the role of Hagar in Genesis 16 as the recipient of a birth announcement.[149] Likewise, Exum points out that in Genesis 31, Jacob consults with Leah and Rachel about their departure from Laban's household, seemingly a nod to the importance of their opinion. Yet Exum is willing to pass both cases off as examples of women bowing to male control. Her willingness to see negative even in apparently positive texts results sometimes in forced and unconvincing readings.

The work of Esther Fuchs, whose background is in modern Hebrew, rather than biblical, literature, is much like Exum's, although she is perhaps more radical. Fuchs also uses synchronic literary analysis, arguing that the difference between historians and literary critics is negligible as both are interpreting literary texts.[150] However, unlike Exum, Fuchs rarely sees even a glimmer of redeeming value for women in the Hebrew Bible. She has primarily focused on sexual politics, but much of her work has in mind contemporary ideas of the issue, and she is interested in the Hebrew Bible only insofar as it is relevant to modern feminism. Like Brenner, Fuchs accepts traditional, negative interpretations of the text that have helped to perpetuate sexist attitudes for centuries. Much of Fuchs's analysis is focused on demonstrating that stories about women revolve around finding a husband and having a son. Once these goals are accomplished, the women's stories end. However, this analysis devolves into railing against women's traditional roles, without considering the realities of ancient Israelite life or the values attached to these roles in ancient Israel. Fuchs also proposes that the status of women in the Hebrew Bible is connected to the diminishing worship of goddesses by proponents of monotheism.[151] In this regard, she echoes a common feminist appeal to a pre-Yahwistic period in which goddess worship ensured a more egalitarian society. Such appeals are problematic, not least because evidence for this egalitarian society is lacking. While Fuchs criticizes Meyers for seeing remnants of such a society within the biblical text,[152] she is on rocky footing herself in simply trying to push the evidence for it back into the preliterary (and thus poorly evidenced) period.

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149.   Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 104 n. 13.
150.   Fuchs, 'The History of Women', pp. 212-13.
151.   Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (JSOTSup, 310; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p. 12.
152.   Fuchs, 'The History of Women', p. 225.

Alice Bach engages in a type of literary criticism initiated by Bal and others, although hers is of a less radical bent than the scholars just discussed. She advocates 'suspicious reading', looking at the text for signs of the narrator's bias and reading between the lines for additional clues about the characters.[153] Bach advocates the role of the reader in resisting the text's assumptions, which she says is a fundamental component of feminist interpretation.[154] In her case, this method lends itself particularly to midrashic (and reader-response) interpretation. In this vein, Bach offers the reading of Miriam as a pacifist.[155] Following Meyers's work on the well-established genre of female victory performances,[156] Bach suggests that the women in Exod. 15.20-21 were celebrating the destruction of the male-dominated culture epitomized by warfare.[157] She supports this conclusion with evidence from a poem by Sappho of Lesbos, although it is not entirely clear why she finds a pacifist message in this specific poem. The major problem with Bach's reading, however, is that the Israelite women in Exodus 15 and in other victory-song passages are very explicitly celebrating the victory of the Israelites and their deity over their enemies; so while they are celebrating the destruction of one (male) culture, they are also rejoicing in the survival, indeed the ascendancy, of another.

Despite her problematic conclusions, there are some sound methodological suggestions at the root of Bach's work. For instance, she argues that readers must identify the narrator's agenda and be on the lookout for evidence of it within the narrative. However, she argues that this identification is still a fictional readerly construct, rather than an accurate historical reconstruction. Bach's insistence that this is a literary, and not a historical, method, is disingenuous. She attempts to divorce the author's agenda from historical reality, without admitting that an authorial agenda is necessarily a part, or a result, of a historical reality. Bach is right in saying that the author's agenda

153.   See, e.g., Alice Bach, 'Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible', *Semeia* 63 (1993), pp. 61-79.

154.   Bach, 'Good to the Last Drop: Viewing the Sotah (Numbers 5.11-31) as the Glass Half Empty and Wondering How to View it Half Full', in Exum and Clines (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), pp. 26-54 (26).

155.   Bach, 'De-Doxifying Miriam', in Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley (eds.), *'A Wise and Discerning Mind': Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long* (BJS, 325; Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2000), pp. 1-10.

156.   Cf. Meyers, 'Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel', *BA* 54/1 (1991), pp. 16-27; Meyers, 'Miriam the Musician', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 207-30; Eunice Blanchard Poethig, 'The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel' (Ph.D. diss.; Union Theological Seminary, 1985).

157.   Bach, 'De-Doxifying Miriam', p. 4.

should not be mistaken for a 'voice of truth', but identifying the author's agenda—whether motivated by secular ideology or by theology—within the text is important for historical as well as literary interpretation.

What about Men?

All the feminist scholars discussed thus far have been women, with the exception of David M. Gunn's collaborations with Danna Nolan Fewell.[158] Mainstream male scholars have been aware of feminism, but often their reactions to feminist scholarship are at best patiently tolerant and at worst patronizing and dismissive.[159] A few men have entered into feminist biblical study, although they are a decided minority.[160] Many of the men who engage in feminist biblical study do the majority of their work in non-feminist areas. (This is true of some feminists as well.) Their works tend not to be highly political or rejectionist.

One such work is S.D. Goitein's socio-literary reading of women's activities in the Bible.[161] Like many of the feminists discussed above, Goitein notes that books about women are not necessarily written by women and that in order to recover women's traditions, it is necessary to look for texts that reflect women's participation in oral-literary genres. Goitein finds genres of activity that he argues are unique to women and were created by them. However, of the genres he discusses, only the example of women leading (and creating) the victory dance is convincing, as it is only women in the biblical text who participate in this activity.[162] The unique role of women is less clear in some of Goitein's other genres, as for instance the wise woman and the female prophet, both of which (wisdom and prophecy) are genres amply attested for men in the Hebrew Bible.

Furthermore, some of Goitein's genres are so infrequently attested that they can hardly be called genres. So, for instance, based solely on the description of Hannah in 1 Sam. 1.13, he argues that women created a genre of 'whispered prayer'. Not only does a single example fall far short of

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158.   Exum has also collaborated with David J.A. Clines on various literary-critical and feminist projects, although none is the subject of discussion here.

159.   See, e.g., Richard Coggins, 'The Contribution of Women's Studies to Old Testament Studies: A Male Reaction', *Theology* 91 (1988), pp. 5-16.

160.   Men contributed six of the sixty-three total essays in the four volumes of the Feminist Companion to the Bible volumes (both the first and second series) dedicated to the Pentateuch. See also Marc Zvi Brettler, 'On Becoming a Male Feminist Bible Scholar', *BR* 10 (Apr 1994), pp. 44-45, and several of the essays in Matthews, Levinson, and Frymer-Kensky (eds.), *Gender and Law*, as well as the work of Mayer Gruber, which will be discussed below.

161.   S.D. Goitein, 'Women as Creators of Biblical Genres', *Prooftexts* 8 (1988), pp. 1-33.

162.   See Poethig, 'Victory Song Tradition'.

constituting a genre, but assuming that the biblical account provides an accurate description of the creation of this supposed genre is problematic in the extreme. Similarly problematic is Goitein's claim that some laments were created by women because they have a 'female coloration' that implies that they were originally spoken by women. Goitein's romantic view of the status of women in ancient Israel conflicts with even the most positive feminist reconstruction of Israelite society. All in all, his article is more of a catalog of the non-mother/wife roles in which women appear; it is generally not clear why women should be considered the creators of these genres.

Mayer Gruber's article on women in the priestly laws is one of the few attempts to treat this topic by any scholar, feminist or otherwise.[163] Gruber's primary conclusion is that women can indeed participate in the cult, as evidenced by the fact that they can bring sacrifices and make vows. Although a woman's vows may be annulled in certain circumstances, it is also incumbent upon her to fulfill her vows if they are not annulled. Gruber concludes that although women do not have the same opportunities as men do for participation in the cult, P nevertheless does not exclude women by virtue of its purity laws.

Gruber has also written studies of mother imagery used of YHWH; the cult-prostitute in the Bible and the ancient Near East; and breast-feeding practices in the ancient Near East.[164] The latter, in particular, seems designed to show how the Hebrew Bible reflects ancient Israelite reality. Gruber argues that the biblical account matches actual practices and side-effects of breast-feeding infants, particularly the infertility that accompanies it. He therefore suggests that the time-consuming job of nursing and raising children stands behind the injunction in Exod. 23.17 that only men are required to appear at a shrine three times a year, thereby excusing—but not excluding—busy Israelite mothers. Deuteronomy, on the other hand, Gruber sees as egalitarian in requiring not only men but also women and children to appear for the reading of the law every seven years.

As insightful as Gruber's comments are, especially concerning vows, they are limited. He looks at a very small number of laws and certain vocabulary within them; the article is a scant five pages long, and even with an additional eight pages of footnotes, it cannot begin to be an exhaustive study of women in priestly law. Furthermore, it is not surprising that women can offer sacrifices and make vows, and that once they have made them, they must fulfill them. P never claims that women are not human, and as humans, women have the ability to pollute the land. It would be critical in P's theology, then,

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163.   Gruber, 'Women in the Cult', pp. 35-48.

164.   These and other essays, including 'Women in the Cult', are collected in Gruber, *Motherhood*. Only four of the fourteen essays in this volume are concerned with women, however.

for women to be able to perform the necessary rites in order to maintain the purity of the land. The issue is not whether women can participate in the cult, but whether their participation is less or different, which Gruber admits it is. The more important question, which Gruber does not address, is whether women's participation is indicative of greater attitudes toward women, and what this says about women's social standing.

Feminism and Historical-Critical Method

This critique of Goitein and Gruber is not meant to suggest that men cannot or should not be feminist biblical scholars. It is meant only to note that their forays into the area have been few and, in the early stages, not always entirely productive. The overview of scholarship presented in this chapter also supports the observation that the study of women has not been incorporated into the mainstream of biblical scholarship yet. The frequent combination of feminism and literary criticism has certainly drawn a few more men into the general orbit of feminism, inasmuch as literary criticism often addresses feminist issues. However, there is still a dearth of traditio-historical scholars, either male or female, who embrace feminist analysis. While some feminists attempt historical reconstruction, they seldom do so with the traditional tools of historical criticism, such as source, redaction, or textual criticism; to some extent they may use form criticism, especially in working with genres like myth or folklore, but even these are typically not couched in the traditional terminology or articulation of the method. Some feminists have addressed the fact that feminism and historical criticism tend to exist separately from each other; most often this is because historical criticism is seen as an androcentric discipline and its tools those of patriarchy. Susanne Scholz, for example, maintains that feminism and historical criticism have no common ground.[165] Scholz believes that historical criticism of the Bible supports the status quo, keeping the Bible isolated from modern realities and the proliferation of worldviews in contemporary society.

A smaller number of feminists have advocated the use of traditional historical-critical tools. Those who do are frequently the products of universities in the northeastern United States—Harvard, Yale, Brandeis, and Columbia—that are more likely to emphasize historical methodologies. The literary critics, on the other hand, come from a far-broader range of institutions, often including theological schools. This most certainly plays a role not only in the type of scholarship that they do, but also in the numbers represented in each area. Women had more access to seminaries and theological institutions during the early years of the feminist movement, and thus it is not surprising that feminists are well represented among the graduates of

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165. Susanne Scholz, '"Tandoori Reindeer" and the Limitations of Historical Criticism', in Vander Stichele and Penner (eds.), *Her Master's Tools*, pp. 47-69.

those schools; likewise, these schools are less likely to emphasize historical-critical methods. There is also a noticeable difference between scholars educated in the United States and those educated in Europe. Until recently, most feminists from Europe focused on literary criticism of the Hebrew Bible.

There has, however, been a small upsurge in historical-critical feminist scholarship recently, particularly on the part of European scholars. The fact that European schools, especially German ones, are still bastions of historical methodologies like source and redaction criticism is surely a reason for this. Monika Fander is one example of such a feminist scholar. She argues that historical-critical methods are not only suitable for feminist criticism, but may also be a corrective for some of the problems inherent in feminist analysis.[166] Thus, for instance, Fander suggests that historical criticism may aid in distinguishing between older traditions and later redactional elements, providing not only a diachronic view, but also a more accurate idea of what a given stage of the tradition looked like vis-à-vis women.

Despite the usefulness of the historical-critical method, Fander notes that there are still tensions between it and feminism, most notably the suspicion with which proponents of one regard the other. Fander insists that this tension is a result of the assumptions that scholars bring to the interpretational endeavor, especially their stance on the authority of the text. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, like Fander a New Testament scholar, has made similar observations about the apparent incompatibility between feminist and historical-critical methodology, particularly because the former tends to consider the latter positivist in its outlook.[167] However, even within the realm of historical-critical studies, there is a growing consensus that history cannot be reconstructed objectively. It may be that the recent spate of revisionist theories in Pentateuchal source criticism is an indication of acceptance of the idea that historical interpretation is not as objective as its proponents have traditionally believed. If this is the case, then we may begin to see an increase among traditional scholars in accepting methods like feminism that bring another perspective to the text.

In 2005, Scholars Press published a volume devoted to historical-critical and feminist (as well as liberationist) scholarship.[168] To my knowledge it is the only volume of its kind. The essays in this book are not limited to the

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166.   Monika Fander, 'Historical-Critical Methods', in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; 2 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1993), pp. 205-24 (212).

167.   Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation', in Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (SBLCP; SBLBSNA, 10; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 43-63 (47).

168.   Vander Stichele and Penner (eds.), *Her Master's Tools*.

Hebrew Bible and are varied in their support of historical-critical methods. In the opening essay the editors, Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, note the indebtedness of approaches like feminism to historical-critical work. Feminist biblical scholarship is still interested in reconstructing the past, they argue, and thus requires certain positivistic statements about women in history. Modernist disciplines like historical-critical research, and postmodernist ones, like much feminism, are more closely related than many scholars would have it appear. Rather than reject historical-critical discourse and its tools outright, Vander Stichele and Penner suggest that feminists reject the traditional uses of these methods, turning them instead to other purposes. As Hanna Stenström notes in her contribution to the volume, historical-critical analysis, like feminism, began as a radical, even subversive approach to biblical study, despite the fact that it has come to embody the traditional methodologies of an androcentric status quo.[169]

A few feminists have begun to use historical-critical methods that lend themselves less obviously to specifically feminist interpretation; for example, Kristin De Troyer applies text criticism to the LXX text of Joshua to argue that biblical editors during the Maccabean period (in service to the Maccabean revolt) were concerned with showing the importance of obeying orders. The textual evidence indicates that the Masoretic Text contains execution phrases for commands, whereas in the LXX the execution phrases are not always given. De Troyer concludes that these textual differences are the work of editors in the second century BCE who were invested in the political and theological messages of the Maccabean revolt. De Troyer's argument would be more convincing if she presented evidence of this phenomenon in other biblical books, and it would appear more relevant to feminist criticism if she found examples (not on the same theme of command and execution) that specifically concerned women, of which there must be some. Nevertheless, De Troyer rightly defends the relevance of her work to feminist criticism, in that it supports questioning textual authority and examining the motivations of the texts' authors and editors.

Judith McKinlay also advocates incorporating insights from the realm of historical criticism into feminist interpretation. She observes that historical criticism has moved into a new phase, where the social location of the authors and editors is recognized and the search for connections to the historical times the texts purport to depict is often abandoned in favor of reading texts in the context of the time they were written. McKinlay also suggests reading the Sarah–Hagar narrative within a Persian context, in view of scholarship that puts the composition of Genesis in that period. The narrative takes on

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169.   Hanna Stenström, 'Historical-Critical Approaches and the Emancipation of Women: Unfulfilled Promises and Remaining Possibilities', in Vander Stichele and Penner (eds.), *Her Master's Tools*, pp. 31-45 (40).

new significance when read in light of Ezra and Nehemiah's views on foreign wives. Developments in historical criticism thus provide direct and relevant means for assessing the depiction of women in the text. Roland Boer moves the debate a step further by proposing a means of entry for feminists into texts with little or no material about women. He notes that there is almost no feminist discussion of Ezra–Nehemiah, since there are almost no women present in the text.

Another exception to the divide between historical criticism and feminism appears in the work of Irmtraud Fischer, who uses source criticism in her treatment of the matriarchs in Genesis.[170] Fischer covers only Genesis 12–36 so her source-critical results are somewhat limited, especially as she does not tie them in with the larger Pentateuchal text or the ideologies of the writers at all. Fischer's main premise is that texts involving women were integral to the narratives of Genesis 12–36 from the outset, and thus it is more appropriate to speak of traditions about *ancestors*, rather than *patriarchs* as has been most common among source critics and other mainstream biblical scholars. Fischer points out that while traditions about women have been important for source criticism, the meaning and importance of women in the texts has largely been ignored. The prominence of women in the text is striking; according to Fischer, the narratives emphasize women's experiences and emotions and often place female characters on a par with male ones.

Fischer also sees the primary role of mother as indicative not of limitations on the social roles of women, but rather of the limitations of the narrative itself: because it is a family history, the story necessarily focuses on the continuation of the family through childbirth. However, the women's elements are in the earliest layers, which are not about the promise to the fathers but rather YHWH's intervention for the mothers. Men gradually move into the center, especially in P, but women are not completely displaced; they still have a presence, albeit a marginal one. In combining various narrative cycles, mothers provided the key to establishing the promise lineage. In the genealogies (as opposed to the narratives), the main lineages are traced from the father, but secondary lines are traced through mothers. When the element of the promise is added, all the texts are reinterpreted in light of this promise.

Fischer posits several layers of accretion and editing for the text, placing the oldest layer in the period of the monarchy, with the fall of the Northern Kingdom as the latest possible date. These traditions expand in the pre-exilic period, but it is not until the exilic period that a redaction combines all the promises. The P layer, around the exilic or early postexilic period, reduces the Hagar story and adds its own version of Isaac's birth, as well as adding chs. 17 and 23, which center on the actions of men.

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170.   Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (BZAW, 222; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994).

Fischer concludes that the prominent role of women in the traditions means that while Israelite society may have been patriarchal, it did not lead to sole domination by men. The later tendency to push women into the background was, according to Fischer, owing to the postexilic and priestly focus on cult and purity. This led to idealization of the patriarchs as paragons of piety and a shift to a pedagogical function for the texts. While this may be the case, the priestly ideology has more in mind than purity and piety; as I will show in the following chapters, there are many ways in which the portrayal of women in the sources is indicative of (other) comprehensive ideologies.

2. *Conclusions*

The scholarship discussed in this chapter illustrates the variety of feminist biblical interpretation. Regardless of these differences, though, nearly every feminist scholar would agree that the Bible is the result of a patriarchal society whose norms are reflected in the text. This idea is not new anymore. The question becomes, where do we go from here? There is more than simply patriarchy at work in the text. The writers of the Hebrew Bible had larger ideologies and theologies, and developing a fuller portrait of how those involve and relate to women serves not only feminist but also source-critical ends.

The Hebrew Bible is the work of a small, and likely select, group of people from a fairly long period of history. The Pentateuch alone was also likely written by only a few, and while the span of time during which it was composed is a matter of debate, the traditions it records likely cover several centuries' time as well. The evidence these five books offer is not necessarily indicative of the experience of most, or even many, Israelites, and thus it is difficult to reconstruct the history of women in ancient Israel from it. Likewise, as a piece of literature with a long and important historical influence, it is critical in interpreting the Bible to understand the context out of which it arose and the selectiveness of the opinions it reflects.

Studying the ways in which women are depicted by the various authors recognizes that while we may not be able to reconstruct a full history of Israelite women, we can reconstruct certain attitudes toward them, and perhaps also developments in their status, at least among certain groups. Such study also acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible, as a literary product, reflects certain ideologies that are essential keys in understanding the texts themselves, whether one accepts or rejects such ideologies. Treating women in the Hebrew Bible synchronically, ignoring the fact that these depictions may cover over a thousand years of history, oversimplifies a complex topic, in that it collapses all the evidence together and rules out certain explanations for differences in the text. We cannot assume that women's status remained the

same over the centuries, just as we know the status of men may change as well. Ignoring the sources ignores one way to trace changes in attitudes toward women and changes in their status. There is reciprocity in this process as well: the material concerning women also reveals something of the ideology of the author, and thus can serve as an important source-critical tool. In addition, it may also reveal information that bears on the dating of the sources. Of course, the sources may preserve traditions that originated with women, and thus they do also provide a window onto the women themselves, not just onto the authors' ideas of those women. This is a harder task, however, and one whose findings must therefore be more provisional.

As should be clear from the overview of scholarship thus far, there is a fundamental lack of communication between source critics and feminists. In part, I believe this stems from the fact that while source criticism is literary in a sense, it is fundamentally a historical endeavor, in that it relies on history for the plausibility of its hypotheses. Feminism, on the other hand, has moved increasingly toward literary criticism, often even rejecting the historical as inaccessible or irrelevant. It may be this shift that is responsible for the continued failure of traditional historical critics to engage with feminism—the perception that feminism is synonymous with literary criticism, which latter is a completely different methodological approach than historical-critical methods like source and redaction criticism. However, both feminists and source critics would do well to recall the origins of historical-critical method, and the degree to which it was once a tool used to overturn the status quo, not to maintain it.

2

THE MATRIARCHS OUTSIDE THE PRIESTLY CORPUS

1. *Introduction*

This chapter begins the discussion of biblical texts, starting with the non-priestly material. This will involve some literary reading of the text, as any discussion of the Bible must at some level treat the narrative details. However, this analysis is geared toward a reading within a historical context and is concerned with filling in some historical details, particularly the ideology of the texts' author(s) where women are concerned. In this regard, the analysis will not be purely literary, nor will it partake of the methodological trends of postmodern or new literary criticism.

The narrative outside the priestly corpus (not including D) is generally assigned to J, E, JE, or non-P by scholars who distinguish between sources. As noted in the Introduction, I have chosen to use the term non-P because of the difficulty in separating out and reconstructing an independent Elohistic source. The discussion of material about women will reinforce the conclusion that a coherent and independent E source cannot be separated out from the rest of the non-P material. Abandoning E (at least for the time being) makes the use of the term J unnecessary. The term non-P implies nothing about the source beyond its basic differentiation from P, and is certainly not meant to indicate that this source is originally a single unified entity. I will follow the general scholarly consensus, where there is one, in assigning texts to non-P (and to P), with specific justifications as necessary. Because of the variety of depictions of women in the non-P material, I will organize this chapter and the following one around characters and themes, rather than individual passages. I begin with the matriarchs because they appear in the most detail and cover by far the largest block of text, from the end of Genesis 11 through Genesis 35.

The matriarchs are the women—Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel—in the book of Genesis who are the primary wives and mothers of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[1] The larger themes in which they are involved

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1. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to Sarai/Sarah as Sarah throughout this chapter; likewise, Abram/Abraham will always be Abraham. The only exceptions will be in direct citations of biblical texts, where any translation will reflect the Hebrew.

are fundamental to the composition not just of Genesis but of the entire Pentateuch. Although the matriarchs are not frequently mentioned outside the Pentateuch, they are mentioned slightly more than other women, thus confirming their primacy in Israelite tradition. They are the wives and mothers of the beneficiaries of YHWH's promises (and in P, the covenant). So, for instance, Abraham's wife Keturah is not considered a matriarch nor are Bilhah and Zilpah, because as secondary wives their children are counted as the children of the primary wife.[2] Hagar is not technically a matriarch, although her son Ishmael receives the same promise of progeny given to the patriarchs, and in one episode this promise is conveyed to Hagar directly. In P, Ishmael is even circumcised. But Ishmael does not become Sarah's son or Abraham's heir, despite this being the original intention when he is conceived, nor in P does Ishmael enter YHWH's covenant. However, because Hagar and Ishmael receive the promise, I will treat Hagar along with the matriarchs in this chapter.

2. *The Matriarchal Childbirth Narratives*

Much of the non-P matriarchal material can be divided into two categories: stories dealing with childbirth, including the promise of a child, and the wife–sister stories. The childbirth narratives of the matriarchs are often conflated with the genre labeled 'promise to the patriarch', based largely on the explicit combination of the two in P.[3] However, they were originally two distinct groups of tradition. Because many of the childbirth traditions involve a promise and other shared motifs, and because I wish to distinguish them from the promise to the patriarchs, I have labeled this genre promise to the matriarchs. These traditions concerning the promise and/or birth of a specific child were once independent of the patriarchal traditions with which they are now associated; they have their origins in stories primarily about women. Just as the matriarchs figure in the patriarchal traditions, so too the patriarchs may figure in these matriarchal traditions, but the characters in the foreground of the latter are the women. As the promise to the patriarchs emerged as a theological motif spanning the entire Pentateuch, the traditions of the matriarchs were incorporated into it. The promises concern not only Sarah but the other matriarchs as well. In order to understand the form and genre, I will examine all of the non-P promise motifs concerning progeny together. This begins with a discussion of the promise to the patriarchs in order to establish the features of each promise motif and to differentiate them from each other.

2. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, pp. 16-17.
3. See, e.g., the treatment in Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (trans. David E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

The Promises to the Patriarchs

The theme of the 'promise to the patriarchs' is an essential element not only of Genesis, but of the entire Pentateuch.[4] Although often referred to as a single promise to the patriarchs, the promise texts in Genesis consist of three different promise motifs, namely land, seed, and blessing, that have been brought together so that in the final text they exist in relation to one another. Only the promise of seed is relevant here, as it provides the closest parallel to the promise to the matriarchs and is the element of the patriarchal promise theme with which the promise to the matriarchs is ultimately combined. One woman (Hagar) also receives this promise of seed, but as I will argue below, she is filling in for an absent patriarch and the promise is directed toward her son; thus the title promise to the patriarchs still holds. The promises appear in both P and non-P, and as a result some discussion of P must be included here, but my main concern will be with the non-P material.

The promise of seed involves YHWH promising a patriarch that he will be the forebear of a multitude of people. This promise of progeny is a general promise for offspring, originally independent of any mention of a specific child.[5] Stock words and phrases mark this promise, although they vary from instance to instance. They break up into three primary categories: (1) becoming a great nation, marked by phrases like גוי גדול;[6] (2) having numerous seed, involving a comparison to dust, stars, or sand;[7] and (3) various uses of the root רבה, 'to be many, great'.[8] The first and third categories are found in

4. For an excellent overview of the different promise types, see Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, pp. 95-163. On the overarching nature of the promise theme throughout the Pentateuch, see, e.g., von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, pp. 1-78; Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 55-83; von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 13-14; Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT, 57; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), pp. 362-83; David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 152-232; Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis* (JSOTSup, 315; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

5. Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, p. 132.

6. In non-P, Gen. 12.2; 18.18; 21.18; 46.3; and with minor variants in 21.13. In P, Gen. 17.20, and with minor variants in 17.4-6, 16; 28.3; 35.11; 48.4.

7. Only in non-P: Gen. 13.16; 15.5; 22.17; 26.4; 28.14; 32.13. There are also numerous repetitions of the term זרע, 'seed', without comparisons, throughout the promise narratives.

8. Non-P: Gen. 16.10; 22.17; 26.4, 24; P: Gen. 17.2, 6, 20; 28.3; 35.11; 48.4. The specific combination of the roots פרה and רבה is unique to P. The distribution of these themes is somewhat uneven; only the first one is represented in all three literary sources; the second is missing in P. Non-P also contains variants on the theme that use none of these keywords, but that nonetheless involve a similar concept of increase (Gen. 49.16, 19).

both non-P and P, while the second is found only in non-P. The distribution of these words and phrases throughout the 'promise of numerous offspring' passages marks them as belonging to, and drawing from, the same group of traditions.

As the name promise to the patriarchs suggests, the promises of numerous progeny are nearly always given to a male character. Each of the three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is included, Abraham being the most heavily represented.[9] Only one of these passages, Gen. 15.1-6, also contains a reference to Abraham having a child. Genesis 15 will be discussed in more detail below, as it is a complicated case. The promises to the remaining patriarchs are less extensive, perhaps in part because the promises to these figures were seen as an extension of the promise already given to Abraham.[10]

The Question of Deuteronomic Editing of the Promises
Whether the promise passages are original to their narrative contexts is a matter of some debate. Arguments that the non-P promises are secondary generally assume that they are secondary only in a limited context; that is, they were already there once non-P was a more-or-less finalized narrative, and were not added by a later, redactorial hand. Such arguments also assume that the promises were still originally associated with the patriarchs—that is, with specifically male characters.[11] While the promises were an originally distinct motif, they were placed in the narrative at strategic points, in order to provide an over-arching theme according to which all other texts are now to be understood.[12]

Certain scholars, however, argue that the promises are closely linked to Deuteronomy, or are even evidence of Deuteronomic or Deuteronomistic editing of the Tetrateuch.[13] The evidence within Deuteronomy for the promise of increase, often touted as evidence for a Deuteronomistic hand in Genesis, does not hold up to scrutiny. The main promise motifs listed above appear far less in Deuteronomy than they do in Genesis, and where they do appear, they are not always in a specific promise context.[14] Deuteronomy 1.10 and 30.5

9.   Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, pp. 133, 143-44.
10.   The promises themselves note this to an extent: see Gen. 26.3, 5, 24; 35.12. Other scholars have noted that the theme figures more heavily in the Abraham narratives; so, e.g., Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R.A. Wilson; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 20; Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 270.
11.   For a summary of this issue, see J.A. Emerton, 'The Origin of the Promises to the Patriarchs in the Older Sources of the Book of Genesis', *VT* 32 (1982), pp. 14-32.
12.   See Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, pp. 2-3.
13.   E.g., Blum, *Studien*.
14.   The phrase גוי גדול is used six times in Deuteronomy (4.7, 8, 38; 9.1; 11.23; 26.5; also 4.6 with the definite article) but never in a context that explicitly concerns the

provide the closest parallels to the promise of progeny in Genesis, Deut. 1.10 because it includes a comparison to stars and Deut. 30.5 because it contains the root רבה[15] and the verb יטב in the hiphil.

Genesis 15.5, in a chapter that according to many scholars shows considerable Deuteronom(ist)ic influence,[16] looks the least like the verses from Deuteronomy. Although it uses the star comparison, it does not use a form of the verb רבה.[17] As for evidence of the promise of progeny in Exodus–Numbers, which would surely be expected of a thorough Deuteronom(ist)ic reworking of the Pentateuch with the promise motif, there is only Exod. 32.13. This verse appears in the middle of the golden calf episode, where Moses cites the promise in his appeal to YHWH not to destroy the Israelites. The parallel text in Deuteronomy 9 does not include a specific reiteration of the promise; instead, in the expected place, Deut. 9.27, there is only a general reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[18]

Rolf Rendtorff, a major proponent of an extensive Deuteronomic redaction in the Pentateuch, bases his argument for this redaction on the land promises.[19] He does not explain why a redactor would have added numerous references to the promise of land throughout the Pentateuch, while putting

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promise to the patriarchs. The comparisons to dust and sand never appear in Deuteronomy, although the stars do, but only twice (1.10; 10.22). Deut. 28.62 contains a reference to the stars as well, although in this case the Israelites are threatened with a curse that will decrease their numbers so that they are no longer as numerous as the stars. The root רבה appears twenty times in sixteen verses in Deuteronomy (1.10; 3.5; 6.3; 7.13, 22; 8.1, 13; 11.21; 13.18; 14.24; 17.16-17; 19.6; 28.63; 30.5, 16) but this is a common root and in only seven of these instances is it connected in some way with the promise to the fathers.

15. Deut. 30.5 also uses the verb יטב in the hiphil. This verb appears in the promise setting in Gen. 32.10, 13 (non-P), but in no other promises in Genesis and so is a very weak connection.

16. See, e.g., Moshe Anbar, 'Genesis 15: A Conflation of Two Deuteronomic Narratives', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 39-55; Blum, *Komposition*, p. 382; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 165.

17. Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 165, claims that the theme of inheritance, a major motif in Deuteronomy that also appears four times in Gen. 15, links the latter to the former. However, this argument does not stand up to scrutiny either. The specific link is the verb ירש, which appears in Gen. 15.3, 4, 7, 8. In the first two, however, it is related to a specific heir for Abraham's estate, and not to the D/tr concept of inheritance of the land. The connection seems more apparent in vv. 7 and 8, but the verb ירש appears elsewhere in connection with possessing the land in non-D/tr contexts (e.g. Gen. 28.4; Lev. 20.24; Num. 14.24; 21.24, etc.); it is an idiomatic expression and not exclusive to D/tr.

18. While A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1979), p. 203, says that this is an explicit reference to the promise to the patriarchs, it is sufficiently vague as to argue against the idea that the promise in Exod. 32.13 must be a D/tr addition. Deut. 9.27 does not mention an explicit promise, either for land or for progeny.

19. Rendtorff, *Problem*, pp. 94-99.

the promise of progeny into Genesis and leaving it out of Exodus–Numbers entirely. The vocabulary and phrasing in the Deuteronomic promises is also generally quite different from those in Genesis, and thus it is difficult to argue that the promises in Genesis derive from them.[20] The evidence is hardly overwhelming and it could just as easily be argued that a Deuteronomic editor knew the non-P material and occasionally drew on it.[21] The fact that the promises appear in P as well as non-P, sometimes with slightly different phrasing but with the same intent, suggests that the promise was a wide-spread, well-known motif, and need not be limited to only one biblical author. The evidence thus indicates that non-P incorporated these promises into the narrative as a structuring element; they are not redactional.

The Promises to Hagar

The non-P narrative also contains two promises for numerous offspring mediated through a woman, Hagar (Gen. 16.9-14 and 21.14-19), and unlike the general promise to the patriarchs, one includes a specific promise of a son as well.[22] The second of the two is the more straightforward, and so I will address it first. In Gen. 21.18, God tells Hagar that he will make Ishmael (who has already been born) into a great nation, a promise that he gave to Abraham in v. 13 of the same chapter. The narrative requires that God now make the promise concerning Ishmael to Hagar—as she has been permanently expelled from Abraham's household, she is effectively now the head of her family.[23] On the verge of perishing in the desert, this revelation of her son's fate will strengthen her to preserve him. The fact that the same promise, with strikingly similar phrasing, is delivered first to Abraham indicates that it belongs to the promise to the patriarchs. Abraham is now absent, and as the sole parent, Hagar is being notified of her son's promising future as well; Hagar is filling in for the patriarch.

The first part of Genesis 16 relates Hagar's conception and change in attitude toward her mistress. This is followed by an annunciation scene

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20. For the development of promise themes and the role of D/tr, specifically in relation to the promise of the land, see Marc Zvi Brettler, 'The Promise of the Land of Israel to the Patriarchs in the Pentateuch', *Shnaton* 5–6 (1983), pp. vii-xxiv.

21. Or, more controversially, it would be just as plausible to argue that non-P edited D; so, for instance, Frederick H. Cryer, 'On the Relationship between the Yahwistic and the Deuteronomistic Histories', *BN* 29 (1985), pp. 58-74. Similarly, some of these promise motifs appear in P, and yet they are not seen as evidence for P editing of the Pentateuch, even though a priestly editor is widely accepted.

22. Jo Ann Hackett, 'Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern', in Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference*, pp. 12-27 (15), notes the singular nature of this promise as well.

23. So Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg 1985), p. 343.

containing the major elements of the annunciation genre, which will be discussed further below, including instructions for naming the child and the oracle concerning his fate (vv. 11-12). In v. 10, an angel tells Hagar that YHWH will greatly increase her seed, but the placement of this promise of numerous offspring before the annunciation interrupts the flow of the angel's annunciation speech. Furthermore, v. 10 is the middle of a series of three verses that all begin with the same opening phrase, ויאמר לה מלאך יהוה, 'the angel of the LORD said to her',[24] resulting in an awkwardly repetitious passage. This repetition, combined with the fact that the promise of numerous offspring is out of place, suggests that v. 10 is a secondary borrowing from the promise to Hagar in ch. 21.[25] Although v. 10 does not repeat the promise from Genesis 21 verbatim, it shares aspects found in other promise texts and, like them is a general promise of an undefined but large number of future descendants, not of a specific child. It is only linked to the promise of a specific son secondarily and, notably, it is made through a woman. In the original formulation of the promise tradition, however, the patriarchs alone were the recipients of the general promise of numerous offspring.

Because these two stories are so similar, many scholars have concluded that they are variants of the same story of Hagar on the verge of perishing in the desert.[26] Genesis 21.8-21 is thus attributed to E, while Gen. 16.7-14 is attributed to J.[27] However, the two episodes need not stem from different authors. They are more likely two separate narrative traditions incorporated by a single author.[28] In the act of combining both traditions in a single narrative, the author incorporated an element of one story, the promise of numerous offspring in Genesis 21, into Genesis 16, thereby creating a secondary association between the promise of numerous offspring and the promise of the birth of a specific son, a separate traditional motif.

The Matriarchal Childbirth Traditions
The matriarchal childbirth traditions are an originally independent group of traditions that were unrelated to the patriarchal promises, as we shall see.[29] These promises concerned the births of specific children, always sons, often to be born in the near future. These were naturally conceived as parallels to

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24.   Translations of biblical passages follow NJPS unless otherwise noted.
25.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 236. Verse 9 is also an insertion, intended to join vv. 1-6 with the remainder of the chapter (pp. 244-45).
26.   So Hackett, 'Rehabilitating Hagar', p. 17; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 338.
27.   Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; MLBS; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 183, 225; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 191; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 263-64; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 234-36, 338.
28.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 338.
29.   See also Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, p. 132.

the promise of progeny to the patriarchs and thus the matriarchal and patriar-
chal traditions were eventually seen as two aspects of a single promise, as the
various elements of Israelite tradition were knit together into a single story.
Nevertheless, a detailed study of the elements of the promises reveals their
distinct formulae and unique origins.

The matriarchal childbirth traditions consist of a variety of elements, used
singly or in combination, much as the patriarchal promises also contain a set
of motifs and terms that may be variously utilized in a given episode. The
primary motifs of the matriarchal promises are barrenness or childlessness,
annunciation, which may include several other elements, and childbirth.[30]

Barrenness/Childlessness. The first and most prevalent element of the
matriarchal childbirth traditions is barrenness.[31] The very opening of the
ancestral history introduces this subject, reporting that Sarah is barren (ותהי
שׂרי עקרה אין לה ולד, Gen. 11.30).[32] This statement was likely added here
under the influence of the tradition of Sarah's childlessness in Genesis 16 and
18. Its placement in Genesis 11 reflects the use of the promise as a framing
element of the narrative, and as an introduction to the following chapter,
which opens with the first promise to Abraham. It thus serves as an
interpretive key for the following narrative of promise and sojourn in Egypt.
It also establishes dramatic tension: the promise cannot be fulfilled if Sarah is
barren. On the other hand, the barrenness provides some insurance as well:
since Sarah is barren, there is no possible challenge to Isaac's paternity when
Pharaoh takes her into his house.

In the final form of Genesis, Sarah's barrenness becomes essential to all
the narratives about her, but it is original to the promise/childbirth stories.
The integral nature of this element in the tradition is particularly evident in
Genesis 16. In that instance Sarah is not called עקרה, 'barren'. Rather, the
text states that she has not borne any children to Abraham (לא ילדה לו).
However, the explicit connection elsewhere (as for example in Gen. 11.30) of
barrenness (עקרה) with childlessness (using לא and ילד) indicates that the
two are synonymous, and perhaps that the combination is formulaic.[33]

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30.   On childbirth traditions, see Finlay, *Birth Report Genre.*

31.   Note that in Gen. 18, Sarah is post-menopausal, not barren, but again this contrasts
with the promise of a son. The same is the case in Gen. 17.17 (P).

32.   The use of עקרה in Gen. 11.30 indicates that it is to be assigned to non-P; the term
is used elsewhere only in non-P in Genesis (25.21; 29.31).

33.   See Gen. 29.31; 30.1; Judg. 13.2, 3; Isa. 54.1; Job 24.21; cf. 1 Sam. 2.5. Gen.
11.30 uses the unusual form ולד, in the phrase אין לה ולד; the same form occurs in a
kethib tradition of a similar phrase in 2 Sam. 6.23: לא היה לה ולד. Although *BHS* uses the
(normal) pausal form of the noun, many MT manuscripts maintain the *kethib* tradition for
2 Sam. 6.23. While Gunkel argues that ולד is a scribal error (Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 162),

Sarah's childlessness necessitates Hagar's appearance in the narrative, which gives rise to the rivalry between the wives; childlessness also adds a miraculous element to the eventual birth of Isaac.[34] Rebekah and Rachel are barren as well (Gen. 25.21; 29.31), and although Leah is not, she receives Yhwh's help to begin conceiving and to resume having children after a subsequent period of infertility. Barrenness and fertility are the cause of Leah and Rachel's rivalry, a main component of the entire Leah–Rachel narrative in Genesis 29–30. Because barrenness and childlessness also add a miraculous element to the birth, they heighten the narrative and the characters' status. Notably, Hagar is never barren; it would be an impossible addition to the story, her very purpose in the narrative being her surrogacy for the barren Sarah. Barrenness and fertility problems are a primary feature of all the matriarchal narratives; the promised child is born with difficulty and Yhwh's direct involvement is required.

In three of four cases where the matriarch is barren, she tries to circumvent her childlessness by giving her husband a concubine: Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham; Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob; and Leah gives him Zilpah. While all of these unions are fruitful, none provides a permanent solution to the primary wife's dissatisfaction, although for different reasons in each case. Hagar's son Ishmael is specifically excluded as Abraham's heir and is eventually driven away, while Sarah bears the rightful heir, Isaac. Although Bilhah and Zilpah's sons are counted among the twelve fathers of the Israelite tribes, Rachel and Leah are not content with only their handmaids' sons; both go on to have sons of their own and the primary tribes of Ephraim and Judah come from Rachel and Leah.

Annunciation. A second major element of the matriarchal traditions is the annunciation scene, often an extended episode comprised of several elements. The annunciation concerns a birth that is always impending or even immediate, and may include a divine messenger, the announcement of conception, and instructions and/or an etiology for naming the child.

Divine Messenger. Divine messengers visit Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21, which were discussed above. They also appear to Sarah in Genesis 18.[35]

Westermann's conclusion that ולד is a rare, archaic form is preferable (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 139). The word is a frozen form that is associated with an old motif of barrenness.

34.   Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One*, p. 21.

35.   Gen. 18–19 is generally recognized to be a combination of four distinct narrative threads, all non-P. The first narrative is the visit of three men to Abraham (18.1b-2, 4-8, 16, 22). The second involves Yhwh's appearance to Abraham and Sarah to announce the impending birth of their child (18.9-15). The third is a dialogue between Yhwh and Abraham concerning whether Sodom and Gomorrah should be destroyed. The fourth

Although Abraham is the central figure in the opening verses of this chapter (vv. 1-8), once the annunciation scene begins in v. 9 he recedes somewhat, although he is still addressed by the messengers. Some scholars argue that Sarah plays only a peripheral role in this chapter, preparing the food and standing in the shadows of the tent throughout the annunciation, but this argument ignores the extent of her interactions with the messenger(s) in vv. 12-15, where she is central to the narrative and speaks directly to (and contradicts!) YHWH.[36] It is very likely that an earlier form of the tradition saw the messenger speaking directly to Sarah, as happens in other annunciations, and as Westermann suggests.[37]

   Although no divine messengers visit Rebekah or Isaac, Isaac requests and receives YHWH's help in allowing Rebekah to conceive (Gen. 25.21). Once she has conceived, Rebekah has a difficult pregnancy and seeks out YHWH's help again, this time through an oracle that she requests and receives without Isaac's involvement (vv. 22-23).[38] Both of these involve some kind of divine or supernatural power and may thus be included in this category. There are no divine messengers in the Rachel–Leah narrative.

Announcement of Birth or Impending Birth. The annunciation, of course, also includes the announcement that the woman will have a son or that she is already pregnant. The promise of the son is always delivered to a woman in non-P.[39] In Gen. 16.11 we find the phrase הִנָּךְ הָרָה וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן, 'see, you are pregnant with a son'. The anomalous form וְיֹלַדְתְּ appears to be a conflation of a participle and a converted perfect, although it is impossible to say whether this is an archaic form or a later conflation.[40] However, the phrase

concerns the episode in Sodom (19.1-28), although this narrative is also comprised of multiple traditions. Sarah appears in the traditions combined in 18.1-15 but is absent from the remainder of chs. 18–19. The boundaries between these four combined narratives are often blurred, and all of the units have lost some elements in the process of combination. See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 277; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 192.

   36.   Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', *Semeia* 46 (1989), pp. 151-66 (153).

   37.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 274-75. Cf. Gen. 16.9-11; Judg. 13.3; 2 Kgs 4.16, and perhaps also 1 Sam. 1.17.

   38.   Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, pp. 80-81. The phrase לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוה, 'to seek YHWH', when it refers to seeking an oracle, usually involves a prophet. No prophet is mentioned in this passage and YHWH appears to be speaking directly to Rebekah in v. 23. However, the narrative may simply assume a prophetic intermediary.

   39.   Gen. 15, in which Abraham is told he will have an heir, is not a true promise of a son; see the discussion below.

   40.   So Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 187; *HALOT* 2, p. 411. Joüon, §§16g, 89j says the form may be a *lectio mixta* meant to leave open either option; GKC, §§80d, 94f argues that it is an archaic form of the participle.

הנך הרה וילדת בן occurs in Judg. 13.5 and 7, and with the usual participial form of ילד in Isa. 7.14; this evidence points to the entire phrase being a formulaic element of an old annunciation tradition.[41]

The announcement to Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 18 begins with a report that they are old and that Sarah is past menopause, rather than barren as in Gen. 11.30. Isaac's conception and birth are a particularly stunning miracle. YHWH is not simply allowing a woman who would otherwise be fertile to conceive; he is changing the very nature of her body, overriding the fact that she is already past menopause.[42] The announcement in this case is שׁוב אשׁוב אליך כעת חיה והנה־בן לשׂרה אשׁתך, 'I will return to you in a year's time,[43] and your wife Sarah will have a son' (18.10). The use of והנה, although it is common in the Hebrew Bible, indicates that the annunciation provides new and exciting information.[44]

Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah do not receive specific annunciations, although the oracle given to Rebekah in Genesis 25 may stand in its place. YHWH's response in v. 23 concerns the fate of the two sons Rebekah is carrying; it has the characteristics of an annunciation, although it comes at a point in the text when Rebekah already knows she is pregnant. Westermann suggests that vv. 22-23 are secondary to the surrounding narrative.[45] Their removal smoothes the text out considerably, resulting in two connected narratives that could easily stem from separate, although related, versions of the Rebekah birth tradition. In one, Rebekah is barren and conceives after Isaac's prayer (v. 21); she finds out that she is bearing twins only at the end of her term, as they are being born (v. 24). In the other (vv. 22-23), Rebekah has a problematic pregnancy and seeks an oracle to explain why she is having trouble. The oracle reveals that she is having twins. Once it is recognized that these are two distinct narratives, it is no longer problematic that in v. 24 the narrator presents the news of the twins as though it is a surprise. Non-P brings the traditions together, but the two are not easily attributed to separate sources and thus this episode offers further evidence for non-P as a compiler of traditions, rather than requiring independent sources like J and E.

Coupled with the motif of barrenness in v. 21, this Rebekah narrative conforms to the annunciation type-scene despite being out of order.[46]

41.   See Brettler, *Judges*, pp. 43-49, who suggests that Judg. 13 may belong to an older, oral circle of women's traditions. See also Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, pp. 134-35.

42.   See Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 197.

43.   On this phrase, see Oswald Loretz, 'k't ḥyh— "wie jetzt ums Jahr" Gen 18,10', *Bib* 43 (1962), pp. 75-78.

44.   See Dennis J. McCarthy, 'The Uses of *wehinnēh* in Biblical Hebrew', *Bib* 61 (1980), pp. 330-42 (332-33).

45.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 412-13.

46.   So Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 112.

Additionally, although the Rachel–Leah narrative is missing specific annun-
ciations, numerous other elements of the childbirth traditions do appear in it,
including barrenness, actions of God to allow conception, conception, birth,
and naming, accompanied by etiologies, indicating that this material indeed
belongs to the same genre of women's childbirth traditions. The number of
children involved may have obviated the need for specific annunciation(s), as
the other annunciations appear in instances where there is only a single,
unique birth.

Etiology. The annunciation may also contain an etiology for the name of the
child to be born.[47] The etiology is usually related to the immediate experience
of the mother, either in the form of instructions for naming, or in the mother's
speech or action.[48] For example, in Gen. 16.11 the divine messenger instructs
Hagar to name her son Ishmael, because YHWH has heeded (שמע) her suffer-
ing. In other cases the etiology is implicit only; thus in Gen. 18.12, Sarah
hears that she will bear a child, sparking her laughter in disbelief (ותצחק) and
thereby providing a direct etiology for Isaac's name. In this case, although no
instructions are given, the entire narrative serves an etiological purpose.[49]

In some instances the etiology is part of the birth scene rather than the
annunciation, in which case it may be related to the child's nature and/or
future, as is the case with Jacob, who not only comes out grasping his
brother's heel (עקב; Gen. 25.26), but who also supplants his brother's place
as firstborn (ויעקבני; Gen. 27.36). As part of the birth scene, the etiology may
also relate to the mother's experience. So, for example, after Isaac is born,
Sarah says, צחק עשה לי אלהים כל־השמע יצחק־לי, 'God has made laughter for
me; everyone who hears will laugh with me' (Gen. 21.6). In this case, the
connection to Isaac's name is not direct—it does not contain the phrase
ותקרא שמו, 'so she named him', for example—but the etiology is nonethe-
less clear. The abundance of references to laughter in the scenes involving
Isaac's annunciation and birth indicate that this was a pervasive tradition.[50]

Rebekah's oracle (Gen. 25.23) also contains an etiological element for
Esau's name in the use of the term צעיר, 'smaller', the name of a town in

47.   On etiologies, see Herbert Marks, 'Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology', *JBL*
114 (1995), pp. 21-42; *ABD* VI, pp. 970-71.

48.   In the cases where the etiology is from the father's perspective, the fathers are the
protagonists of the narrative and the women are less visible. See, for instance, the
examples from the Joseph and Moses narratives, discussed below. Cf. also Gen. 5.29.

49.   Scholars have noted that having Sarah laugh results in a slightly less apt etiology
for Isaac's name than if Abraham laughed; cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 281.
However, it is precisely for this reason that the feminine etiology is the more original; it is
the more difficult, whereas if the masculine had been arrived at first, there would have
been little justification to change it to the feminine.

50.   Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 334.

Edom (2 Kgs 8.21) that evokes the name שֵׂעִיר, Seir, another name for Edom.[51] The wordplay is odd in that it is Jacob who is the 'smaller' or younger of the twins; the etiology points to the overturning of Esau's status as firstborn. The account of Jacob and Esau's birth contains etiologies as well, although none that directly relates to the name Esau. Esau is described as ruddy and hairy, phrases that evoke the names Edom and Seir.[52]

The Rachel–Leah material contains explicit etiologies for all twelve sons, but as the Rachel–Leah narrative contains no separate annunciations, these appear in the extensive birth narrative found in Genesis 29–30 (and 35). Rachel and Leah name all the sons, providing etiologies for each one; most of the etiologies have to do with the competition between the sisters to have sons and win their husband's affections. When Benjamin is born (Gen. 35.16-18), Rachel names him Ben-oni in recognition of the difficult birth that costs her life, although no explicitly etiological connection is made.[53] Jacob renames him Benjamin, giving no etiology, although the meaning of the name ('son of the south', and perhaps also 'son of the right hand = son of fortune') is transparent.[54]

Childbirth. The final element in the matriarchal childbirth traditions is the actual birth of the child. This may include Yhwh/God remembering or look-ing to the woman, birth (sometimes linked directly with conception), and naming, often including an etiology for the child's name, if the etiology was not given in the annunciation scene. It is not entirely clear whether the motif of remembering/seeing to the woman and/or opening her womb belongs with the childbirth scene or with the annunciation scene. Owing to the fact that it is generally followed by the phrase ותהר ותלד, however, it is probably best included with the birth element.[55] In Gen. 21.1, Yhwh 'looks to' (פקד) Sarah and does as he had promised in Genesis 18.[56] Although this verse belongs to

51. See John R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup, 77; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), p. 41.

52. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 414, notes that the meaning of the name Esau had apparently been lost at a fairly early stage. On the connection of Esau with Edom, see Bartlett, *Edom*, pp. 83-102.

53. Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 153. An etiology would require some statement from Rachel explaining the name; in this instance, the etiology is only implied.

54. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 555; Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 151 n. 237.

55. Gen. 21.1-2; 29.31-32; 30.17; 30.22-23; 1 Sam. 2.21.

56. On the separation of the annunciation from the actual birth and naming, Wester-mann argues that it was originally part of the same narrative tradition, but that the elements were separated in order to fill in the narrative; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 274. The verb פקד is used again for Hannah in 1 Sam. 2.21; it also appears in Gen. 50.24 regarding the fulfillment of a promise, and in Exod. 3.16; 4.31; 13.19 in reference to Yhwh noticing the plight of the Israelites in Egypt. Implicit in this idea is not only heeding or noticing, but taking action as well. See *TDOT* XII, pp. 54-55.

non-P, it is followed by a P insertion in vv. 2-5 that shifts the focus to Abraham, who names the child and circumcises him.[57] However, vv. 2-3 contain elements like ותהר ותלד and קרא שם that were probably part of both the non-P and the P narratives originally, meaning that the two cannot be completely disentangled here.[58] The prevalence of the phrase ותהר ותלד in non-P birth narratives suggests that this part at least would have been found in non-P. Verses 6 and 7 (non-P) return to Sarah's perspective, the former containing the second etiology for Isaac's name.

   Although the Rebekah tradition does not say that YHWH 'remembers' or 'takes note' of her, it does report that when Isaac prayed on her behalf, YHWH heeded his prayer (Gen. 25.21). Verse 24, as noted above, confirms that Rebekah is having twins. The remainder of the passage is the etiology for Jacob and Esau, also discussed above. The verbs appear without specific subjects, meaning they could be impersonal or be construed as passives.[59] They do not necessarily indicate that Isaac, as opposed to Rebekah, named the infants. This short narrative combines all the elements of the promise motif in a few verses and out of the typical order, and yet it contains the requisite features of barrenness, annunciation, as well as birth.

   The Rachel–Leah narrative contains nearly all the birth notices in one continuous narrative (Gen. 29.31–30.24). The last, the birth of Ben-oni/Benjamin, appears a few chapters later (Gen. 35.16-18). The narrative begins in 29.31 with YHWH opening Leah's womb, because he sees that she is unloved: וירא יהוה כי־שנואה לאה ויפתח את־רחמה. Although she has not been barren, this is parallel to the instances of YHWH looking to the woman and allowing her to conceive. After Leah stops bearing children (29.35), God's[60] action is again required for subsequent births. In 30.17, God 'hears' (שמע) Leah and allows her to begin conceiving again. And finally, in 30.22, God

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   57.   On P's account of events, see below, Chapter 4.
   58.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 331. It is unusual to see non-P and P combined so thoroughly, and to require words to belong to both sources. An alternate explanation is that vv. 2-5 are entirely P, and have simply displaced the non-P account of the birth and naming. However, both elements would have been necessary in both narratives, and thus it is possible to reconstruct a hypothetical model for each.
   59.   GKC, §144b, f, g. *BHS* notes 25a and 26a show that the forms of the verb vary in the textual witnesses; some have a singular in v. 25, while some have a plural in v. 26.
   60.   Both divine names, יהוה and אלהים, are used in this larger unit. If these are in fact indicators of different source material, this chapter again offers compelling evidence for the intertwined nature of this material and the difficulty in separating out originally independent strands. On divisions into J and E, see Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 321; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 265; Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 126. The attribution of certain verses to E rather than J disregards the highly formulaic nature of the narrative. Gunkel's assertion that there are traces of P in the chapter must be rejected; it is based on the use of the term שפחה, which is by no means exclusive to P; see, e.g., its use in Gen. 16.

both remembers (זכר) and hears (שמע) Rachel before opening her womb.[61] This element does not appear in the sections concerning Bilhah and Zilpah since, as surrogates, their fertility is both required and assumed, like Hagar's. The account of the birth of Benjamin (Ben-oni) in Gen. 35.16-18 departs more significantly from the previous Rachel–Leah births. It takes place while the family is traveling, and is thus outside the tradition of the sisters' rivalry.

In this series of birth narratives, a distinct pattern develops, which is best illustrated with a chart of the component elements.

Verses	Mother	Son	Verbs			
29.32	Leah	Reuben	אמרה	ותקרא	ותלד	ותהר
29.33	Leah	Simeon	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
29.34	Leah	Levi	קרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
29.35	Leah	Judah	קראה	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
30.5-6	Bilhah (Rachel)	Dan	קראה	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
30.7-8	Bilhah (Rachel)	Naphtali	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
30.10-11	Zilpah (Leah)	Gad	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	cf. LXX[62]
30.12-13	Zilpah (Leah)	Asher	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	cf. LXX
30.17-18	Leah	Issachar	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
30.19-20	Leah	Zebulun	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
30.21	Leah	Dinah	ותקרא		ילדה	
30.23-24	Rachel	Joseph	ותקרא	ותאמר	ותלד	ותהר
35.16-18	Rachel	Ben-oni/ Benjamin	ותקרא		ותלד	

61. Gen. 29.33 and 30.6 both contain the verb שמע in the etiologies for the sons born, the mother acknowledging that Yhwh or God (respectively) has heard her and given her a son.

62. Although the element ותהר is missing in these two verses, LXX has the Greek equivalent, καὶ συνέλαβε, in both cases. The idea that the missing verb might be related to the status of the mother as a handmaid is untenable, not least because the verb appears in the birth reports of Bilhah (see Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 125 n. 141). It might be tempting to say that this is a harmonistic addition in LXX, as does Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 117 n. 122, following Wevers. The LXX reading is compelling, as the majority of other birth reports include this element. The other two cases in which ותהר does not appear are the births of Dinah (30.21) and of Ben-oni/Benjamin (35.16). The former breaks from the traditional formula, probably because it relates the birth of a daughter. The latter is missing the conception because the narrative picks up in the middle of a journey, during which Rachel was already pregnant.

Texts outside Genesis

The wealth of common elements in the birth narratives points to a well-established and self-standing genre. The appearance of a promise alongside these other elements, and often linked inseparably to them, shows that the promise of a son is part of the matriarchal childbirth traditions. The promise of a son was not originally linked with the promise to the patriarchs, nor do most of non-P's ancestral narratives make this connection. In addition to the texts discussed thus far, three texts from outside the Pentateuch confirm the promise of a son as a distinct genre of narrative tradition.

Judges 13.2-24. The first text, Judg. 13.2-24, concerns Manoah and his wife, the future parents of Samson. Manoah is a marginal character in the story—although he appears throughout, he is slow on the uptake; his wife is the obvious protagonist.[63] Manoah's wife is barren and has never given birth (עקרה ולא ילדה; Judg. 13.2, cf. 13.3).[64] She receives a visit from a divine messenger who announces that she is pregnant and will have a son (הנך הרה וילדת בן; v. 5),[65] and she names her child herself. Throughout the passage we find words and phrases that appear in the Genesis texts and elsewhere, suggesting a common stock of traditional phrases. This narrative also contains the element of dedicating the son as a nazirite.

1 Samuel 1.1–2.21. At the beginning of the book of Samuel, we again find rival wives. Like Rachel, Hannah is barren. The narrative also explicitly notes that her husband Elkanah loves her, as Jacob loved Rachel. Like Rebekah, Hannah seeks YHWH's help in conceiving. She also promises to dedicate her son to YHWH, possibly as a nazirite.[66] While there is no divine messenger

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63. Cf. Ackerman, *Warrior*, pp. 111-13; Yairah Amit, '"Manoah Promptly Followed his Wife" (Judges 13.11): On the Place of the Woman in Birth Narratives', in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (FCB, 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 146-56; Brettler, *Judges*, p. 45; Exum, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 246. Also note v. 9, where the author is sure to point out that Manoah is not present.

64. The same phrase appears in Isa 54.1 and with slight variation in Job 24.21.

65. The messenger actually makes this announcement twice, in slightly different forms. In Judg. 13.3, he tells her והרית וילדת בן. On the unusual form וְיָלַדְתְּ, see the discussion above.

66. Although the term נזיר is never used here, the phrase ומורה לא־יעלה על־ראשו may indicate that he will be a nazirite. Cf. Num. 6.5 (albeit with a different word for razor); Judg. 13.5, 7; 16.17. Additionally, when Eli mistakes Hannah for a drunk, she says ויין ושכר לא שתיתי, a phrase reminiscent of the restrictions for the nazirite (cf. Num. 6.3; Judg. 13.4, 7, 14). Cf., however, Matitiahu Tsevat, 'Was Samuel a Nazirite?', in Michael Fishbane, Emanuel Tov, and Weston W. Fields (eds.), *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 199-204. Tsevat argues that the non-MT trend toward

here, the priest Eli acts in the capacity of intermediary with the divine in confirming the fulfillment of Hannah's request. In 2.20 he again prays that Elkanah and Hannah may have more children to take the place of Samuel, who is now living at the sanctuary. In 1.19, YHWH remembers (זכר) Hannah, and Hannah has a son whom she names herself, providing an etiology for his name as well (albeit the wrong etiology!). In 1 Sam. 2.21, YHWH looks to (פקד) Hannah, and she conceives and gives birth to three more sons and two daughters.[67]

2 Kings 4.11-17. In 2 Kings 4, Elisha and his servant Gehazi visit a Shunammite woman whose husband is old and who has no son, suggesting barrenness. A divine messenger, Elisha, is involved and, like Sarah, the woman expresses disbelief when she is told that she will bear a son (v. 16). Additionally, this passage uses the phrases למועד הזה and כעת חיה, found elsewhere only in Gen. 17.21 (P) and Gen. 18.10, 14 (non-P), two annunciation scenes.[68]

The Combination of the Traditions
The above examples feature a distinct set of elements included in the matriarchal childbirth stories, and thus indicate that this was a genre known and used widely in biblical tradition. It was not limited only to the matriarchs, but extended to other women in Israelite tradition as well, and it had a standard but flexible set of phrases and motifs. These matriarchal promise/ childbirth traditions were in no way connected to the promise to the patriarchs, which features a completely different set of motifs and distinct vocabulary. Not only are the patriarchal promise elements missing from the matriarchal traditions, but also, with the exception of the appearance of the divine messenger—a very common biblical occurrence—none of the matriarchal childbirth elements appear in the patriarchal promise of numerous progeny either. We are dealing, then, with two distinct genres of narrative, that of the promise of general, numerous progeny and that relating to the birth of a specific child or children. This latter also contains the 'promise of a specific son' that is frequently included with the promise to the patriarchs but that is not in fact an original element of that tradition. The promises of numerous progeny to the patriarchs are originally independent from the matriarchal stories about

adding nazirite elements to Hannah's vow are later attempts to add the element of Samuel as a nazirite into the older tradition.

67. Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 141.
68. Gen. 18.14 uses למועד alone, although it also uses כעת חיה. 2 Kgs 4.11-17 contains certain jumps in the narrative that some have seen as indicative of later interpolations; cf. Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL, 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 53. It is possible that we are dealing here with a late tradition that knows both the non-P and the P terminology.

barrenness, childbirth, and the promise of a specific son, and while one
matriarch receives the patriarchal promise, no patriarch ever receives the
matriarchal one. The origins of the latter are unclear, but their ubiquity and
their adaptability suggests that they are relatively ancient traditions.

Of course, these two originally independent traditions exist in relation to
each other in the text as we have it. The connection is clear to the reader: the
promise of offspring cannot be fulfilled without that first son being born. It is
no surprise that the ancient authors made this connection as well. In three
texts, these traditions are explicitly combined: Genesis 15, 16, and 17. That
these passages occur in such close succession is probably not coincidental.
Genesis 16 was discussed above; the promise of numerous offspring there is
a secondary interpolation into an original matriarchal childbirth story. Fur-
thermore, Hagar occupies a unique position in the narrative, being the sole
woman to receive the promise of numerous progeny. Placing this promise in
the midst of an annunciation of a specific son links the traditions together
secondarily while maintaining the childbirth tradition's association with the
mother.

Genesis 15 and 17, however, involve male characters. The first text
belongs to non-P and the second to P. Genesis 17 is the only text in which
both genres are organically combined and will be discussed in detail in
Chapter 4. Genesis 15, on the other hand, is one of the Pentateuch's more
famously difficult chapters, problematic at best and impossible at worst. Its
compositional history, unity, and dating are matters of much debate and it is
probably one of the latest non-P Abraham traditions.[69] For the sake of this
discussion only vv. 1-6 are relevant; eliminating the rest of the chapter from
the discussion solves certain problems, although it is worth noting that, like
Genesis 17, the remainder of the chapter includes a covenant between YHWH
and Abraham, suggesting a general association of the themes of promise and
covenant in both non-P and P.[70] For the sake of this discussion, I will assume
the unity of vv. 1-6.

Genesis 15.1-6 combines the general promise of offspring, in this case an
analogy to the countless stars, with an ostensible promise of specific off-
spring in v. 4. However, this promise of specific offspring is not the same

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69.   Contra Alt, *Essays*, pp. 84-85, who sees the chapter as 'genuinely ancient'. Anbar,
'Genesis', pp. 39-55, sees the chapter as a combination of two Deuteronomic works. Cf.
also Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 214-16; John Ha, *Genesis 15: A Theological
Compendium of Pentateuchal History* (BZAW, 181; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1989).

70.   This is not the same covenant that we find made with all Israel; rather, it is an oath
of obligation that YHWH makes, with no corresponding action required of Abraham. See
Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and his People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 90; on the ritual as an element in establishing the
covenant, see Nicholson, *God and his People*, p. 97, and cf. Jer. 34.18-19.

type of reference to a specific birth that appears elsewhere: it lacks the traditional elements from the matriarchal announcements of a specific son and is in fact extremely vague.[71] It does not say that the child will be born soon, as the women's stories do, nor does it specify which wife will bear the child, or give any intimation of a name or an etiology. This alleged promise, a response to Abraham's complaint that he has no heir besides the mysterious Damesek Eliezer, is worded as follows:

לא יירשך זה כי־אם אשר יצא ממעיך הוא יירשך

> This one will not inherit you, but rather one who will be your own issue, he
> will inherit you.

The star analogy of the general promise follows this statement, but as Westermann notes, it is an addition to the promise rather than a confirmation of it.[72] This so-called specific promise in v. 4 contains none of the elements of the matriarchal traditions examined above. It is concerned with inheritance, rather than with the fulfillment of the promise specifically, although a promise follows it. There is thus no combination of the matriarchal and patriarchal traditions here.

Non-P as an edited whole does make a connection between the patriarchal promise and the matriarchal childbirth traditions, as indicated by the placement of Gen. 11.30, an announcement of Sarah's barrenness, before the promise in 12.1-3. The two traditions exist in narrative tension with each other, but they still maintain their independence. In Genesis 15, non-P has provided a more-specific promise to Abraham, a promise that alleviates the narrative tension without specifically taking over the matriarchal tradition. Non-P thus begins to treat the two traditions as thematically related and linked to the concept of covenant, but each still maintains its own independent nature. Only in the priestly material, as Chapter 4 will show, are the promises combined completely.

Conclusions

The evidence both from Genesis and from other biblical books shows that there is an original genre of stories about childbirth in which women are the primary figures. In these narratives, women are the recipients of specific promises or announcements, often delivered by divine messengers. The women name their children, in many cases providing personalized etiologies for the names they have chosen. Husbands may be involved, but they are not the protagonists of the stories. The traditions about the matriarchs having

71. Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, p. 17.
72. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 221.

children belong to this genre and include both general birth narratives as well as stories involving a specific promise of a son, a closely related theme. These matriarchal traditions developed separately from the general promise of numerous progeny to the patriarchs. The genres contain no common elements and the stock vocabulary used in each makes clear just how distinct from each other the two are. The author of the non-P material has structured the narrative traditions so that they appear in relation to each other, but nevertheless they remain independent of each other. An explicit connection is only made in the case of Hagar, where the final form of the narrative requires that she receive the promise concerning Ishmael, but the connection is secondary and not organic to the structure of the narrative. Genesis 15 does not contain a promise of a specific son, as some have claimed, and so non-P maintains the tradition that links this motif with the matriarchs alone.

3. *Wife–Sister Stories*

The second primary group of matriarchal texts is the wife–sister narratives found in Gen. 12.10–13.1;[73] 20.1-18; and 26.1-11. These only concern two of the matriarchs—Sarah and Rebekah—but they are a substantial part of the narratives about Sarah in particular. In all three, the patriarch and matriarch, living in a foreign land, present themselves as brother and sister rather than husband and wife. The three stories vary in detail, and although all draw on the same basic motifs, there is much disagreement among scholars about the precise relationship of the variants to each other.[74] According to most traditional criticism, all three belong to non-P; the variants in Genesis 12 and 26 are typically assigned to J, Genesis 20 to E. Most consider Gen. 12.10–13.1 to be the oldest of the variants, but opinion is divided as to the relative dating

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73. Although scholars generally agree that 12.10 marks the opening of the narrative, the end is a matter of some small debate, some choosing to finish with 12.20, and others including 13.1 as part of the same narrative unit. On the latter, see in particular David L. Petersen, 'A Thrice-Told Tale: Genre, Theme, and Motif', *BibRes* 18 (1973), pp. 30-43 (34), who notes that 13.2 contains a disjunctive clause marking the beginning of the next unit. Including 13.1 provides the last element of resolution to the story, with Abraham leaving Egypt as instructed. Cf. also T. Desmond Alexander, 'Are the Wife/Sister Incidents of Genesis Literary Compositional Variants?', *VT* 42 (1992), pp. 145-53; Howard Wallace, 'On Account of Sarai: Gen 12.10–13.1', *AusBR* 44 (1996), pp. 32-41.

74. See, e.g., Alexander, 'Wife/Sister Incidents', pp. 145-53; J. Cheryl Exum, 'Who's Afraid of "The Endangered Ancestress"?', in Exum and Clines (eds.), *New Literary Criticism*, pp. 91-113; Eugene H. Maly, 'Genesis 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26,7-11 and the Pentateuchal Question', *CBQ* 18 (1956), pp. 255-62; Robert Polzin, '"The Ancestress of Israel in Danger" in Danger', *Semeia* 3 (1975), pp. 81-97; Van Seters, *Abraham*, pp. 167-91; Petersen, 'Thrice-Told Tale', pp. 30-43.

of the other two.[75] Van Seters argues that the canonical order reflects the order of composition, with only Gen. 12.10–13.1 going back to an early oral tradition, the other two being literary compositional variants dependent on the previous text(s).[76] T.D. Alexander argues that the existence of narrative variants does not require different authors for each story. Rather, he posits that all three come from a single author who drew on earlier traditions.[77] Susan Niditch abandons source-critical arguments and treats each episode as an independent narrative concerned with similar themes and motifs.[78]

The first part of Genesis 12 contains a combination of itinerary notices and a promise to the patriarch. Nothing directly links this material with the following wife–sister narrative. In its current context, the reader is meant to read the story in light of the information that Sarah is barren and that Abraham has been promised a great heritage, but the original setting of the story was quite independent of this context.[79] The theme of Sarah being barren is foreign to the wife–sister narrative, where it is unnecessary and in fact decreases the drama of the story. In the oldest form of the narrative, barrenness would have obviated some of the tension, an unlikely choice for a story in which narrative tension is an important element. Although taking the wife into Pharaoh's house constitutes a social transgression and danger by itself, the risk that Sarah will bear Pharaoh's child adds drama. Because the episode was originally independent of stories about Isaac's birth, Isaac's paternity specifically would not have been a concern. The promise of offspring and the theme of fertility have no role in the story itself; none of these things is mentioned, nor is the possibility that Sarah could have become pregnant addressed. Only in the combined narrative did an author or editor deem it necessary to clarify that Sarah could not have become pregnant by Pharaoh, by affixing the note of barrenness in Gen. 11.30. As the promise narratives illustrate, direct intervention of YHWH is needed to counteract the barrenness. Thus, in the final form of the text, Isaac's paternity is safe, but this is an added element missing from the wife–sister story itself.

Sarah never speaks or acts in Gen. 12.10–13.1. She is mentioned by name twice (vv. 11, 17); otherwise she is referred to as '(his/your) wife'.[80] This puts a decided emphasis on the fact that Sarah is Abraham's wife, and thus

75. See, e.g., Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 223-25; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 105. Cf. Brettler, 'Promise of the Land', pp. vii-xxiv. The primary reason for assigning Gen. 20 to E is the use of a revelatory dream, an alleged hallmark of the Elohist; the use of the name Elohim also supports this assignment, as it appears five times in this episode and not at all in the other two.

76. Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 183; also Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 161.

77. Alexander, 'Wife/Sister Incidents', p. 152.

78. Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*, pp. 23-69.

79. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 162.

80. 12.11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20; 13.1.

indicates that the transgression of the marital relationship is the central component of the narrative.[81] Nor is there any doubt that she is his wife, not his sister as in Gen. 20.12. In v. 13 Abraham asks Sarah to say she is his sister so that it will 'go well for him because of her' (למען ייטב־לי בעבורך) and so that he 'will live because of her' (וחיתה נפשי בגללך). Verse 16 reports that, after Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's house, things go well for Abraham because of her (בעבורה). When YHWH strikes Pharaoh's household with plagues it, is 'over the matter of' (על־דבר) Sarah. Sarah is the primary impetus for considerable male action.[82] She is essential to Abraham's plan as well as to YHWH's response. Without her there would be no point to this story. She is both the problem and the solution.

Pharaoh's statement ואקח אתה לי לאשה, 'I took her as my wife' (12.19), suggests that he had sexual relations with Sarah.[83] This seems to be the main motivation for YHWH striking Pharaoh's house with a plague, and yet the story is vague on this point. The primary intent of the story is to show how the patriarch lied about his wife for his own advancement and got away with it. As some feminists note, the interests of the woman are not really considered.[84] Abraham is acting to save his own skin; how Sarah might feel about the arrangement is left unaddressed, because the story is simply not concerned with Sarah's perspective. She is important only insofar as she embodies the relationship of wife that Pharaoh is violating, and thus she provides the impetus for action. This limited role is critical to the story, but Abraham and Pharaoh are the main players and it is ultimately their story.

Whereas Abraham tells Sarah of his plan and nominally requests her agreement to it in Genesis 12, Genesis 20 contains no such niceties. The narrative shifts the emphasis from wife to sister, however. The word אשה, 'woman/wife', occurs only seven times in reference to Sarah in this chapter, although the narrative is twice as long as the parallel in Genesis 12. The word אחות, 'sister', occurs three times in the chapter, versus twice in Genesis 12, and Genesis 20 includes the element that Sarah is in fact Abraham's sister: they share a father but not a mother (v. 12). Despite evidence that the term אחות can also mean 'kinswoman', much as אח can mean 'kinsman',[85] in this instance such an argument is complicated by the fact that Abraham goes on

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81. Wallace, 'On Account of Sarai', p. 37.

82. Wallace, 'On Account of Sarai', p. 37.

83. See, for instance, Gen. 24.67; Exod. 6.20, 23, 25; 2 Sam. 12.9. The Exodus passages in particular make the connection explicit.

84. Exum, 'Endangered Ancestress', pp. 91-113; Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Sarai's Exile: A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12.10–13.2', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 222-34.

85. Jacques and Marie-Claire Nicole, 'Sara, soeur et femme d'Abraham', *ZAW* 112 (2000), pp. 5-23. See *HALOT* I, p. 29.

to explain that they share a father but not a mother. The most likely inter-
pretation is that Abraham means that Sarah is his actual sister, not a more
distantly related kinswoman. The text is silent on the issue of incest, the
statement that Sarah is Abraham's sister serving only to cast a more positive
light on Abraham.[86]

   Most of this story is really about interactions between Abraham and
Abimelech. However, the last few verses contain some seeming exceptions.
Although it is difficult to untangle, v. 16 is key for this discussion. The
phrase כסות עינים לכל אשר אתך, 'a covering of the eyes for all who are with
you' (v. 16), is clear in a very literal sense. That it is intended to absolve
Sarah of any guilt is likewise clear.[87] The issue is whose eyes are concerned,
and to whom or what לכל אשר אתך refers. Westermann argues that it is the
eyes of others that are to be covered, and those others are also the referent of
the end of the phrase.[88] When a form of the root כסה, 'cover', appears with
עין, 'eye', elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the sense is that the thing being
covered is obscured from the view of others.[89] Analogously, Sarah is covered
or shielded from the view of others.[90] The image is one of feminine modesty,
and brings to mind the suspected adulteress whose head is uncovered (Num.
5.18) before YHWH, presumably as a sign of shame.[91]

   The end of Gen. 20.16 is even more problematic. As it stands, MT reads
וְאֶת כֹּל וְנֹכָחַת, which, translated literally, reads: 'and with all/everyone, and
you are exonerated'.[92] Again, the syntax is awkward while the sense is clear:
Sarah's honor is being restored—or if not restored, then confirmed. Despite
the fact that Abimelech did not violate her, explicit mention is made of the
need to establish this fact. Abimelech gives Abraham one thousand shekels to
compensate them for the humiliation that Sarah has endured. Furthermore,
Abimelech tells Sarah that he has given the money to her 'brother', rather
than to her 'husband', the word choice emphasizing the sibling relationship

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   86.   Although contemporary cultures, namely Egypt, did engage in such sibling
marriages, the biblical prohibitions against such unions suggest that this was not typical in
ancient Israel.
   87.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 328.
   88.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 328.
   89.   Exod. 10.5, 15; Num. 22.5, 11.
   90.   Tamar covers herself when she masquerades as a roadside prostitute (Gen. 38.14-
15). Other references refer to the face being covered with shame (Jer. 51.51; Ezek. 7.18;
Ps. 44.16; 69.8).
   91.   On this passage, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'The Strange Case of the Suspected
Sotah (Numbers 5.11-31)', *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 11-26.
   92.   וְנֹכָחַת is a pausal form of a niphal f.s. participle. GKC, §116s, reads it as a niphal
2f.s. perfect, which requires only minor revocalization; it is not clear what advantage such
a reading has, unless it is to make it conform to the more common form of an apodosis (cf.
IBHS, §32.2.3).

and thus absolving Abraham—and perhaps also Sarah—of lying. The sum itself is preposterously large.[93] Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is such a large sum named for the redemption of a person or for compensation for the violation of a woman.[94] Indeed, a married woman who is violated is to be killed, assuming she and her partner are apprehended.[95] While such laws may not reflect the reality of the author of Genesis 20, they do suggest that the amounts required to compensate for sexual violation would not even have begun to approach a quantity as high as one thousand shekels of silver. The amount named here is purely hyperbolic and is a variant element of the wife–sister motif that illustrates the many ways that the tradition might develop.

Although the majority of the narrative revolves around Abraham and Abimelech, Sarah again is the impetus behind all the action.[96] Likewise, the resolution of the story hinges on her and the restoration of her honor. In this, though, Genesis 20 is much more concerned than Genesis 12 with the negative impact of the ruse on Sarah's reputation. The theme of fertility is also highlighted within the story, not only in the infertility of the women of Gerar but also by the placement of this chapter after the promise in Genesis 18 and before the birth narrative in Genesis 21. This theme serves to heighten the drama of the story, as the promise in Genesis 18 suggests a possible threat to Isaac's paternity. (This threat is alleviated by Gen. 21.1, which states that only at this point does YHWH heed Sarah and perform the promised miracle.) The concerns of Genesis 20 are so different from those of the previous wife–sister episode that it is hardly likely to be directly dependent on it. Rather, it maintains its own tradition, going back to a similar original motif but departing in the particulars of the narrative.

The final version of the story appears in Gen. 26.1-11, where Isaac and Rebekah travel to the court of Abimelech in Gerar. The evidence points to this story originating as a literary composition, rather than stemming from an older, oral form of the story.[97] The main action begins with the people of Gerar asking Isaac about Rebekah. Isaac offers the now-familiar lie, again without consulting his wife. It is difficult to argue in this case that the author was depending on a previously established plan narrated elsewhere, since this is the first such episode in the Isaac–Rebekah narrative. This fact also lends

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93. On שׁקל as implied, cf. GKC, §134n; Joüon, §142n. The phrase אלף כסף in precisely this form occurs three more times in the Hebrew Bible and is meant to signify an inordinately large sum of money; see 2 Sam. 18.12; Isa. 7.23; Song 8.11.

94. Deut. 22.29 stipulates that a man who has sex with a virgin must pay the woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and he cannot divorce her.

95. Lev. 20.10; Deut. 22.22.

96. For example, when confronted by Abimelech, Abraham says he was afraid 'on account of' (על־דבר) Sarah.

97. See, e.g., Alexander, 'Wife/Sister Incidents', pp. 145-53.

support to the idea that Genesis 20 was an independent tradition from Gen. 12.10–13.1, albeit one based on the same literary motif.

As with Sarah in Gen. 12.10–13.1, Rebekah's beauty is cited as the reason for the lie that she is Isaac's sister. The emphasis is on Rebekah as Isaac's wife, אשה being used five times and אחות only twice. Twice (vv. 7, 9) Isaac explains that he was concerned 'because of' (על) Rebekah, but she is not named as a reason for action otherwise, and the phrases so abundant in Genesis 12 are absent here. The story ends with Abimelech cautioning his people not to harm the couple; Isaac's amassing of wealth, an important component in the other two wife–sister narratives, appears in a following, separate episode.

While Sarah has an inactive role in Genesis 12 and 20, she nonetheless plays a far greater role in those chapters than Rebekah does in Genesis 26. This may be owing to the generally sparse nature of the Isaac–Rebekah traditions, although elsewhere in these narratives Rebekah is quite prominent—more so even than Isaac. Genesis 26.1-11 also has very little connection to the surrounding narrative. The promise to the patriarch is interpolated although Isaac and Rebekah already have two sons, one of whom must be Isaac's heir. There is thus no narrative tension over Jacob and Esau's paternity. The following narrative is about how Isaac becomes wealthy, but it has no connection to the wife–sister story, beyond the location in Philistia. The author composed Gen. 26.1-11 in order to move Isaac to Gerar, utilizing the motif of the earlier wife–sister stories to provide the impetus for action.[98] Of the three wife–sister narratives, Genesis 26 focuses the most on men and pushes Rebekah the farthest into the background. This narrative provides the most compelling evidence for being a later literary (written) composition, rather than an older oral tradition and thus illustrates the evolution of the role of women in biblical narrative: the later the text, the more the women are relegated to the background.[99]

4. *Genealogical Material*

The Pentateuchal narrative is framed by numerous genealogies. These focus primarily on men but do sometimes include women as well. As the analysis of these passages will show, in both non-P and P the inclusion of women in a genealogy may serve a particular purpose in advancing some ideology. This is most pronounced in P, but is present to some degree in non-P as well.

98.   Non-P on several occasions provides some narrative of instruction or incentive for movement from one place to another, rather than simply giving a brief itinerary notice that the characters have moved; see Gen. 12.1-4, 6; 13.1; 27.42-45; 28.10-29.1; 35.1-8, 16-21.

99.   Similarly, Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 377-78.

The ancestral stories begin with the genealogy in Genesis 11. Verses 27-32 deal with the family of Abraham, and source critics generally assign vv. 27, 31-32 to P and vv. 28-30 to J/non-P.[100] Verses 27 and 32 are in a markedly P style, including the formula 'these are the generations' (אלה תולדת); the use of the hiphil of ילד;[101] the phrase 'the days of PN were…' (ויהיו ימי); and listing precise ages. Verse 28 is more difficult; it reports the death of Abraham's brother Haran and reads well between vv. 27 and 32.[102] However, Gunkel notes that the phrase ארץ מולדת, 'place of birth', found here appears elsewhere only in non-P contexts.[103] The assignment of v. 28 to a source is not critical here, as it does not directly involve women or affect the outcome of this argument, and so I will follow the consensus in assigning it to non-P. Nevertheless, it makes an abrupt beginning, suggesting that the original opening element of this non-P material is missing.

Verses 29-30 also belong to non-P; v. 29 has a more expansive narrative style that is reminiscent of Gen. 4.19, a verse that appears in an exclusively non-P context. Verse 30, which must follow on v. 29 to make sense, belongs with the tradition in Gen. 12.1-4a (non-P[104]) and elsewhere in the continuing narrative, a tradition that in its final form involves Sarah being barren; these verses belong to non-P.[105] Verse 31, also traditionally assigned to P, breaks the flow of the narrative and is repetitive in light of v. 29. It provides a variant to 12.1 (non-P) regarding Abraham's journey to Canaan from Ur. Verses 29 and 31 are therefore better assigned to separate sources, and thus the traditional assignment of vv. 28-30 to non-P is correct.

These non-P verses name three women: Sarah, the wife of Abraham; Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor; and Iscah, Milcah's sister,

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100.   Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 263; von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 155-58; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 156; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 110-11; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 134. For dissenting views, see Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 225; Blum, *Komposition*, p. 440; Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), pp. 49-50.

101.   See Hendel, 'Begetting'.

102.   Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 225, argues that this would be an odd way to introduce Abraham's story, although it is not entirely obvious, as he argues, that the verse 'clearly presupposed the remarks in v. 27'. Mention of Haran's death would also explain why he does not appear alongside the other two brothers in v. 29.

103.   Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 156. That only includes two additional occurrences of the phrase, in Gen. 24.7 and 31.13.

104.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 145.

105.   See, for instance, Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 138-45. Westermann notes that such statements about a person just mentioned in a genealogy are a hallmark of J and always supply noteworthy information. As Chapter 4 will show, P does not know a tradition of Sarai being barren. In Gen. 17, P knows only the tradition (found also in Gen. 18) that Sarah is old and presumably past menopause.

mentioned only here. The text gives no lineage for Sarah. Genesis 11.29 refers to Milcah as מלכה בת־הרן אבי־מלכה ואבי יסכה, 'Milcah, daughter of Haran, father of Milcah and father of Iscah'. This circular genealogical notice makes Milcah the niece of her husband and a Terahite as well. Milcah is also Bethuel's mother and Rebekah's grandmother (Gen. 22.20-24).[106] Bethuel's children Rebekah and Laban, and his granddaughters Rachel and Leah, are thus direct descendants of Terah, doubly so because Nahor and Milcah are both Terahites.[107] As I will discuss below, this lineage is an important aspect of the ancestral narrative.

The detail provided for Milcah is surprising, given that nothing is said of Sarah's lineage.[108] In particular, this isolated mention of Milcah's sister Iscah seems strange. Constructions like הרן אבי־מלכה ('PN, father of PN') appear throughout the Hebrew Bible,[109] but in no other instance are two daughters named. The construction X בת X ('PN, daughter of PN'), on the other hand, appears more frequently, usually with the name of the father or grandfather, occasionally listing brothers as well.[110] There are a few instances that give the name of the mother, but these are rare.[111] Thus, the lineage given for Milcah is unusual in the extreme; it is perhaps an old genealogical tradition that non-P incorporated into the narrative here, despite the import of that tradition having been lost.[112]

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106. P makes no genealogical connection between Bethuel and any Terahite line. On Rebekah, see below.

107. Cf. also Gen. 29.5 (non-P), where Laban is called the son of Nahor, perhaps in this context meant figuratively as 'descendant'; on the possibilities of kinship terminology, cf. Nicole, 'Sara', pp. 5-23. On the idea that patriarchs were required to marry women within the Terahite lineage, see Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, pp. 138-39.

108. In Gen. 20.12, Abraham says that Sarah is also a daughter of Terah; on that tradition, however, see below.

109. Six more times in Gen. (9.22; 22.21; 33.19; 34.6; 36.9, 43; all but the last two are non-P); a handful of times in Josh.–1 Sam. and Ruth; and twenty-five times within the first seven chapters of 1 Chron.

110. See, for instance, Gen. 24.47; 25.20; 26.34; 28.9; 34.3; 1 Sam. 14.50.

111. In Gen. 34.1, for instance, Dinah is called דינה בת־לאה, although in all subsequent references she is called בת־יעקב (34.3, 7, 19). In Gen. 36.2 we find אהליבמה בת־ענה בת־צבעון החוי (cf. vv. 14, 18, 25). The last named, Zibeon, appears to be male. There is some confusion about Anah, who appears to be male in v. 24. In Gen. 36.39 we have מהיטבאל בת־מטרד בת מי זהב (cf. 1 Chron. 1.50); the sex of the latter is also unknown.

112. On the incorporation of genealogical elements from other contexts, see Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (YNER, 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 201-202. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 217 n. 579, argues that Milcah and Iscah must at one time also have been the subjects of other narrative traditions.

As noted above, Sarah's father is not named in Genesis 11. Genesis 20.12 reports that Sarah and Abraham have the same father, which makes Sarah a Terahite, but this is a tradition intended to ameliorate the effects of Abraham and Sarah's ruse in the court of Abimelech.[113] The narrative is independent of the genealogy of Genesis 11 and is not concerned with showing that Sarah is a Terahite,[114] as evidenced by the fact that the narrator does not report the name of Sarah's father. If the author's intent were to clarify Sarah's Terahite lineage, he would surely have included Terah's name. It is only secondarily, through the combined non-P narrative bringing together Abraham's genealogy with the story in Genesis 20, that Sarah becomes a Terahite. In the genealogical tradition, Sarah's patrilineage was either unknown or deemed unimportant.[115] She is atypical in this regard, as non-P gives some genealogical information for the other matriarchs.[116]

Rebekah's genealogy appears in Gen. 22.20-24, where Abraham is told of the birth of sons to his brother Nahor. The passage includes a genealogical listing of the sons of Nahor, ending with Bethuel (vv. 21-22), a notice that Bethuel bore Rebekah (v. 23), and a report of the births to Nahor's concubine Reumah (v. 24). No mention is made of Laban, Rebekah's brother. The full genealogy given for Bethuel's generation indicates that this is the primary interest of the genealogy, and the specific mention of Rebekah turns the passage into an introduction to Genesis 24, the next non-P unit. This is the only instance in which the birth of a female character is reported as an introduction to a narrative, in a similar fashion to the births of Noah and Abraham.[117] This signifies the importance of Rebekah in the tradition.

Although there is no genealogical notice of Rachel and Leah's births, they do feature in later genealogies where they are listed as the mothers of Jacob's sons, the eponymous tribal ancestors.[118] Rachel and Leah's own lineage is made clear in Genesis 29, however, when Jacob meets the sisters. As Rebekah's nieces, Rachel and Leah are also of the Terahite line. This lineage thus emerges as one of the most important features of the matriarchs' identities, and the true heir of the patriarch, and of his promise and blessing,

113.   Van Seters, *Abraham*, pp. 75-76; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 326.

114.   Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 139.

115.   Westermann argues the tradition of Sarah's lineage was lost (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 138).

116.   In this case, Hagar is excepted from the list of matriarchs, as her son is not Abraham's heir and thus he is not the heir of both the blessing and promise. It is particularly for tracing the mothers of this line that genealogical information is given.

117.   Although the birth of Noah belongs to the P genealogy, Noah's naming is in non-P and is tied to the report of his birth (Gen. 5.28-29). Likewise, the birth of Abraham is recounted in P but the attached non-P verses are partly genealogical in nature, as in the listing of Milcah's lineage (Gen. 11.29).

118.   See the genealogies in Gen. 35 and 46.

depends on the mother's line. The necessity of finding a Terahite wife is emphasized at several points in the narrative, and thus helps link the genea-logical and narrative elements together.

5. *Other Material on Sarah*

There is very little material on Sarah in non-P that is not part of the childbirth or wife–sister material. The prevalence of the childbirth narratives is consis-tent with Sarah's role as the first mother of the Israelite ancestral family; indeed the single reference to her outside of Genesis, in Isa. 51.2, makes reference to this role.[119] The fact that there are multiple wife–sister narratives involving Sarah is somewhat more surprising; however, these are primarily traditions about Abraham in which Sarah appears in a critical but subsidiary role. The remaining Sarah material centers on her relationship with Hagar.[120]

The rivalry between Sarah and Hagar arises over the issue of offspring and rightful heirs. However, their story does not fully fit within the childbirth rubric, and so will bear some additional discussion here. The first scene between Sarah and Hagar is Gen. 16.1-6, in which Hagar becomes pregnant and Sarah mistreats her. Most of this narrative belongs to non-P,[121] although vv. 1a and 3 are P,[122] meaning that non-P begins abruptly in v. 1b without

119.   While this text from Deutero-Isaiah is probably later than non-P by at least one or two centuries, it attests to the tradition that Sarah is primarily a matriarchal figure; see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 326.

120.   Most scholars ascribe Gen. 23, the death of Sarah and the account of the pur-chase of the cave at Machpelah, to P. However, some have argued that the main body of the chapter belongs to non-P, and is only surrounded by a P framework at the beginning and end. The account of the purchase, however, even if it belongs to non-P, is a narrative about Abraham, not Sarah; Sarah is referred to throughout only as Abraham's 'dead'. See the discussion of Gen. 23 in Chapter 4.

121.   See, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 236-37.

122.   Both vv. 2 and 4 feature the verb בוא, whereas v. 3 uses לקח and נתן. In v. 2 (non-P), Sarah tells Abraham to go (בא) to Hagar, and in v. 4 Abraham obeys her and goes (ויבוא) to Hagar. In v. 3 (P), on the other hand, Sarah takes (ותקח) Hagar and gives (ותתן) her to Abraham. Furthermore, v. 3 says that Hagar becomes Abraham's wife (ותתן אתה לאברם אישה לו לאשה), whereas vv. 2, 4 mention no such thing. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 239-40. While too much should not be made of these linguistic differences (after all, in v. 5 Sarah says she gave [נתן] Hagar to Abraham), the action in v. 3 is of a notably different character than that in vv. 2 and 4: in v. 3 Sarah is responsible for more of the action, whereas in vv. 2, 4 Sarah instructs Abraham on what to do, but he carries out the action himself. The assignment of v. 1 is less clear; it bears none of the markers of P, but both P and non-P need some of the information contained in it in order to form a coherent narrative. See Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 13.

having specifically named Sarah. Presumably non-P originally also mentioned Sarah by name here, but this was lost in the process of combining the narrative.[123] Both Hagar and Sarah behave less than admirably in this passage, although Hagar emerges slightly better than Sarah, who comes across as bitter and hypocritical. More remarkable is the lack of involvement on Abraham's part. He is mostly passive in this section, as in the rest of the chapter. He repeatedly defers to Sarah's will. Sarah and Hagar are the primary characters in the story.

The rivalry between Sarah and Hagar resumes in Gen. 21.9, when Sarah sees Ishmael playing with Isaac. The verb denoting Ishmael's behavior, from the root צחק, is a play on Isaac's name that makes palpable the threat Sarah perceives to Isaac and, thereby, to her own status. She insists to Abraham that he force Hagar and Ishmael to leave so that Ishmael does not inherit alongside Isaac (v. 10). She prevails, with YHWH's backing, and thus secures her status.

Sarah is integral to the overall structuring of the Abraham material. Not only is she a major character, frequently present even when she is not active, but concerns about her motivate much of the action. It is mostly her fertility that is at issue, as she is to be the mother of the heir to the promise. There is never any question about Abraham's role in the narrative. Sarah's, on the other hand, is always in question. While this signals the fact that she is secondary to Abraham, particularly in relationship to YHWH, it also means that she is a primary figure who, despite having only six speaking lines, nonetheless emerges in much narrative detail.

The larger complex of Abraham–Sarah material is about having a child, the right heir for Abraham. Various previously existing narratives have been cobbled together in service to this single, overriding theme. The promise is included as the means toward this end; it is the insurance to the reader that the couple will have a child, while also providing narrative tension as the fulfillment of the promise is delayed. The motif of the specific promised child, once independent, is also being used in service to the larger theme of promise, which spans the entire book of Genesis and unites all the sections of the narrative. Non-P is the first to bring the narratives together through the theme of promise, although this happens only in the general arrangement, not in any specific combination of the promises with one another in individual texts. In this respect, non-P resembles von Rad's Yahwist as theologian: he is responsible for the overall shaping and theological message of promise in the Pentateuch.

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123.   Alternately, as with Gen. 21.2-3, the first verse is a melding of non-P and P elements; such an explanation accounts for elements that would have been necessary for both narratives.

6. *Rebekah*

The material on Rebekah is more diverse than the traditions about the other matriarchs. Much of it was discussed in the treatment of matriarchal childbirth and wife–sister stories, but there are several stories that do not fall into those categories. Genesis 24 recounts the story of how Rebekah and Isaac were married.[124] It is the most extensive betrothal type-scene in the Hebrew Bible.[125] Isaac's servant and Rebekah share the central role in this narrative, and it is striking how active Rebekah is as a character.[126] While the narrator is the primary speaker in this chapter, Rebekah is the goal of the entire story, and is thus present as the potential wife even before she appears. She is depicted not only as active but also as hospitable. Her offer to water all of Abraham's servant's camels is enormously generous. Although she is not specifically consulted about whether she would like to marry Isaac, the narrator also makes clear that YHWH intends for her to be Isaac's wife. The other characters recognize that this is part of YHWH's plan and thus offer no argument to her marriage. Consulting Rebekah is not within the parameters of the narrative, because she has revealed herself as the divinely appointed bride. However, when the servant wishes to depart for Canaan immediately, Rebekah is consulted and opts to depart immediately.[127] Finally, when Rebekah reaches Isaac, the text is concerned with her reaction to him, not vice versa.[128]

Rebekah is also a critical player in Jacob's securing the blessing from Isaac. The stage is set in Genesis 25, the story of Esau's relinquishing the birthright for a bowl of stew. Verse 28 notes that Jacob is Rebekah's favorite: significantly, in the struggle over the rights of the first-born the one who ultimately prevails is backed by his mother rather than his father. This is a testament to the role women were perceived as playing in the family, particularly in the successes of men, and recalls the role of the queen mother in the

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124.   There is some debate about the unity and dating of this chapter, but it is generally attributed to J, even when additions are posited or when it is deemed a late layer of J; see Van Seters, *Abraham*, pp. 240-48; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 382-84.

125.   See Esther Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 273-81 (274).

126.   Lieve Teugels, '"A Strong Woman, Who Can Find?" A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24, with Some Perspectives on the General Presentation of Isaac and Rebekah in the Genesis Narratives', *JSOT* 63 (1994), pp. 89-104 (90). Cf. Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 244.

127.   Teugels, 'A Strong Woman', p. 98.

128.   Cf. Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics', p. 275. Fuchs overstates Isaac's role and massively understates Rebekah's.

royal court.[129] This note provides a glimpse of the drama that will unfold in Genesis 27, derived from an old oral folktale,[130] in which Rebekah contrives to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob. As Esau has already sold his birthright to Jacob, the maneuvering in ch. 27 less surprising.

Rebekah is the mastermind of much of the action of the chapter, although she comes in and out of the spotlight. She devises the plan whereby Jacob can receive the blessing, offering solutions to Jacob's objections about how he will be able to impersonate his brother. Rebekah is resourceful and clever in this story, doing everything for Jacob, including cooking the meal. Fuchs thinks Rebekah is characterized negatively as deceitful,[131] but she does not take into account that Jacob is likewise deceptive and yet is perceived as a positive character throughout. As Niditch observes, tricksters are positive characters in folklore, and Rebekah is Jacob's 'co-trickster'.[132] Genesis 27 is meant to explain how it was that the younger son became the heir and out-stripped his older brother. The tradition of the birthright in Genesis 25 further attests to the popularity of stories about how Israel usurped its neighbor Edom. It is significant that in this story, the help of the mother is so critical; Jacob would not have succeeded without it.

7. *Rachel and Leah*

Surprisingly little has been written on the figures of Rachel and Leah.[133] The two (and especially Leah) are the least-colorfully depicted of the matriarchs. Discussions of them tend to be combined with other matriarchs, rather than given individually. Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah also tend to be treated together as an indivisible group. Phyllis Kramer picks up on this theme when she observes that biblical women are frequently depicted in pairs and are

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129.   On the queen mother, see variously Ackerman, 'Queen Mother', pp. 385-401; Zafrira Ben-Barak, 'The Status and Right of the *Gebira*', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp. 23-34; Nancy R. Bowen, 'The Quest for the Historical *Gebira*', *CBQ* 64 (2001), pp. 597-618.

130.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 435. Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 298-99, sees both J and E and offers a list of the differences between the two. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 97, attributes it to J, as does von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 276, although with some hesitation. Westermann rejects the claim that there is any reason to see more than one source here (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 440).

131.   Fuchs, 'Literary Characterization', pp. 162-63. Cf. Adrien Janis Bledstein, 'Binder, Trickster, Heel and Hairy-Man: Rereading Genesis 27 as a Trickster Tale Told by a Woman', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 282-95.

132.   Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters*, p. 100.

133.   The only discussion of Gen. 29–30 in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, for instance, is from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible*.

rarely friends.[134] This need not be a solely negative assessment, as exploring these relationships may allow for additional insights into the individual characters.[135] Kramer does not note, however, that the men often come in pairs as well: Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Simeon and Levi, Moses and Aaron. With the men, too, the pairings often allow for the treatment of themes of legitimacy, promise, and covenant and for the explanation of the special status of one man over the other. The stories about the women may also be related to these themes, as the relationship between Sarah and Hagar mirrors that between Isaac and Ishmael.

A large part of the material on Rachel and Leah was covered above, but there are additional narratives about them. The first, Gen. 29.1-30, shares a common 'betrothal at the well' motif with Genesis 24 and Exodus 2. However, in contrast to the episode in Genesis 24, in which Rebekah features quite prominently, in Genesis 29 Rachel plays a fairly limited role. The narrator reveals that Rachel is a shepherdess, to explain her presence at the well among the other shepherds, but beyond this, the narrator only mentions her beauty and the fact that she is Laban's daughter. The meeting at the well focuses much more on Jacob than Genesis 24 did on Isaac, not only because Isaac was not physically present in the latter, but also because Rebekah was a much more active character.

Fuchs identifies a progression in the betrothal scenes from the active Rebekah to the passive Rachel (and ultimately to Zipporah).[136] The role of the women is most easily related to their prevalence or status in the tradition. As the male figures involved in the episodes increase in prominence (Isaac is arguably the least active of the three male figures in the combined narrative and Moses is arguably the most active), the women's roles decrease proportionally. This trend is echoed in the larger non-P Pentateuchal narrative as well, where the female characters in Genesis are more likely to share equally in the spotlight with their male companions than characters in later books are. As Moses and Aaron take over the narrative, women disappear almost completely.[137] Female characters have only the space left them by male characters; the less active the man, the more the woman will rise to the fore.

134.   Phyllis Silverman Kramer, 'Biblical Women That Come in Pairs: The Use of Female Pairs as a Literary Device in the Hebrew Bible', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis: A Feminist Companion*, pp. 218-32 (229).

135.   Kramer, 'Biblical Women', p. 231.

136.   Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics', pp. 273-81.

137.   Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'Forgotten Heroines: The Exclusion of Women from Moses' Vision', *BR* 13 (June 1997), pp. 38-44 (42). Cf. also Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 377-78, who treats only the matriarchal traditions in Gen. 12–36. Fischer sees this difference in treatment as a diachronic development, happening in the later layers of the text, rather than a phenomenon which may happen within a single authorial layer.

   In the second part of Genesis 29, Rachel and Leah play an even more limited role. Laban's deception of Jacob, giving him Leah rather than Rachel as a wife, is a brazen act of trickery. Nothing is said at this point about Leah's or Rachel's reactions to the marriages, nor is it clear why Laban uses the argument that in this region, the eldest daughter must be married off first. Remarkably, most commentators simply take Laban's explanation at face value, accepting that he is acting according to custom while recognizing his trickery in the process.[138] But does Laban truly act only because of tradition, or is he using the custom as a pretext to marry off a daughter for whom he is worried he might otherwise never find a husband? The narrative has already explained that Jacob loves Rachel, not Leah, and we may reasonably conclude that Jacob would have objected had Laban suggested that he marry Leah first. The story is concerned with Laban's trickery, but it also furthers the plot element of the rivalry between the sisters, and thus is integral to their story. Laban's mistreatment of his daughters is manifest, while Jacob emerges as something of a hero for his long years of service to marry the woman he loves.

   While Genesis 29 finds Rachel largely inactive, her role changes in ch. 31. This chapter revolves around the relationship between Jacob and Laban, and most of its second half concerns the covenant that the two make. However, Leah and Rachel both play a surprisingly significant part. The chapter itself is a collection of traditions that have been worked together and that can safely be ascribed to non-P.[139] The central narrative details Jacob's departure from Haran because of his unfair treatment at the hands of Laban. The disagreement between Laban and his daughters is part of this tradition. Rather than unilaterally deciding to leave, or leaving based on YHWH's instruction, Jacob consults Rachel and Leah (vv. 4-16), who cite their own dispute with their father. Their claim is surprising: they argue that their father has sold them and 'eaten up' the proceeds, and that he now considers them as foreigners (vv. 14-15). Moreover, they claim a right for themselves and their children to Laban's fortune (v. 16), which contrasts with Laban's claim in v. 43 that not only the women and children, but also the flocks and everything else Jacob sees belong to Laban. Having voiced their complaint, Rachel and Leah offer Jacob their full support in his plan to leave. This is the only instance in the

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   138.   Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 227; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 291; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 467; Frymer-Kensky, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 108.

   139.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 489; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 331, sees the chapter as a composite of J and E, as does Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 93-94. The division into J and E components results in two choppy, disjointed narratives. Despite the obvious inconsistencies in the narrative, Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 490-91, rightly rejects the attempt to reconstruct an independent E source here. Most scholars attribute some of v. 18 to P, based mainly on the use of Paddan-Aram.

Hebrew Bible of such cooperation among a family, and the case is all the more remarkable given that it is Jacob's family.[140]

Some have suggested that the sisters' complaint reveals a custom by which the bride should have received some of the wealth from her brideprice.[141] However, no biblical evidence supports such a custom. Furthermore, if this were the basis of the sisters' claim, it would be quite a leap for them to claim all of Laban's riches. It would make more sense for them to claim only the portion equivalent to their share of the brideprice. Rather than making an appeal for the return of their brideprice, the sisters recognize that their marriage to Jacob is the reason behind Laban's wealth. There is both a theological and a practical side to this claim. Jacob took over care of Laban's flocks in service to marrying the sisters, and through his skilled management caused the flocks to proliferate so that Laban became wealthy. Thus, the sisters had a hand, albeit an indirect one, in Laban's wealth. It is also through the sisters' alliance with Jacob that Jacob's god, Elohim, ensured that a portion of Laban's wealth passed to Jacob. The sisters realize their importance in this alliance, but also recognize that in marrying Jacob, they now belong entirely to his family, and not to Laban's. Their prosperity, and that of their sons, is now to be provided by Jacob, not by Laban. This stands in contrast to Laban's claim in v. 43 that everything belongs to him; whereas the sisters recognize the reality of the situation, Laban does not. The sisters are willing to leave, but Laban is not willing to let them—and the wealth he accrues from them via Jacob—go.

Whereas both Rachel and Leah figure in this portion of the narrative, albeit as a single and indistinguishable unit, Rachel alone is the protagonist of the scene involving the theft of Laban's teraphim (vv. 19, 30b, 32-35). Rachel apprises no one of her theft; the motivation may have been evident to the ancient listener or reader, but if so, it is lost now. The reason for Rachel's theft, and the importance of the teraphim, are much debated, and the connection between the theft and the previous episode is not manifest in the narrative. Rachel never reveals that she has the images and never explains the theft to anyone. Westermann argues that Rachel takes the teraphim in lieu of the unreturned brideprice,[142] while Speiser, adducing a parallel from Nuzi, argues that the theft of the teraphim is an attempt to secure Jacob's right as an adopted son to inherit a portion of Laban's estate.[143] Greenberg argues that Rachel takes the teraphim in accordance with the custom of taking the household gods when traveling to a foreign country.[144] Although the precise reason

140. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 492.
141. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 492.
142. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 493.
143. For a summary version, see, Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 250-51.
144. Moshe Greenberg, 'Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim', *JBL* 81 (1962), pp. 239-48.

behind the theft remains elusive, the element of secrecy is more readily explained on the basis of the family's surreptitious and quick departure. The text's silence on the reason for taking the teraphim unfortunately leaves many questions, but the story nevertheless depicts Rachel as clever and resourceful, particularly when Laban searches for the teraphim.[145]

Rachel and Leah appear together in the narrative one more time, in Genesis 33. Jacob, returning to Canaan, meets Esau and a large force of men on the road. Jacob positions his wives and children in groups, one behind the other, with the concubines and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph at the back. The arrangement reflects the relative status of the wives, as Rachel and her son, both Jacob's favorites, are in the safest place at the rear. Each in turn also greets Esau when his warm embrace of Jacob signals that the family is in no danger. Within the narrative framework, the wives and children are the manifestation of Jacob's success in Haran.[146]

8. *Conclusions*

This study of the matriarchal traditions shows that Fischer is correct when she argues that Genesis 12–36 contains not a patriarchal but an ancestral history, in which the matriarchs are significant characters.[147] The women are critical to non-P's ancestral traditions. But they are more than simply present; they are often key actors in the unfolding story. The narrative combines a variety of older traditions. Many are variations of type scenes, like the childbirth and wife–sister stories, while some are stand-alone episodes, like the story of Rebekah aiding Jacob in receiving Isaac's blessing or Rachel stealing the teraphim. Most of the stories include prominent male characters, and the matriarchs were likely never entirely independent of the patriarchs, even in the female-centered childbirth stories. Throughout the ancestral narratives, women's prominence is inversely proportional to the prominence of the men they play opposite; biblical stories only have room for one leading role. The narratives centered on women and the promise of a son and childbirth, however, are demonstrably distinct from the promises to the patriarch with which they were later combined. Non-P also appears to include one or two narratives, such as the wife–sister story involving Rebekah, which are of later origin than the majority of material and in which women's roles are more significantly diminished than in other ancestral narratives.

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145.   For an alternate reading, see Esther Fuchs, '"For I Have the Way of Women": Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative', *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 68-83.

146.   According to MT, in v. 7 Joseph comes forward before Rachel to greet Esau; LXX and Syr., however, have the opposite order.

147.   Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 375-78.

3

OTHER WOMEN OUTSIDE THE PRIESTLY CORPUS

Although there is no single collection of traditions to rival those of the matriarchs, many more women appear in the rest of non-P's Pentateuchal narrative, and in Genesis in particular. Some of these women—like Eve, Dinah, and Tamar—are subjects of detailed stories, while others appear only in a verse or two. Most have names, but some do not.[1] Through much of Genesis, these women move in and out of the spotlight. In the Joseph story, which focuses almost entirely on that character alone, women appear only twice. With the appearance of Moses, roles for women slip away almost completely; very few of the women discussed in this chapter appear in the books of Exodus–Numbers. Nevertheless, the number and nature of the women in non-P's narrative attest to that author's perception of women as key figures in the early stages of Israel's history.

1. *Women in the Primeval History*

Eve

The placement of the creation stories at the beginning of the Pentateuch has, I believe, imparted more importance to them than their authors intended. Adam appears only one more time in the Hebrew Bible, in 1 Chron. 1.1, and Eve disappears entirely after these first few chapters. The garden of Eden appears in a few references, but is by no means a widespread biblical motif.[2] The

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1. On women and names/namelessness, see Adele Reinhartz, *'Why Ask My Name?' Anonymity in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*.

2. Isa. 51.3; Ezek. 28.13; 31.9, 16, 18; 36.35; Joel 2.3. Much is made of the ostensibly similar motif in Ezek. 28.11-19, particularly by John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 119-22. There are several problems with Van Seters's analysis, the primary one being that the figure in Ezek. 28.11-19 is not a human but a cherub. For a fuller discussion of the pitfalls in drawing comparisons between the Gen. and Ezek. texts, see Sarah Shectman, 'Women as Looking Glasses: Reflections in the Pentateuchal Sources' (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2007), p. 289.

patriarchs are mentioned far more often than Adam and Eve in other biblical books, and even some of the matriarchs make an occasional appearance. The story of Adam and Eve, then, while it offers some compelling characterizations, should not be given undue weight in judging biblical attitudes toward women or in drawing conclusions about women in ancient Israel. It is not meant to be the lens through which the remaining Pentateuchal narrative is read.[3]

Traditional scholarship, with near unanimity, attributes the Garden of Eden story in Gen. 2.4b–3.24 to the J source.[4] But while such critics see these chapters as the product of a single author, many agree that two traditions have been combined to form the present story.[5] These two traditions are still largely separate from each other; the first appears in Genesis 2, detailing the creation of humans, man and woman, and the second appears in Genesis 3, relating how the humans eat the fruit of the forbidden tree and are punished with expulsion from the garden. Each of these narratives also consists of layers of accreted tradition.[6] The same non-P author was responsible for the entire unit as it stands now, however, and thus in its final form it functions as a unified whole. Nevertheless, because of the impact these chapters have had historically, it is important to treat them as stemming from two originally separate contexts, that is, to remember that originally the one part of the narrative had no connection with the other. Not only does this help in determining the intent of the narratives vis-à-vis women, but it will also aid in seeing the larger purpose of the non-P author in combining the narratives as he did, and will thus help in discerning the author's attitude toward women.

The first section of the narrative, Gen. 2.1-8, 18-23, details the creation of man, a garden, animals, and woman, in that order. With the exclusion of vv. 9-17, an extraneous digression about the garden and the rivers coming from it, it becomes clear just how decidedly this passage is focused upon the man; it is his narrative. On the other hand, there are numerous points to be

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3.   The same is not entirely true of the P creation story, which establishes the major theme of fruitfulness and increase that appears throughout Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. See the discussion in the next chapter.

4.   Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 14; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 73; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 1; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 186; Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, p. 107; Trible, 'Eve and Adam', pp. 251-58; Bird, *Missing Persons*; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 92; Helen Schüngel-Straumann, 'On the Creation of Man and Woman in Genesis 1–3: The History and Reception of the Texts Reconsidered', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 53-76; Ronald A. Simkins, 'Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis: A Feminist Companion*, pp. 32-51 (32).

5.   Gerhard von Rad, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch* (BWANT, 4/13; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1934), p. 74; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 25; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 192.

6.   See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 191-267.

made about the woman in the passage. Because treatments of the woman often focus on contrasting the creation of the woman with that of the man, some discussion of the creation of the man in 2.7 is required.

In v. 7, YHWH-Elohim creates the man from the ground that he is to work, a suggestive beginning that is enhanced by the play on words between אדמה, 'earth', and אדם, '(hu)man'. According to Trible, the creature, אדם, is created sexless but embodying both male and female, which are only differentiated from each other later in the story.[7] A closer look at the text, and at biblical usage of the term, however, shows that this is not the case. Although the term אדם can refer to the entire human species,[8] the present narrative consistently treats this creature as male. The rest of the story in Genesis 2 assumes as a matter of course that the female is the proper mate for this creature, and thus that it is male.[9] אדם is used here not for its possible gender inclusivity, but because it allows the wordplay אדמה–אדם.

Once the man is animate, YHWH-Elohim determines that he needs a companion, עזר כנגדו (traditionally translated 'fitting helper'; vv. 18, 20). There is no suggestion that this companion is meant to be servile or inferior to the man.[10] While the woman is created separately from and after the man, the phrase used in anticipation of her creation is one that emphasizes her complementarity: the creation of this creature will complete the species. YHWH-Elohim creates the animals out of the earth in the same way that he created the man. When he creates the woman, however (vv. 21-22), he uses a piece of the man, indicating the sameness of the two.[11] The order of creation is not meant to suggest anything about the hierarchy of one sex over the other. Just as the narrative says nothing about man being superior to the earth, or about his relation to the animals, so, too, the woman is neither superior nor inferior to the man because of her order in creation, or because she is made from him. To make such arguments is to conflate this story with P's creation in Genesis 1, where the humans are explicitly given dominion over the animals and plants previously created.

Verse 23 has also been seen as indicating woman's subordinate status to man by describing the woman as 'taken from' the man (כי מאיש לקחה־זאת). As Trible points out, the phrase 'taken from' is used here only for the sake of the pun on איש and אשה,[12] just as the creation of the man depended on the wordplay אדמה–אדם. Neither one implies the subordination of one element

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7. Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 80.
8. Cf. *HALOT* I, p. 14.
9. Susan S. Lanser, '(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2–3', *Semeia* 41 (1988), pp. 67-84 (72).
10. Trible, 'Depatriarchalizing', p. 36.
11. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 181.
12. Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 101.

to the other. Likewise, the fact that Adam names Eve does not imply his dominion over her, either in 2.23 or in 3.20.[13]

This story is an etiological tale concerned with the creation of humans; it ends with a note that because of their nature in creation, men and women couple and marry. It has nothing to say about equality between the sexes; such arguments are not part of the language of the text. The story is a careful literary work making a logical, if playful, progression from אדמה to אדם and from איש to אשה. Like the P creation, the story has in view the creation of humanity as a collective, but unlike the former, it presents a fuller tale of the creation of the two component parts of this species. Man and woman are complementary halves of a species, just as all the other animals are likewise paired.

With the addition of vv. 9-17, the context of this original story was drastically altered and brought into the context of the episode in ch. 3. This addition gives the story a different subtext: the human starts alone in Eden, living in a paradise-like garden. But this does not last long and soon, in addition to animals, the woman appears, setting the stage for the unfolding drama of disobedience and expulsion. With these additional verses, we become acutely aware that something is at stake. As a final touch at foreshadowing, the author adds v. 25: the man and the woman are ערומים, 'naked', a play on the snake's craftiness in ch. 3.

Genesis 3 opens with the serpent, who is described as ערום מכל חית השדה, 'more clever than all the animals of the field'. The fact that the serpent chooses to speak to the woman is, according to some, indicative of some perceived affinity between the two in the ancient Near East, particularly in terms of fertility and wisdom, two aspects frequently connected with the feminine.[14] In traditional interpretations, however, the snake's choice of the woman has been taken as a negative valuation of the woman's character. But while the snake is described as crafty, there is no description of the woman, nothing to suggest that the snake picked her as the easier mark or the one more likely to give in to temptation.[15] The snake never tells Eve to eat the fruit; she decides to eat it based on what she sees—that the tree is appetizing as food and is a valuable source for knowledge (v. 6)—and on the information that she will not die.

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13. See the argument of Trible, *Rhetoric*, pp. 73, 99. For a counterargument, see George W. Ramsey, 'Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2.23 and Elsewhere?', *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 24-35 (29).

14. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p, 183; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 237.

15. Contra Westermann, for example, who argues that the author intended to depict Eve as more gullible than Adam; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 250. According to Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 110, the woman reveals her intelligence and skill as an interpreter of the law in this episode.

Upon eating the fruit, the woman and the man are described not as knowing good and evil, but as knowing that they are עירמם, 'naked' (v. 7). The play on ערום, 'clever, wise' in v. 1 is most certainly intentional, meant not only to compare them to the snake, but to indicate that they, too, are now wise, knowing 'good and evil'. The action to this point has focused on the snake and the woman; now the man becomes part of the action. In response to the humans' disobedience, YHWH-Elohim metes out punishment. These punishments are often called 'curses', although this is a misnomer.[16] Of the various perpetrators, only the snake is directly cursed, while the land is cursed on account of the man's behavior. The woman's punishment contains no reference to cursing. Notably, perhaps because of the interactions between the snake and the woman, YHWH-Elohim says that he will 'put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers' (v. 15). The reference to the woman's offspring, not the man's, emphasizes the centrality of the woman in this entire episode, in contrast to the focus on the man in ch. 2.

The punishment of the woman (v. 16) has had immense historical impact and thus much is at stake in its interpretation. It is the shortest of the three punishments, only taking up a single verse. Traditional renderings look something like the following, taken from the NJPS translation:

> And to the woman He said,
> 'I will make most severe
> Your pangs in childbearing;
> In pain shall you bear children.
> Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
> And he shall rule over you'.

On the face of it, this punishment inflicts severe pain and subordination on women. However, Genesis 3 is a myth explaining the human condition,[17] and as such, we must keep in mind its historical and social setting. In the ancient, pre-epidural world, childbirth was dangerous and painful. The irony of this punishment, what makes it so effective, is that child-bearing is nonetheless necessary. Just as the man must farm the cursed earth to eat, the woman must have children. Her desire for children will not only be social or economic; it will be biological as well (her 'desire' for her husband). Furthermore, this description of the woman's state does not stand in opposition to the positive, ideal state of woman as a 'helper fit for' the man in Genesis 2.[18] Both are fundamental elements of human existence, at least for this author.

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16. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 92. See also Adrien Janis Bledstein, 'Are Women Cursed in Genesis 3.16?', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 142-45.

17. Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 29. See also Schüngel-Straumann, 'Creation of Man and Woman', p. 70; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 3.

18. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 262.

Carol Meyers has done extensive work combining textual analysis with archaeological and anthropological evidence in an attempt to draw an accurate picture of the status of women in ancient Israel.[19] Her analysis of Gen. 3.16 has done much to reject the idea that the punishment is entirely negative. She divides the verse into 4 lines and translates:

> I will greatly increase your toil and pregnancies;
> (Along) with travail shall you beget children.
> For to your man is your desire,
> And he shall predominate over you.[20]

According to Meyers, the words עצבון, 'toil' (which also appears in the punishment of the man) and עצב, 'travail', are related to women's household or farming work unrelated to childbirth.[21] Likewise, Meyers argues that הרנך, 'your pregnancies', refers to conception, not the act of labor and delivery itself.[22] Genesis 3.16 thus has mostly to do with women needing to bear more children along with their other subsistence-related work. At this early stage in Israelite history, population-building was important and more children were necessary to populate Israelite communities. The end of the verse, which states that man will 'rule over' woman, must be understood in this context, although Meyers argues that this submission is mitigated by the woman's own sexual desire.[23]

Meyers assumes a fairly early date for this text, as she is basing her conclusions on a comparison with early Iron Age archaeological findings.[24] Despite this early dating, and despite her claims about a woman's hypothetical reluctance to have children because of the apparent dangers, Meyers's translation of Gen. 3.16 is compelling. Rather than simply explaining why labor pains are so great, we can now read the verse in the context of women's social roles in ancient Israel. Genesis 2–3 thus reflects the same ideas we have seen in other biblical texts: women may come to the forefront of the action at times, but their roles nonetheless tend to be fairly narrowly circumscribed.

The narrative continues in Gen. 4.1, where Eve conceives and bears Cain. Although the text does not say who named Cain, the etiology is placed on Eve's lips, consistent with other female-centered childbirth accounts. In 4.2, she again gives birth, this time to Abel; nothing is said about who named Abel, nor is there an etiology. Eve's final appearance comes in Gen. 4.25,

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19. Carol Meyers, 'Gender Roles and Genesis 3.16 Revisited', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 118-41; Meyers, 'Roots of Restriction', pp. 91-103; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*; Meyers, 'Procreation', pp. 569-93.
20. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 118.
21. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 107-108.
22. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 102.
23. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 116-17.
24. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 15.

where she is not named, but is rather referred to as 'his wife'; nevertheless, in this episode also she names her son and gives an etiology for his name. She is absent from P's genealogy, starting with Adam, in Genesis 5.

Non-P's creation story emphasizes the singularity of each of the sexes. As Bird notes, this story is concerned with the sexual dimorphism of humanity.[25] Created separately, man and woman act separately and are punished for their disobedience separately. Eve is no mere extension of Adam, nor is she depicted as subordinate to him. The ultimate goal of the story is to describe how life came to be as it was, a difficult life in which animals and humans were at odds, women were endangered by the necessity of childbirth, and life-sustaining food required intensive labor. This is not a story about sin or a fall from grace, and the blame is not placed solely at the woman's feet. It is about the fundamental difficulties of life and the alienation of humans from an easy existence associated with the divine.

Other Women in the Primeval History

The second woman to appear in Genesis is Cain's nameless wife (Gen. 4.17).[26] In non-P's primeval history, only Eve and Lamech's wives and daughter are named,[27] and besides these and Cain's wife, no other individual women are specifically mentioned at all. Not until Sarah and Milcah are introduced in Gen. 11.29 do specific women again appear. This comes as something of a surprise, given the wealth of genealogical material in these chapters; however, like P, non-P does not use women's names in these early genealogical lists.

The genealogy changes form in Gen. 4.19 with the report of Lamech's marriage and the births of his children. This unit (vv. 19-24) is considerably more detailed than the preceding genealogical material, and branches into a narrative excursus. Verse 19 mentions Lamech's two wives, Adah and Zillah. The two mothers serve to separate the children into two distinct groups.[28] Adah is the mother of Jabal, the forebear of tent-dwelling herdsmen (v. 20), and Jubal, the father of musicians (v. 21). Zillah bears Tubal-Cain, a metal-smith, as well as his sister, Naamah (v. 22). Nothing more is reported of Naamah, and there is no obvious reason why she is mentioned here.[29]

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25. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 165.
26. Reinhartz, *Why Ask my Name*, p. 19, notes that namelessness does not necessarily indicate that a character is unimportant.
27. Wilson, *Genealogy*, p. 141.
28. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 330.
29. Wilson, *Genealogy*, p. 144. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 129, suggests that Naamah may have been associated with singing, connected with the root נעם, which fits well with the mention of Jubal in v. 21.

Thus far, the text is a fairly straightforward genealogy that provides a miniature history of human culture.[30] The narrative takes a surprising turn in v. 23 however, with an oddly violent song about retributive killing. The song calls to its audience with the verbs 'hear' and 'give ear', but unlike other biblical songs or prophecies that begin this way,[31] this song is addressed only to Lamech's wives, indicating that its setting is the 'family circle' and that it is a very old tradition.[32] What exactly Lamech means in his song, especially in the reference to Cain and revenge in v. 24, is unclear. The word-pair פצע, 'wound' and חברה, 'bruise' are linked with the concept of retribution in the talion law of Exod. 21.25, thus evoking a specific retributive theme here.[33] The inclusion of Lamech's wives seems significant, although its precise importance is unclear. Meyers's argument that the wives are mentioned in the invocation of the song because of the association of women with victory songs is not compelling, as this song is not about military exploits, nor do the women participate in the singing.[34]

The mysterious 'daughters of man' (בנות האדם) in Gen. 6.1-4 are the final group of women in non-P's primeval history. The passage has been an important theological crux concerning angels and quasi-supernatural beings, but as Westermann points out, it is remarkably similar to other notices of marriage and birth in biblical genealogies.[35] The story seems to have come from Canaanite myth, where the 'sons of the gods' appear frequently, and v. 1, which states that humans had begun to increase in numbers, sounds remarkably like the Mesopotamian flood story, Atrahasis.[36] However, there is more to this story than the simple marriage plot, namely the crossing of boundaries and the move of the divine beings into the human realm. The placement of this passage before the flood suggests that these marriages constitute the evil behavior that causes God to bring the flood, although the connection between the stories is not explicit.[37] Like the rest of the minor female characters in the

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30. Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, p. 145; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 324; Wilson, *Genealogy*, p. 148.

31. E.g., Judg. 5.3 as well as several vv. in Isa. and Ps.

32. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 334; likewise Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (SAOC, 32; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 25.

33. The pair also appear in Isa. 1.6 and Prov. 20.30.

34. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 46. On women's victory songs, see Poethig, 'Victory Song Tradition'. Cf. Gevirtz, *Patterns*, pp. 33-34, who argues that this is a military exploit, albeit a fight between two individuals rather than a battle between opposing military forces.

35. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 366.

36. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 369-83. On the mythic nature of non-P's primeval history, see Ronald S. Hendel, 'Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6.1-4', *JBL* 106 (1987), pp. 13-26.

37. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 367-68.

primeval history, these women appear in roles centered on marriage and childbirth but ultimately do little more than hint at the place of women in early Israelite mythology.

2. *Other Women in the Ancestral History*

Lot's Wife and Daughters

Lot's wife and daughters appear in two separate, although connected, scenes. The first is the confrontation between Lot and the men of Sodom over Lot's visitors. Lot's offer of his daughters to the men of Sodom in place of the visitors is key to the interpretation of the passage, where the nature of the offense of the men of Sodom is a matter of debate. While traditional interpretations conclude that homosexuality was the major offense, others have argued that the crime of Sodom was rather inhospitality: the men of Sodom wanted to know something about the visitors, rather than simply welcoming them. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, references to Sodom's crimes are not sexual in nature.[38] The offer of the daughters, however, seems to belie this interpretation. Lot specifically mentions that they are virgins, and the verb ידע, 'to know', in this case is obviously sexual. However, it is also possible that there is a play on the word: the men only wanted to get to know the visitors in a neighborly fashion (an innocuous use of ידע), but instead (and seemingly out of all proportion) Lot offers his daughters for their sexual pleasure (ידע in a sexual sense).[39]

Feminists often highlight the potential rape of the daughters here. Such arguments frequently adduce Judges 19, the rape of the Levite's concubine, as a parallel.[40] However, it is important to remember that in the ancient Israelite view, it is not clear what constitutes rape.[41] Sex with the daughters could have been permissible (and therefore not rape in the biblical view) because they were virgins and the father was giving his consent.[42] On the

38.   E.g., Deut. 29.22; Isa. 3.9; Jer. 3.14; Ezek. 16.49; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 298.

39.   Lyn M. Bechtel, 'A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19.1-11', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis: A Feminist Companion*, pp. 108-28 (117).

40.   Michael Carden, 'Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A Response to Ken Stone', *JSOT* 82 (1999), pp. 83-96. On Judg. 19, see also Trible, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 65-91.

41.   See, e.g., Lyn M. Bechtel, 'What if Dinah is not Raped? (Genesis 34)', *JSOT* 62 (1994), pp. 19-36; Ellen van Wolde, 'The Dinah Story: Rape or Worse?', *OTE* 15 (2002), pp. 225-39; van Wolde, 'Does *'innâ* Denote Rape? A Semantic Analysis of a Controversial Word', *VT* 52 (2002), pp. 528-44; Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (HBM, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp. 179-80.

42.   Lot says of them that they 'have not known a man' (v. 8). Bechtel, 'A Feminist Reading', p. 123, argues that they were betrothed but not yet married, based on v. 14.

other hand, when Lot offers his daughters, he tells the men to 'do to them as you please' (ועשׂו להן כטוב בעיניכם), as long as they do not harm the men who are under his protection as guests. This suggests that whatever the townspeople might do to the daughters, it would not be pleasant. Ultimately, the daughters are Lot's to give away, whereas the men are his to protect, and the implications for women in this narrative are hardly positive.

The daughters, as well as Lot's wife, appear in the continuing narrative as well, going with Lot when he leaves Sodom. Lot's wife is a marginal character, mentioned first in vv. 15-16 among those leaving with Lot. In v. 26, contrary to the messengers' instructions, she looks back and is turned to a pillar of salt. The visceral nature of her death makes her quite memorable, although she figures very little in the narrative. In looking back at the city, she seems fundamentally human, curious and perhaps also sad at the loss of her home. The story seems also to be etiological in nature, accounting for the odd geological formations in the part of the Judean wilderness where the story is set.[43]

Lot's daughters appear in considerable detail in the second part of the chapter. Whereas in vv. 7 and 15 they are completely in the background while the narrative focuses on Lot and the various men with whom he interacts, in vv. 30-38, Lot becomes completely passive, while his daughters are the actors, getting their father drunk and having sexual relations with him so that they will have children. Certainly the daughters would not have had to go far in order to find living, available men to father their children, but this is not the point of the story. The lack of available men is part of the motif of destruction and new beginning.[44]

According to this story, Lot's daughters are the mothers of two major nations, ones that figure frequently in the biblical narrative. The story acknowledges their close relations with Israel, to the extent that they are considered to be descendants of Abraham's brother.[45] They provide another example of mothers differentiating groups from one another. While P also uses matrilineage to trace certain important lines and to distinguish between heirs, non-P develops fuller pictures of women in this regard. The characterization of the women may be a comical jibe, as in this story, or it may mirror the relations between the sons, as with Sarah and Hagar. Larger themes in the sons' lives are often acted out through the mothers. While this leads to the conclusion that the women are important mainly in relation to the sons they bear, it nonetheless highlights the role of the mother as well as the important place that these traditions occupied in Israelite lore.

43.   So, for example, von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 221. Westermann rejects such an explanation; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 26.

44.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 312.

45.   On whether or not Moab and Ammon are the original etiological objects of the story, see Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 314.

Keturah

Abraham's second wife, Keturah, bears several sons (Gen. 25.1-6).[46] The list of subsequent generations of her children concludes with the note 'all these were descendants of Keturah' (v. 4). Verses 5-6 relate that Abraham gives all of his estate to Isaac, and to the sons of his concubines he gives gifts before sending them all far to the east, away from Isaac. Possibly there is a subtle distinction here between Keturah, who is called Abraham's wife, and the other women, who are called concubines (פילגש). Neither Keturah nor Hagar is called a concubine elsewhere, so it is not clear who precisely is meant. The text implies that this giving of gifts and expulsion to the east applies to Keturah's children, and given the narratives about Hagar and Ishmael, the treatment of Keturah's children is not surprising.

Dinah

The story of Dinah in Genesis 34 is both very detailed and, especially where the effects on Dinah herself are concerned, enticingly vague. Westermann sees the story as a combination of two older narratives, one concerned with the family and the other with the tribe. The editor who combined them belonged to the priestly group and had a heavy hand in the process, leaving his mark particularly in the references to circumcision.[47] This argument breaks down primarily on the last level; that P would advocate the use of an important rite like circumcision as a ruse to debilitate a large group of non-Israelites is unthinkable.[48]

However, Westermann is right in noting that there are two primary traditions behind this chapter, and that separating them out into two coherent narratives is difficult. Verses 2 and 3 narrate two different events: in the first, Shechem sees Dinah, has sex with her, and thereby defiles or debases her. He

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46.   On the assignment of these verses to non-P, see Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 395, who argues, following Noth, that they are neither P nor J. The unit here bears a resemblance to Gen. 4.17-18, another non-P text, which begins with the notice that a man has taken a wife and that she has had children, before shifting to the offspring of the offspring in the subsequent genealogy.

47.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 535-37.

48.   Circumcision is a sign and a reminder of the covenant and is treated in a serious fashion in P. Cf. Michael V. Fox, 'The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly 'ôt Etiologies', *RB* 81 (1974), pp. 557-96. There are a few other words that some see as evidence of P here as well: בנות הארץ (v. 1); טמא (vv. 5, 13, 27); and אחז (v. 10); see, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 535-43. The most compelling of these, the use of the verb טמא, is problematic because elsewhere in P, finite forms of the root in the piel never refer to defiling another person. In most instances they refer to the priest proclaiming a person unclean (Lev. 13.3, 8, 11, etc.). In a few instances they refer to defiling the camp, the sanctuary, or the land (Num. 5.3; 19.13, 20; 35.34). Only once does such a form refer to the people defiling themselves (Lev. 11.44). Thus the usage in Gen. 34 is not in accord with regular priestly usage.

does not, as is often maintained, rape her.[49] In the second, Shechem sees Dinah and wishes to marry her, speaking tenderly to her (וַיֶּאֱהַב אֶת־הַנַּעֲרָ וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב הַנַּעֲרָ, 'he loved the girl and spoke to the girl's heart'). Similarly, there appear to be two sets of negotiations with Jacob and his sons, one involving Hamor and one Shechem as the main petitioner. Toward the end of the narrative, according to one account, only Simeon and Levi attack and kill the people of the town; according to the other, all Jacob's sons take part. Verse 1, which identifies Dinah by her mother, Leah, seems related to the tradition that Simeon and Levi attack the town to avenge her, as they are her full brothers. This stands in contrast to verses that identify Dinah by her father, Jacob (vv. 7, 13, 25, 27).[50]

The result of the combination of the traditions is that Dinah emerges as a slightly fuller character. In the combined text, although he has perhaps treated her badly in debasing her (v. 2), Shechem loves Dinah and desires to treat her well by using the appropriate channels to marry her.[51] The narrator must leave the debasement element in, in order to explain why Jacob's sons react the way they do. Although the story is concerned with an attempted marriage alliance, the request for intermarriage is not the offense, as some would have it.[52] This is confirmed by the last verse, where Simeon and Levi justify their behavior with the rhetorical question, הַכְזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ, 'Should our sister be treated like a whore?' and say nothing about intermarriage. The fact that this accusation of bad treatment is inconsistent with Shechem's love for Dinah and his attempt to marry her appropriately is not a problem for the narrator; it was a required element of the tradition, and it is logically placed at the end of the chapter. Although Shechem's mistreatment colors the interpretation of the whole to some extent, it does not erase the fact that the narrator, despite the brutality, is telling a love story.[53]

49. The verb עָנָה in the piel means something like 'oppress, humiliate, violate' (*HALOT* II, p. 853). In certain places it appears in the context of rape, but this is not the meaning of the verb itself, which is better translated as 'debase'. See Bechtel, 'Dinah', pp. 19-36; van Wolde, 'Dinah Story', pp. 225-39; van Wolde, 'Does *'innâ* Denote Rape', p. 543; Lipka, *Sexual Transgression*, p. 253.

50. Likewise, in 1 Sam. 13 it is Absalom, Tamar's full brother, who kills Amnon in revenge for the latter's debasing of Tamar.

51. Fewell and Gunn, 'Tipping the Balance', pp. 196-97.

52. See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 536-37.

53. Equally off the mark is the claim of van Wolde, 'Dinah Story', p. 235, that the brothers blame Dinah for what has happened. Some rabbinic interpretations take the same view; see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2nd edn, 2003), II, p. 307. Van Wolde's interpretation of the verb יָצָא in v. 1 is dubious, and nowhere does the text imply blame on the part of Dinah. The brothers' question has rather to do with how Dinah was treated *by* Shechem than with how she behaved toward him.

It is true that Dinah is a pawn being passed around among men in this text. If she loved Shechem and wanted to be with him, nothing is said of it. Shechem speaks to her heart, but we do not know the effect of his speech. Dinah's desires are never addressed, just as those of Sarah and Rebekah are never discussed in the wife–sister stories. But as with Sarah in particular, Dinah is an important motivator for action. The story is about avenging a sister at some level, although it is ultimately not about her but about the men around her.[54]

Deborah

Very little attention has been paid to this Deborah, Rebekah's wetnurse, who is mentioned by name only once, in Gen. 35.8,[55] although an anonymous wetnurse of Rebekah's is mentioned in Gen. 24.59 as well. The latter verse states that Rebekah takes her nurse with her when she leaves with Abraham's servant to go to Canaan and marry Isaac. Interpreters tend to assume that these two wetnurses are the same person,[56] and it is difficult to argue with this assumption. The text is not concerned with the logistics of how the wetnurse got from one place to another and suggests a tradition that this wetnurse stayed with Rebekah's family for multiple generations. Very few wetnurses are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, and it is likely that not many Israelite women had them, as they were a luxury available mostly to wealthy families.[57] This tradition may thus be intended to emphasize Rebekah's status.[58]

The mention of Deborah's grave is linked to an itinerary notice.[59] As Jacob's group moved into the area where tradition placed the gravesite, the author included the notice of Deborah's death and burial, as well as the name of the tree where she was buried, marking it as a sacred location. The death of Rachel is also recounted in this chapter (vv. 19-20) and likewise includes a sacred object memorializing the grave, in this case a stone pillar (מצבה). Indeed, this chapter contains an account of Jacob building a series of altars and stone pillars (vv. 7, 14, 20); this is a special itinerary, one of sacred sites

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54. Fewell and Gunn, 'Tipping the Balance', p. 211.

55. Gen. 35 is a combination of J, E, and P, and provides another illustration of the difficulty in disentangling a discrete E from J. The P parts of the chapter, on the other hand, are fairly easy to distinguish; cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 549.

56. See, for example, Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 552; Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, pp. 65-66.

57. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 66; Gruber, *Motherhood*, pp. 69-107.

58. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 66.

59. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 552; K.A. Deurloo, 'Narrative Geography in the Abraham Cycle', in A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past: Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature and Prophetism* (OTS, 26; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p. 49.

located within a certain area. Of the four sites mentioned, two are dedicated to God, and two to women.

3. *Women in the Joseph Cycle*

Genesis 37–50 contains what most scholars call the Joseph story, although it includes both the conclusion to the Jacob story (Genesis 37, 46–50) as well as the Joseph material (Genesis 37, 39–45), which is of independent origin.[60] The Joseph material has a markedly different style from the remainder of non-P. It lacks the characteristics of oral tales, and most likely existed only in written form.[61] While it may contain elements of various narrative themes, it is a literary unity. A single author probably wrote it, before non-P incorporated it into his work.[62] As we will see, women figure into the Joseph story very little, suggesting that purely literary works, rather than ones stemming from (oral) folklore are less likely to feature women prominently.

Tamar

Genesis 38, the story of Judah and Tamar, is a 'self-contained individual narrative' stemming from oral traditions.[63] The focus of the story, and the reason for its placement in the final text, are matters of some debate.[64] It was not originally a part of the Joseph story or the rest of the Jacob story. Non-P placed it between the two because it concerned one of Jacob's sons.[65] However, because Genesis 37 serves both as the ending of the Jacob cycle and the beginning of the Joseph story, Genesis 38 seems to be out of place and to interrupt the narrative.

Like many Pentateuchal narratives, Genesis 38 is concerned with the perpetuation of the family line, but unlike the matriarchs, barrenness is not the problem. Rather, the problem is a widow whose husband has died before

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60. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), p. 22.

61. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 28. Because of its nature, the Joseph story is often referred to as a novella.

62. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 28. Cf. also Konrad Schmid, 'Die Josephsgeschichte im Pentateuch', in Jan Christian Geertz, Konrad Schmidt, and Markus Witte (eds.), *Abschied vom Jawisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (BZAW, 315; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 83-118, who maintains the unity and independence of the Joseph story, but argues that it was added to the Pentateuch after P.

63. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 49.

64. See, e.g., Richard J. Clifford, S.J., 'Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story', *CBQ* 66 (2004), pp. 519-32; Judah Goldin, 'The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?', *JBL* 96 (1977), pp. 27-44; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 49.

65. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 49. On the placement of the chapter, see also Clifford, 'Genesis 38', pp. 519-32; Goldin, 'Youngest Son', pp. 27-44.

having any children.[66] The chapter opens with the birth of Judah's sons and closes with the birth of his grandsons. Each of the birth announcements begins with an announcement of conception and birth using feminine verb forms (vv. 3-5) that focus on the mother, much like the matriarchal childbirth traditions. Judah's wife, Bath-shua,[67] names two of the three children.[68] At the end, Tamar bears the twins Peretz and Zerah, and although in MT she does not name her children, in some Hebrew manuscripts and translations she does. From the outset, then, this chapter has the marks of belonging to the genre of women's childbirth traditions. Notably, the narrator does not include any lineage or ethnicity for Tamar. Unlike the matriarchs, her parentage is not important. This points to an origin for this story outside the circle of the patriarchal narratives, and indicates that the story itself, rather than the pedigree of the characters, is the point.

Once Tamar is widowed, however, the text offers some insights into several other biblical institutions: widowhood, levirate marriage, and prostitution. Judah's continuing role in finding Tamar a husband—including his relegating her to widow status rather than giving her to his last son[69]—indicates that although widows had some degree of autonomy in ancient Israel, they were also a vulnerable group, likely to be poor and to require protecttion.[70] Judah tells Tamar to return to her father's house, where she would likely have been provided for to some extent, but not all widows would have had this option as many of them would have no surviving family. On the other hand, if Tamar, as a widow, were truly autonomous, then she would be free to remarry or to turn to prostitution,[71] and her pregnancy would not elicit such an extreme reaction from Judah, who calls for her to be burned to death (v. 24). The only explanation that justifies Judah's reaction, as well as his continued involvement with Tamar, is that Tamar is considered to be betrothed

66.   Melissa Jackson, 'Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology', *JSOT* 98 (2002), pp. 29-46 (30); Clifford, 'Genesis 38', p. 528.

67.   V. 12 identifies Judah's wife as Bath-Shua, although it is not entirely clear whether this is a proper name or simply a means of identifying her as the daughter of a man named Shua.

68.   In the third instance (v. 3), a number of Hebrew manuscripts as well as Sam. and Targ. Ps.-J., have a feminine form of the verb קרא, suggesting that the mother did the naming in all three cases.

69.   Judah tells Tamar to 'dwell as a widow' (שבי אלמנה, v. 11), an expression that appears in Isa. 47.8 as well, and which could be a technical phrase.

70.   Cf. Num. 30.10; Deut. 10.18; 14.29; 16.11, etc., and Frank S. Frick, 'Widows in the Hebrew Bible: A Transactional Approach', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 139-51.

71.   On prostitution, particularly how it relates to the story of Tamar, see Bird, *Missing Persons*, pp. 197-236.

to Shelah.[72] Tamar's choice of Judah as target for her ploy shows that she still considers him responsible for her, and the denouement of the story, in which Judah recognizes the rightness of her claim, confirms that both Tamar and Judah realized that she should have been married to Shelah.

Judah's fear for his last remaining son's life is based on his conclusion that marrying Tamar (or perhaps only having sex with her) is not conducive to the health of the men of his family. However, the narrator reveals that it is YHWH who is responsible for the sons' deaths. Judah is in the dark about the reality of the situation, which only adds to the absurdity of his character when he endangers his own life by having sex with Tamar the man-killer. Judah does not realize that it is his sons' behavior, and not Tamar's, that has caused YHWH to kill them. Nor does he recognize Tamar when he meets her at the side of the road; Tamar positions herself at a place suggestively called פתח עינים, 'Open Eyes', and yet Judah fails to recognize her.[73] Then he is tricked into giving her his seal, cord, and staff as markers of his debt to her.[74] And finally, he does not realize that Tamar's pregnancy is the result of his own involvement in her so-called harlotry. Tamar is the only character in this narrative who is consistently aware of the situation and who is always in the right.[75] When Tamar and Judah part ways after their roadside encounter, the narrator follows her, not Judah (v. 19). This is unquestionably a narrative about Tamar.[76] It is only in its current setting, among the stories of Jacob and his sons and immediately following Judah's attempt to save Joseph in Genesis 37, that this chapter can be read as a narrative more centered on Judah than on Tamar.

Potiphar's Wife

Readers usually refer to the woman who seduces Joseph in Genesis 39 as 'Potiphar's wife', although the text never uses this title for her.[77] Instead, she is twice referred to by the phrase 'his [Joseph's] master's wife', or simply by the use of third feminine singular parts of speech. The entire story is told from Joseph's perspective, even scenes in which he is not present. For

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72.   Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 360, decides in favor of Tamar's status as an engaged member of Judah's family. However, he misses the mark when he says that 'Tamar's act proceeded from the assumption that Judah had released her permanently from the family'.

73.   Jackson, 'Lot's Daughters', p. 39.

74.   On Tamar as a trickster character, see Jackson, 'Lot's Daughters', pp. 29-46.

75.   Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 362.

76.   Many scholars recognize that this is an independent narrative that has been secondarily placed in its current context; see, for example, Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 49.

77.   See, for example, Hollis, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 184; Ron Pirson, 'The Twofold Message of Potiphar's Wife', *SJOT* 18 (2004), pp. 248-59.

example, in v. 16, the narrator reports ותנח בגדו אצלה עד־בוא אדניו אל־ביתו,
'She kept his garment until his master came to his house'. Joseph is nowhere
to be found, having fled the scene in v. 12, and yet the woman is described as
waiting, not for her own husband, but for Joseph's master. Nevertheless,
Joseph's master's wife is an active, if unpleasant, character in the narrative.
She not only speaks, but literally screams out, a fact that she recalls several
times as she relates the episode with Joseph to various people. She succeeds
in her revenge and although her seduction fails, the role she plays is critical.[78]
She is the instrument whereby Yʜᴡʜ demonstrates his protection of Joseph.
She is in control of the action; thwarted of her desired outcome, she gets
revenge through manipulation.

The story aims to show that Joseph is under divine protection. No matter
what life throws at him, Yʜᴡʜ makes sure that Joseph always comes out on
top. The narrator creates the worst possible scenario he can: a screaming
seductress who is the wife of Joseph's politically powerful master. Joseph
eludes her seduction, but even this is not enough; she has evidence to support
her lie, and the shrill wife confronts her husband, even invoking his own guilt
for bringing Joseph into their house.[79] The episode ends just as it began, with
Joseph flourishing in adverse circumstances.[80] Once again, a woman appears
in the narrative in an indispensable and active role. As in the wife–sister
stories, particularly the version in Genesis 20, she is a means through which
Yʜᴡʜ is able to demonstrate his special relationship with someone. Unlike
the matriarchs in the wife-sister stories, however, the master's wife is far
more active.

Both the wife-sister stories as well as Genesis 39 indicate the popularity of
stories of sexual escapades involving a woman that land the protagonist in
hot water, allowing God to intervene and save the protagonist. Although
Joseph's master's wife is not a sympathetic character in this instance, she is
nonetheless important. There are numerous unsympathetic male characters in
the Hebrew Bible as well, and yet that does not suggest a negative attitude
toward men in the text; neither should this text indicate a negative attitude
toward women. On the other hand, it should be noted that the text in this
instance is primarily concerned with Joseph; unlike the story of Judah and
Tamar, the object of seduction in this case is the subject of the larger
narrative.

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78. Hollis, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 184.

79. She twice uses the hiphil of בוא to accuse her husband. Pirson, 'Twofold
Message', pp. 253-55, gives an excellent account of the subtle nuances in the speeches of
Potiphar's wife.

80. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 60.

Asenath

The only other woman mentioned in the Joseph story is his wife, Asenath, who is referred to as אסנת בת־פוטי פרע כהן אן, 'Asenath, daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of On' (Gen. 41.45, 50).[81] The first instance (41.45) appears in the context of Joseph's appointment to the head of Pharaoh's court. Joseph is given an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife, the daughter of a high priest no less, signaling his assimilation into Egyptian society as well as his high status therein. There is no hint that a foreign wife might be conceived as a negative reflection on Joseph's character. Quite the opposite is the case, as this element is part of the story of his amazing success in Egypt. This departure from the narrator's earlier attitude to exogamy in the patriarchal stories indicates that Joseph, like Jacob's other sons, is not required to marry a woman in the Terahite lineage. Judah's wife is Canaanite, while no lineage at all is given for Tamar, the ancestress of David. Likewise, Joseph's marriage to an Egyptian is unproblematic.[82]

   Genesis 41.50 begins the announcement of the birth of Joseph and Aseneth's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Asenath is mentioned only in this verse; the continuation of the announcement in vv. 51-52 does not include her and sees only Joseph naming the children. Possibly Joseph does the naming because the sons' names are related to his life experiences.[83] It is true that in this instance, as opposed to namings elsewhere in Genesis, the etiologies are from the father's perspective and therefore are better placed on his lips. In the ancestral narratives, etiologies tend to be given by women,[84] but in those narratives, the matriarchs play a far greater role and can be called co-protagonists along with the patriarchs.[85] The Joseph story is concerned only with Joseph; no women emerge in the story in any real detail, and thus, as the only protagonist, Joseph does the naming.

4. *Women in Exodus and Numbers*

Exodus 1.15–2.10

Although the book of Exodus begins with a list of men, women dominate the non-P parts of the first two chapters.[86] The first women to appear in the book

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   81.   She is mentioned the same way in P (Gen. 46.20).
   82.   See Gary N. Knoppers, 'Intermarriage, Social Complexity and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah', *JBL* 120 (2001), pp. 15-30.
   83.   So Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 97.
   84.   See the discussion in the previous chapter, as well as the observation of Finlay, *Birth Report Genre*, p. 41.
   85.   For the same argument, see Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 375-78.
   86.   J. Cheryl Exum, '"You Shall Let Every Daughter Live": A Study of Exodus 1.8–2.10', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 37-61 (40).

of Exodus are the Egyptian midwives who refuse to obey the pharaoh's orders to kill the newborn sons of the Hebrews (Exod. 1.15-22).[87] They are the only figures whose proper names are preserved in this unit (vv. 15-22), a fact that has long mystified critics.[88] The midwives are essential to the theme of oppression that forms the background to the exodus. Notably, they achieve their goals through deception, as did many of the women in Genesis.[89] Moses' mother and sister also use a kind of deception in order not only to save Moses' life, but also to ensure that he is nursed by his own mother and thus that she is able to spend a few more years with him, until she gives him up completely.

Exodus 2 begins with a marriage notice followed by a birth notice, but unlike other birth notices, the naming of the child comes only at the end of the narrative. The parents, the sister and the pharaoh's daughter remain nameless as well. The naming of Moses, and the revelation to the reader that this story concerns perhaps the most well-known figure in biblical tradition, is the culmination of the narrative. It is absurd to think that a child would remain unnamed for the entire length of his nursing and weaning. The delay is rather intended to highlight the naming—or rather, the revelation of the hero's identity—as the primary concern of the episode. The namelessness of the other characters (including the father) only highlights this, and should not be taken as a devaluation of the women in the story.[90]

Although Moses' family members have names in other traditions, it is not clear whether the mother, the father, and the sister here are really the same as Amram, Jochebed, and Miriam.[91] Nor is there any reference to Moses' brother

Cf. Jopie Siebert-Hommes, 'But If She Be a Daughter…She May Live! "Daughters" and "Sons" in Exodus 1–2', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 62-74; Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 37; William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 142.

87. The passage is often assigned to two sources: vv. 1-21 to E and v. 22 (as well as 2.1-10) to J. See Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (trans. J.S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 23; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 137. The connection of v. 22 to vv. 15-21 is not completely clear. While some scholars assign v. 22 to a different source, it flows logically from the preceding narrative. On the other hand, it also provides the perfect opening to the following narrative. 1.15–2.10 are best explained as two independent traditions that were available to and combined by non-P; 1.22 serves as a bridge verse between the two, although it is likely an organic part of the tradition in 1.15-21.

88. Siebert-Hommes, 'But If She Be a Daughter', pp. 66-67.

89. Meyers, *Exodus*, pp. 37-38; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 142.

90. See Reinhartz, *Why Ask my Name*.

91. The names Amram and Jochebed appear as Moses and Aaron's parents only in P: Exod. 6.20; Num. 26.59. Cf. 1 Chron. 5.29; 23.13, where Jochebed is not mentioned. Aaron is called Moses' brother only once in non-P (Exod. 4.14), but nine times in P (Exod. 7.1, 2; 28.1, 2, 4, 41; Lev. 16.2; Num. 20.8; 27.13) and once in D (Deut. 32.50).

Aaron, named or unnamed. At an early stage in the tradition, Moses was not related to either Aaron or Miriam and this story may reflect such a stage.[92] Alternatively, it may simply be that the narrative concerns only Moses: he is the real focus of this story, and although a number of women are instrumental to his survival into early childhood, as soon as Moses is able to take care of himself, women very quickly cease to figure into the narrative at all.

Zipporah

Moses' wife Zipporah appears in three chapters in Exodus, and each instance poses some serious interpretational problems. The first appearance, Exod. 2.16-22, is a type-scene of a meeting at a well,[93] resulting in the marriage of Zipporah to Moses and the birth of their son Gershom. It does not fully conform to the betrothal type-scene, however, because the meeting at the well is with seven daughters, and does not include any sort of notice of betrothal. In contrast, Isaac's servant in Genesis 24 gives Rebekah jewelry as a token of her betrothal to Isaac, and in Gen. 29.11, Jacob's reaction on meeting Rachel (he kisses her and bursts into tears) confirms that she is the woman from Laban's family that he seeks. Exodus 2.16-22, the shortest of these scenes, focuses the least on the women and their actions.[94] The seven girls are daughters of a priest whose name is not given immediately, perhaps to highlight the fact that he is a priest and that, consequently, Zipporah is the daughter of a priest. It is possible that Israelite tradition held it as a point of pride that Moses' wife was the daughter of a priest, especially if he was a priest of YHWH.[95]

The narrative follows the Midianite priest's seven daughters for a few verses, but switches abruptly to Zipporah in v. 21. While she must be one of the daughters at the well, nothing singles her out from the rest. Unlike Rebekah and Rachel, these seven daughters appear to be a bit flighty: they do

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Miriam is known as Aaron's sister once in non-P (Exod. 15.20) and as the sister of both Moses and Aaron once in P (Num. 26.59, the only genealogy that includes the whole family, a late tradition). In Num. 12, Aaron and Miriam are not called brother and sister either of each other or of Moses.

92.	Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 178; Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 81.

93.	Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, pp. 51-58; Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics', pp. 273-81.

94.	Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics', pp. 276-77.

95.	So, for instance, Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 171. This view is related to the 'Midianite hypothesis', which attributes elements of Yahwism, perhaps including the introduction of YHWH-worship, to Midianite influence, generally assumed to have come from Moses' Midianite father-in-law, possibly a priest of YHWH; see Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period.* I. *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (trans. John Bowden; OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 51-52; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 635.

not invite Moses home with them, and rather than immediately offering information about him, their father must ask before they report. Rebekah, on the other hand, invites Isaac's servant to her father's house while they are still at the well, and Rachel runs back with the specific intention of telling Laban about Jacob. Esther Fuchs notes this steady slide in the strong and positive depiction of the bride-to-be in each successive narrative of betrothal by the well.[96] Following on Exod. 1.15–2.10, with its abundance of active women, however, the depiction here is surprising. The primary reason for this is that this scene involves Moses, arguably the most important character in the Pentateuch. In the first example of the motif of betrothal at the well, Rebekah's character comes to the fore because there is no major male character to compete with her. In the second example, Rachel must share the limelight with Jacob, who is a far more active character. Nevertheless, Rachel, as a key ancestor in the establishment of the Israelite line, is a major enough character that she plays an active role. In this final scene, however, the focus is entirely on Moses, and so the female figures fade into the background. Zipporah's role here is reflected in the rest of the biblical text as well, where she appears very little. As for the actual marriage, Moses has a much more active relationship with his father-in-law than with his wife.[97]

The last verse of this section, 2.22, is the announcement of the birth of a son. It begins with the feminine form ותלד בן but continues with a masculine ויקרא as Moses names his child Gershom and gives an etiology for the name. A few Hebrew manuscripts have a feminine verb instead, but as the etiology is from Moses' perspective, the masculine is not only more appropriate but also fits with the general focus of the narrative on Moses.

After the birth of Gershom, Zipporah disappears from the narrative, while Moses travels to Horeb for the burning-bush theophany. Zipporah reappears in Exod. 4.20, when Moses takes her and their sons[98] to head back to Egypt. Verses 21-23 break from v. 20 and intrude on the action of Moses' family and their trip back to Egypt.[99] However, the placement of these verses adds literary depth, as they mention the future death of Pharaoh's firstborn, which serves as a segue into vv. 24-26.[100] Verse 24 begins one of the more notoriously difficult passages in the Pentateuch, the 'bridegroom of blood' episode (vv. 24-26). Many have tried and failed to explain this bizarre story. That Moses is the object of the construction המיתו, '(to) kill him', is evident when

96.   Fuchs, 'Structure, Ideology and Politics', pp. 273-81.
97.   Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 175.
98.   In MT, Moses and Zipporah have only had one son at this point, despite the use of the plural 'sons' in this verse. In Exod. 18.3-4, however, they have two sons. LXX, Syr., and Vg. include the second son in 2.22, but this is probably a secondary harmonization.
99.   Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 195.
100. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 195-96.

v. 24 is read in its original context following v. 20; Moses is the immediately preceding referent. It is unclear whose leg (or genitals) Zipporah is touching the cut foreskin to, what the reference to חתן־דמים, 'bridegroom of blood',[101] means, or what the purpose of the ritual is. Propp's suggestion that Moses must somehow be expiated of his bloodguilt for killing the Egyptian (Exod. 2.11-15) makes sense of the blood aspect; however, Propp's explanation of the connection between circumcision and bridegrooms associated with the word חתן does not do much to explain the episode.[102]

  Zipporah's speeches about the 'bloody bridegroom' (vv. 25, 26) remain obscure, but some observations and conclusions about the episode are possible even if her cryptic speeches are left aside. The first issue is the matter of the action she performs on her son. Propp notes the significance of the phrase 'her son', rather than 'his' (Moses') son, placing Zipporah at the forefront of the episode.[103] Additionally, the verb used is כרת, 'cut (off)', rather than מול, 'circumcise', suggesting that this is not the same sort of ritual circumcision attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[104] The use of the noun מולת, 'circumcision', at the end of v. 26 (in Zipporah's second speech) indicates that circumcision is intended, but the verb suggests a different context for the action itself. Neither does circumcision have the same significance in non-P that it has in P; Genesis 34 indicates that circumcision is not reserved as a uniquely Israelite rite. This too, then, could be an instance of circumcision not associated with the Israelite cultus or the covenant with YHWH. If so, it suggests that Zipporah may have been performing a family or household religious rite of which she, probably like other women, was a practitioner.[105] Despite the difficulties in understanding this episode, the key point remains that Zipporah is the primary actor and the only speaker. In a book increasingly concerned with Moses—and this passage, too, is concerned with a story about how Moses nearly died—his salvation once again comes from a woman.

  Zipporah appears a final time in Exod. 18.2-7. Verse 2 states that Jethro brings Zipporah to Moses אחר שלוחיה, traditionally translated as something like 'after her sending away', with the sense that Moses had sent her back to her father's house at some point after their initial departure in Exodus 4.[106]

101.   See Ackerman, 'Is Miriam also among the Prophets', p. 74; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 233-38.

102.   Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 234-38. Cf. John Goldingay, 'The Significance of Circumcision', *JSOT* 88 (2000), pp. 3-18 (11).

103.   Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 219.

104.   Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 63.

105.   So Ackerman, 'Is Miriam Also among the Prophets', pp. 74-75.

106.   See, for instance, Noth, *Exodus*, p. 148; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 326-27.

However, שלוחיה is more properly interpreted as a reference to Zipporah's dowry, yielding instead the translation 'after her marriage (to Moses)'.[107] The connection with the material about Moses and Zipporah's marriage earlier in Exodus is unclear, but perhaps this episode once followed more closely upon it, or perhaps it represents a variant tradition.

Verses 3-4 follow awkwardly on the end of v. 2; they announce that Jethro has taken Zipporah's two sons, giving their names and the etiologies. They are called 'her sons', perhaps because they are with Zipporah, or perhaps because 'his sons' would create an ambiguous reading implying that the sons belong to Jethro. Notably, neither of the etiologies is from Zipporah's perspective. Including the names of the sons stretches the episode of meeting out and emphasizes Moses' family. However, while Jethro sends word to Moses that he is bringing Zipporah and the children with him (v. 6), on their arrival in v. 7, Moses greets only Jethro, offering him a kiss, asking after his health, and inviting him into his tent to talk. Nothing is said of Zipporah, or of the two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. The point in this episode is the meeting between Jethro and Moses. Including Moses' wife and children fits in the narrative, especially as Jethro is repeatedly referred to as Moses' father-in-law (vv. 1, 2, 5, 12, 14, 17). The appearance of Zipporah here serves to round out the scene more fully, as she is inextricably linked to the theme of the Midianite meeting as the daughter and wife of the two main characters. But as such, Zipporah is incidental, and she is forgotten as soon as Moses and Jethro come together.

Miriam

Miriam appears only twice in non-P, but unlike P, where she is relegated to a genealogy and a death notice, in non-P the tradition reflects a significant role for her.[108] The first non-P Miriam tradition, Exod. 15.20-21, depicts Miriam leading the Israelite women in song and dance after the victory at the Reed Sea. The song that the women sing is almost identical to the first line of Moses' song in Exod. 15.1, and many scholars recognize that the ascription of the song to Moses is secondary.[109] Other exemplars of the women's victory

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107.   Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 136; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 629; Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup, 113; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), p. 151. Westbrook also notes that the dowry was only given once the bride left her father's house, thus explaining the reference here. Cf. also 1 Kgs 9.16; and with the more general meaning of 'parting gift', Mic. 1.14.

108.   Moses' sister in Exod. 2.1-10 is not the same as the figure specifically named Miriam; see discussion above.

109.   Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam', *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 237-50, argue that the song of Miriam is the title or incipit of the longer song, originally attributed to Miriam, rather than an older and shorter version of the song. Noth,

song tradition provide compelling evidence for the original association of the song with Miriam, the tradition reflected in vv. 20-21.[110]

In addition to attesting to the women's victory song tradition, and to Miriam's role in leading the people in this celebration, Exod. 15.20 calls Miriam a prophetess and identifies her as the sister of Aaron. However, as Burns rightly notes, Miriam does not participate in any activities generally ascribed to prophetesses or their male equivalents. Burns concludes that Miriam is called a prophet in order to give her some sort of introduction and context, as this is her first appearance in the text.[111] Burns also concludes that calling Miriam the sister of Aaron is part of a priestly attempt to minimize any threat to Aaron's unique status, bringing her into the circle of the 'family business'.[112] This depends on Burns's assessment of Miriam as a cult leader specifically, which is questionable; the association of Miriam with Aaron could also reflect a tradition that grouped them together as early leaders specifically in contrast to Moses.

Miriam appears again in Numbers 12, together with Aaron this time as well.[113] In fact, in this episode, Miriam and Aaron act in conjunction with each other throughout, although nothing is said about any family relationship between them or with Moses.[114] The chapter begins with Miriam and Aaron's complaint against Moses over his Cushite wife.[115] However, they quickly

Exodus, p. 122, asserts the priority of vv. 20-21 and connects them with women's victory songs, although he does not comment on the original ascription of the song to Miriam. J. Gerald Janzen, 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 187-99 (190), argues compellingly that Exod. 15.19-21 is an analepsis containing the revelation of additional action; however, his observation that 15.19 repeats much of 14.29 would rather suggest a resumptive repetition, the song attributed to Moses having been inserted into the narrative between the two.

110.   See Poethig, 'Victory Song Tradition'; Meyers, 'Of Drums and Damsels', pp. 16-27; Meyers, 'Miriam the Musician', pp. 207-30.

111.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, pp. 46-48.

112.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 94.

113.   Burns's interpretation of this entire chapter is generally problematic; she sees it as a contest between Levites, represented by Moses, and Aaronides, represented by Aaron and Miriam (Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 94). Burns's major problem lies in seeing a priestly role for Aaron in every instance, despite the fact that much of the material is not primarily concerned with his role as a priest; cf. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 178-79.

114.   Similarly, Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (trans. James D. Martin; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 94.

115.   This Cushite wife is unknown elsewhere in the tradition; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 169, is probably correct in arguing that while it was commonly held that Moses had a foreign wife, there were different traditions concerning her ethnicity. It need not indicate a tradition about a second wife in addition to Zipporah, as, for instance,

drop this theme and instead challenge Moses' role as divine intermediary, asking rhetorically if YHWH has only spoken through Moses. YHWH confronts Miriam and Aaron, chastising them for challenging Moses' prophetic authority, which he confirms as unique among prophets.[116] YHWH singles Miriam out for punishment, striking her with leprosy (מצרעת), but Aaron's response indicates that he views himself as implicated as well. He asks for Moses' intercession, which Moses grants but which YHWH coldly rebuffs. Miriam then spends seven days outside the camp, either as punishment[117] or for purification.[118]

This chapter is another example of multiple traditions—one about the Cushite wife and one about Moses' prophetic authority—that are so thoroughly combined as to render them impossible to completely separate out in the current text.[119] Originally the challenge regarding the Cushite wife seems to have come from Miriam alone, as reflected in the punishment of Miriam and not Aaron, while the challenge over prophetic authority came from both Miriam and Aaron.[120] However, this explanation does not account for the role Aaron plays in Miriam's punishment, particularly in his use of first common plural forms in v. 11. Possibly the punishment of leprosy is a response to the second challenge, over Moses' authority, and not to the issue of the Cushite wife. If this is the case, it leaves v. 1 unresolved.[121]

Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 4; New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 328, argues.

116.   The speech, especially v. 6, is very difficult. For possible solutions, see Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 329.

117.   So Noth, *Numbers*, p. 97.

118.   Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 333; Levine argues that the seven-day quarantine was an old practice, predating P, and thus does not require that this text know priestly laws. The tradition in Deut. 24.9 adds little to our understanding of this episode, as it does not specify Miriam's offense.

119.   Noth, *Numbers*, pp. 92-93.

120.   Noth, *Numbers*, pp. 92-93. So also Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 93. Note that the complaint starts out with the 3f.s. converted imperfect, but then goes on to include both Miriam and Aaron as subjects. This is normal in biblical Hebrew, where the prepositive verb followed by a compound subject may agree in number only with the first subject; see GKC, §146f-g; Joüon, §150q; Noth, *Numbers*, p. 93. However, cf., for instance, Judg. 5.1, in which Barak is probably a secondary addition.

121.   For an alternate interpretation, focused on the issue of intermarriage, see John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 238-39. However, biblical attitudes toward exogamous marriage are varied (see Knoppers, 'Intermarriage', pp. 15-30), and if the continuation of the narrative truly concerns Moses' marriage, it is striking that nothing more is explicitly said on the topic after v. 1.

Many scholars note the connection between Numbers 12 and the imme-
diately preceding chapter concerning the complaining of the Israelites and the
appearance of the quail.[122] That narrative itself is also composed of two
separate traditions: one in which the people complain because they have no
meat to eat,[123] and one in which Moses complains that the burden of leading
the people is too great for him.[124] The former is solved by a plague, which
effectively quells not only the Israelites' desire for meat but their complain-
ing as well. The latter is solved by the appointment of seventy elders to share
the prophetic burden with Moses. As Van Seters argues, Numbers 12 is a
variation on this theme of complaint, which serves narratively to reinforce
Moses' leadership by demonstrating his ability to appeal for divine inter-
cession.[125] This theme is present in both of the combined traditions of
Numbers 11 as well. In this regard, then, Numbers 12 follows logically and
thematically on Numbers 11, and Numbers 11 thus provides some context for
interpreting Numbers 12, despite the fact that Moses' plea on Miriam's
behalf in the latter chapter is unsuccessful.

However, there are major differences as well. In Numbers 11, Moses
himself complains about his prophetic burden, and YHWH provides him with
help in the form of the seventy elders. When two more people—Eldad and
Medad—are found to be prophesying, this is deemed acceptable, and Moses
fervently wishes that the entire population could prophesy in order to
decrease his burden further. If the complaint of Miriam and Aaron is read in
this context, then they could be protesting their exclusion from the group of
the seventy elders. Their question, however, betrays an ignorance of the pre-
vious episode, as they ask only about themselves and Moses.[126] Thus, while
Numbers 11 may provide a new canonical reading for Numbers 12, it cannot
have had any relation to it originally.

Numbers 12 may also be compared to Numbers 16 where Korah, Dathan
and Abiram challenge Moses and Aaron. (This text, too, combines two
sources.) In this case, all of the challengers die, as in Numbers 11 the outcry
of the people is punished first with fire and then with plague, again causing
many deaths. However, in Numbers 12, although Miriam becomes leprous,
Miriam and Aaron do not die. This attests to the importance of their charac-
ters; the fact that Aaron escapes visible punishment, on the other hand,
reflects his higher status and greater importance in the tradition, while his

122.   See, for instance, Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, pp. 342-43; Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 93;
Noth, *Numbers*, p. 93.

123.   11.1-13, 18-24a, 31.

124.   11.14-17; 24b-30.

125.   Van Seters, *Life of Moses*, p. 235.

126.   Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 94, also points out that, ironically, YHWH speaks directly
to Miriam and Aaron in v. 5, thus confirming that he does not speak only to Moses!

efforts to mitigate Miriam's punishment make him look all the more sympathetic. It is perhaps significant as well that this episode comes soon after YHWH gives Israel the law, meaning that, in terms of narrative setting, the nation is in a more centralized and less liminal state. Following Ackerman,[127] the immediate effect of this increase in a central authority would be a decrease in the status of female leaders like Miriam.

Numbers 25.1-5
The non-P episode in Num. 25.1-5 recounts the 'whoring' of Israelite men with Moabite women, resulting in the Israelites' idolatrous worship of Baal-Peor. The expression used of the men's action, זנה אל, 'to go whoring with/after' (v. 1) appears only here and in Ezek. 16.26, 28. While Israelite men may 'whore' religiously after other deities (זנה אחר),[128] elsewhere only women 'whore' sexually with men (זנה), not vice versa.[129] The use of the verb זנה here is artful, as it invokes both the sexual as well as the religious aspects of the episode. That the men in Numbers 25 are said to be the ones doing the whoring indicates that Israelite perceptions of sexual misconduct were not entirely one-sided.

   The vocabulary in vv. 1-3 bears a striking resemblance to Exod. 34.15-16, a passage warning against the dangers of forming alliances with Canaanites and being lured into idolatry and intermarriage with them. The passages share six words or roots, some of which are repeated more than once: זנה, קרא, אלהיהם/ן, זבח, אכל, and בנות. Although Exod. 34.15-16 is concerned with the dangers of apostasy once the Israelites are settled in the promised land, it is apparent that Num. 25.1-5, despite involving Moabite women, contains an illustration of the dangers cautioned against in Exodus 34.[130] Numbers 25.1-5 is specifically concerned with the problem of intermarriage and how it leads to foreign cultic worship. Foreign women in particular are singled out as culprits in this regard.[131]

   Numbers 25.1-5, the last non-P passage pertaining to women, constitutes a serious departure from previous non-P treatments of women. Its concern with foreign marriage and its alleged connection to improper worship are not found in any of the previous non-P material. Abraham's concern that Isaac not marry a Canaanite may stem from religious concerns, although Abraham's religious identity is singular at this point, and fetching a wife from his family

   127.   Ackerman, 'Is Miriam Also among the Prophets', pp. 47-80.
   128.   E.g. Deut. 31.16; Judg. 2.17, etc.
   129.   E.g. Gen. 38.24; Lev. 21.9, etc. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 212.
   130.   Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 212, for instance, notes the connection, but he does not remark on how closely the two passages correspond to each other.
   131.   Three other texts in the Hebrew Bible mention Baal-Peor (Deut. 4.3; Hos. 9.10; Ps. 106.28) but all focus on the religious apostasy with no mention of women specifically.

will not ensure that she is a follower of YHWH. His concern is more likely one of ethnic or family/clan identity.[132] Rachel's theft of the teraphim even hints at practices that might have been condemned by a strict follower of YHWH, and yet she is an acceptable wife for a patriarch. Miriam's complaint about Moses' Cushite wife could denote an aversion to foreign marriage, but if this is the case, then the author is oddly silent on the matter. The fact that references to Moses' Midianite wife draw no ire suggests again that the negative religious influence of foreign women was simply not a major concern for most of the narratives collected in non-P.

Why, then, does Num. 25.1-5 depart from this generally permissive attitude toward foreign women? Its similarity to Exod. 34.15-16 provides the key. The Baal-Peor narrative is connected with the covenant material found in Exodus 32–34, a corpus that is heavily influenced by the Deuteronomist or Deuteronomic thinking.[133] It thus stems from a completely different circle of tradition than did the narratives about the matriarchs and other women of the pre-exodus and exodus generations. The women at Baal-Peor are not vividly-drawn characters; they are illustrations of a cultic covenant motif, drawn from and for a cultic covenant setting. Whether these passages are genuinely non-P, or are evidence of D/tr influence in the text, they have no connection with other non-P narratives about women.[134]

5. *Conclusions*

In non-P, women's active involvement is often critical to the narrative—Sarah is necessary for Abraham's success, as Rebekah is for Jacob's. Women, in their capacity as mothers, are an obvious necessity for the continuation of the family line and fulfillment of the promise, and in this regard they often appear in the priestly tradition as well; but in non-P women's roles go beyond the biological. Eve is responsible for setting the course of human life in motion in the first place. Sarah is instrumental in Abraham's amassing of wealth, through her complicity in the wife-sister ruse. Without the quick thinking of a number of women, Moses would not have survived his infancy nor, apparently, would he have survived the return from Midian to Egypt.

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132.   On ethnic identity, see Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), pp. 320-27.

133.   Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Deuteronomic Contribution to the Narrative in Genesis–Numbers: A Test Case', in Linda S. Schearing and Steven L. McKenzie (eds.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTSup, 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 84-115 (108-11); Childs, *Exodus*, p. 613.

134.   In this case, they would reflect Carr's idea that D/tr ideas were 'in the air' without requiring D/tr authorship or editing; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 159.

Women appear in a variety of motifs and settings, and may be depicted positively or negatively, as is true also of men. In the Genesis material in particular, while women are often limited to certain roles and appear in relation to certain men, they are still depicted as prominently and as colorfully as the men are. Women are thus *quantitatively* prominent in non-P. There is considerable narrative material about them, whether it is *qualitatively* positive or not.

The traditions of childbirth and the promise of a son belong to a well-defined and widespread genre of stories about women. Once an independent group of traditions,[135] non-P placed these stories in his narrative in such a way that they now appear in relation to the promises to the patriarchs, which provide a narrative framework for the ancestral history. As a result, the women's stories seem to support the idea that men were always the key players in Israelite history. Nevertheless, the original independence of the matriarchal traditions is not completely masked in non-P. It is not until the work of P that the matriarchs are fully co-opted by the patriarchs and lose their unique standing.

It also appears to be the case that the older the time the story was about, the more active the women are. The contrast between Eve and Zipporah, for instance, is striking, and between the matriarchs and Miriam even more so. Miriam may once have been a prominent figure; the key role she plays in the few traditions about her suggests that she had a very high status within the Israelite community at one time. However, with the focus of the biblical text on Moses, her role has been pared down significantly, and the traditions about her have been greatly eroded—quantitatively speaking—in the current text of Exodus–Numbers. Such a contrast between female characters in Genesis and those in Exodus–Numbers suggests that the role of women is inversely proportional to the role of men in the story. Rebekah, for example, shares far more significantly in the action, while Isaac hardly acts at all, but Moses takes narrative precedence over nearly every woman mentioned in the same narrative. The more active the man, the more circumscribed the role of the woman. Even where she may still be important, as in the wife–sister narratives, she stays quietly in the background.

Perhaps in Israelite tradition, just as the early generations lived longer, so the women in those generations tended to be more actively involved in the making of Israelite history. This could have been an element of older, often oral traditions, or it might have been the result of a conscious effort on the part of non-P, who may have used a heavy hand in editing the material about women once the major figure of Moses appeared on the scene. Consciously

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135.   The fact that we have here an identifiable genre of traditions *about* women should not be taken to mean that we have identifiable traditions originally conceived or composed *by* women. It is a possibility, but nothing more.

or not, non-P is moving from a mythical past in which women figure much more prominently, to a less-distant past closer to the state of affairs that he knew, where priests and kings were in control of the nation and women's roles were limited. Significantly, the last non-P material concerning women, the Baal-Peor episode, reflects an increasingly centralized and legalistic cult in which foreign women, once deemed acceptable as spouses for important characters, are perceived as a threat to Israelite men.

The analysis of material on women has shown not only that non-P is fairly inclusive where women are concerned, but also that the material on women cannot easily be divided into independent sources like J and E. Genesis 29–30, which many scholars consider to be a combination of both J and E, provides the strongest example of this; the consistent flow of the narrative, despite alternation in divine epithets, suggests that it is a unified composition. While many of the chapters traditionally divided between J and E are no doubt comprised of more than one tradition, these traditions have been combined so inextricably that disentangling them is impossible; as a result, arguing for an independent and reconstructable E source is impossible as well.

Dividing non-P into J and E also results in some irregularities where traditions about women are concerned. Following Noth and Friedman, who both reconstruct a fairly extensive E narrative, women appear and disappear suddenly in the narrative.[136] There are no betrothal and marriage scenes and only a few odd birth scenes in such an E. Sarah appears in one wife–sister narrative, and gives one etiology for Isaac. There is almost no trace of Rebekah, the single tradition mentioning her being the notice of the death of her wetnurse in Gen. 35.8. (Admittedly, there is very little material on Isaac in E either; however, to have E suddenly mention the death and burial of the wetnurse of a character who has never been mentioned is fairly odd.) According to Friedman's division, there is no Miriam in J, whereas according to Noth she is missing entirely from E. While the material on women in non-P most likely comes from disparate and separate traditions, as the discussion of the passages on women shows, there is not enough, particularly of the demonstrably important matriarchal traditions, to posit an independent E source.

The material on women is inconclusive where absolute dating of the sources is concerned. There are no references to the Babylonian exile, for instance, and traditions about the patriarchal period can no longer be relied upon to provide historical evidence. However, these texts may provide some useful data concerning relative dating, particularly in relation to the material

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136.   According to Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, the material about women in E appears in Gen. 20.1b-18; 21.6, 8-34; 25.1-4; 30.1-24a*; 31*; 35.8, 16b-20; Exod. 1.15-21; 15.20-21; 18; Num. 12. Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, differs only on Gen. 25.1-4; Exod. 15.20-21; Num. 12, all of which he assigns to J.

on women in P. The key to this dating is the process of centralization, a process attested in the biblical record and the inevitable result of a nation consolidating its power in a monarchy and a religious cultus, as ancient Israel (or perhaps more properly, Judah) did. Many feminist biblical historians have noted the role that centralization plays in the status of women in a society.[137] Centralization drew power away from the family, where women played the greatest role. While laws that reflect centralization, most notably those of Deuteronomy, ostensibly move to include women in the religious community, the accompanying shift in power away from the family nonetheless serves to decrease women's overall power and status in the society.[138] Centralization also decreases the role of women in the official cultus, manifested in Israel in the exclusion of women from the priesthood.[139]

The prominence of women in non-P suggests that the traditions themselves developed in a less-centralized period. However, the way in which non-P incorporated the traditions into the male-centered narrative, which focused first on the promise to the patriarchs and then on the roles of Moses and Aaron, suggests that by the time non-P was collecting them, centralization was at least an emerging social force. The significantly reduced role of women in P, which will be discussed in the following chapters, reflects a time when centralization had become deeply entrenched in Israelite society. Just what periods in the history of ancient Israel these might correspond to will be taken up in the Conclusions.

137.   See Ackerman, 'Is Miriam Also among the Prophets', pp. 57-58; Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 102; Hackett, 'In the Days of Jael', p. 17; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, p. 614; Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 190-91; Steinberg, 'The Deuteronomic Law Code', pp. 161-68.

138.   See Steinberg, 'The Deuteronomic Law Code', pp. 161-68; Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 102.

139.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 102; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, p. 614; cf. also Judith Romney Wegner, '"Coming before the Lord": The Exclusion of Women from the Public Domain of the Israelite Priestly Cult', in Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler (eds.), *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (VTSup, 93; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 451-65, who argues that women's status was also different from men's in terms of offering sacrifices.

4

Women in P's Genesis

The previous chapter showed that women feature prominently in non-P texts, reflecting a varied set of traditions, but whereas women in traditions about the earlier periods of Israelite history appeared in the greatest detail and with the most autonomy, women began to fade into the background when Moses appeared. In P, this trend continues, as Moses and Aaron become the focus of the majority of the material. While there is considerably more priestly material in Exodus–Numbers than there is in Genesis, women appear more often in P's Genesis than in the P material in later books.

The ease with which many P texts are identified is owing to P's theology, frequently evident in the text. This theology influenced the treatment of women in P, as the following discussion will show.[1] P is generally concerned with women only insofar as they relate to some other topic, especially genealogical pedigree. Nearly all the P material concerning women relates very specifically to the concerns of men. At times, P is silent about an episode that non-P narrates; some of these cases are significant, and will be discussed in the course of this chapter. P also shows evidence of being aware of non-P in places, sometimes even specifically responding to it. P often incorporates older material into the narrative, while other texts are wholly new compositions of P. The genealogical framework is also part of an independent P tradition. However, there are places where P adds redactional elements as well. As this chapter will show, P is both a source and a redaction. There are layers within P, and these layers do not present an entirely consistent view of women, although there are evident trends which, at times, echo the development of the treatment of women in non-P.

Scholars have long recognized that the priestly material includes not only the material traditionally described as P, but also a collection of material from the Holiness School, termed H, which was added to P.[2] Most of the

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1. I will follow the general scholarly consensus in assigning texts to P, although at times I will diverge from the majority opinion (with explanation).

2. In this, as in most judgments of what belongs to H, I will follow the arguments of Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). Exceptions and disagreements will be noted.

priestly material in Genesis belongs to P, particularly to the genealogical material incorporated by the priestly authors into their work. In Exodus– Numbers, however, there is significantly more H material than there is in Genesis. Several of the passages on women in these books appear in contexts considered to be H. However, in some of these cases, the material on women may in fact belong to a pre-H layer of the text; as we will see, H includes very little material on women, which is consistent with the decrease in atten- tion paid to women in later texts.

Of the Pentateuchal books, Genesis has by far the most material on women and as a result has engendered much scholarship on the topic. A large portion of this scholarship focuses on the women in non-P, as there is more narrative material there. However, a closer look at P reveals women hiding in many corners of the text. The material falls roughly into two categories: genealogi- cal material and narrative episodes. There is some mixing of these two, and the genealogies may also contain itinerary notices as well as brief birth scenes. I will treat each of these two larger categories individually, noting the places where the distinction between them blurs. In this way, the pattern of P's treatment of women, as well as the connection of women with some of P's larger themes, will become apparent.

1. *Genealogical Material*

Genesis 5

The opening genealogy in P, Gen. 5.1-2, echoes Gen. 1.26-27.[3] It repeats numerous elements from the creation story: the verbs ברא, 'create', and עשה, 'make', for creation; בדמות, 'in the likeness'; זכר ונקבה, 'male and female'; and ויברך אתם, 'he blessed them'. The syntax of the phrase בדמות אלהים עשה אתו (5.1) echoes both נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו (1.26) and בצלם אלהים ברא אתו (1.27), indicating either that both Gen. 1.26-27 and Gen. 5.1-2 come from the same hand or that one is dependent on the other.[4] Genesis 5.1-2 links the end of the creation account with the beginning of the genealogies, which in turn lead into the flood story. Gen. 1.1–2.4a is a composition of a priestly author and not a part of the earliest layers of P; because Gen. 5.1-2 gives a distinct summary of the creation of humans and seems purposefully created to link two separate sections of text, it is most likely a composition by the same priestly author. Gen. 5.1-2 also adds a divine element to a list of genealogies that are otherwise entirely human-centered, suggesting that P has

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3. This passage will be treated below, as it is a narrative rather than a genealogy.

4. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 355; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 72-73, argue that 5.1-2 is dependent on 1.26-27; Carr's argument does not preclude both also having been written by the same hand.

added the element to a pre-existing genealogy in order to connect the various episodes of the primeval history together.

The use of אדם and the reiteration that this singular noun includes both male and female shows that humans, male and female, occupy a single niche in P's conception of the world. The command to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1.28) is not repeated here, but the text moves into the genealogy of Adam—that is, the list of the fruitfulness and multiplying that Adam and his wife do. Although P includes male and female within the rubric of *human*, P's genealogy here, as elsewhere, focuses almost exclusively on men. Women appear only insofar as P deems it necessary to include them. The mention of daughters in the generic 'sons and daughters' (vv. 4, 7, 10, etc.) should not be taken as indicating that P is concerned here with actual, specific daughters. It is rather a catch-all equivalent to the English *children*, and is no more significant in P than is the phrase *male and female.*

Verse 3 is particularly important, not because of what it says but because of what it does not say: Adam has a son 'in his image and likeness' and names him Seth. This verse is the P equivalent of non-P's account in Gen. 4.25, discussed above. P's version differs on Eve's role in the episode, focusing solely on Adam. Indeed, P never mentions Eve at all, either directly or indirectly.[5] It is possible that P knew non-P and was responding to it, or that P simply had a similar tradition but with an emphasis on the man rather than the woman. As Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes observes, on occasion a P text seems to be correcting a J one by shifting the naming from woman to man, as P is concerned with the lines of men.[6]

The verb in 5.3, ויולד, is a masculine hiphil form. Ronald Hendel has compared the forms of the verb ילד used in P and J to make diachronic judgments about the development of the text, concluding that P reflects a later usage than J.[7] Hendel notes that the shift to hiphils and niphals in P reflects a desire to correct the 'semantic ambiguity' of the qal forms, which are used indiscriminately of male and female subjects in J. In the two lengthy P genealogies in Genesis, chs. 5 and 11, hiphils are used exclusively.[8] However, Hendel does not note that P's shift coincides with a shift to exclusively male subjects, and thus reveals something deeper about P's ideology. P has focused the genealogies systematically on the males, and has adjusted the

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5. P uses only the term אדם, with both a general meaning of *human*, which would include the female, or as the proper name Adam. But P never refers either to Eve (direct reference) or to 'Adam's wife' (indirect reference).

6. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, p. 102.

7. Hendel, 'Begetting', pp. 38-46. Again, I use the sigla J and E only to reflect the arguments of those I am citing.

8. A hiphil form of the verb occurs 28 times in Gen. 5 and 27 times in Gen. 11.

language to reflect this change.[9] The genealogy of Lamech in Gen. 5.28-31 offers another example of this phenomenon: P presents Lamech's line as a simple genealogical progression from one male, Lamech, to the next, Noah. The non-P text discussed above (Gen. 4.18-24), on the other hand, presents a tradition about Lamech in which his wives figure prominently.

Genesis 11

Two genealogies have been interwoven in Genesis 11, one stemming from P and the other from non-P.[10] The end of the chapter introduces Abraham and Sarah and the narrative concerning them. The P section (vv. 27, 31-32) mentions Sarah as Terah's daughter-in-law (כלתו; v. 31) only, in contrast to the slightly fuller information given about her in non-P. Choosing to describe her this way emphasizes Terah's place at the head of the family at this point. P knows of some traditions concerning Sarah, as will become clearer below, but the notice that she is barren, found in non-P in v. 30, is absent from P. Sarah is mentioned because of her role in tradition, but P is primarily concerned with giving an inclusive genealogy and beginning the itinerary at this point, and offers no asides about the characters.

Genesis 12

P is interrupted by non-P material in Gen. 12.1-4a, resuming in 12.4b-5.[11] Sarah appears again as part of a list of the people accompanying (literally 'taken by') Abraham from Haran to Canaan. This continues the itinerary begun in Gen. 11.31; for this reason, I include it here, although it is surrounded by narrative rather than genealogy. Although Sarah's age is not mentioned, the fact that v. 4b mentions Abraham's age is consistent with the tradition in Genesis 17 that Sarah and Abraham are too old to have children. The tradition here likely belongs to an itinerary tradition independent of Genesis 17, but the carefully constructed nature of the P narrative as a whole indicates that P was mindful of being consistent with such details.

Genesis 25

P does not give genealogies for Abraham's other wife, Keturah, as non-P does in Gen. 25.1-4. We would expect P only to be concerned with the covenant lineage, but in Gen. 25.12-18 P presents Abraham's lineage through Hagar. The most likely explanation for this interest in Ishmael is his status as a recipient of a blessing in Genesis 17. As such, P feels the need to include

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9. Even where P's genealogies include women, as will be shown, they frequently appear for the purposes of establishing male lineage.

10. The assignment of vv. 28-30 to non-P and vv. 27, 31-32 to P was discussed above.

11. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 145, notes that there is 'virtual unanimity' on assigning (only) Gen. 12.4b-5 to P.

his genealogy, to show that God has fulfilled the blessing he gave Ishmael as well. The only other non-Israelite whose genealogy is given in P's ancestral history (after Genesis 11) is Esau. Although there is no blessing of Esau in P, as one of Isaac's sons he is still a member of the Abrahamic lineage through the Bethuelite woman Rebekah, which perhaps merited him a genealogy in P. The genealogy in Gen. 25.12-18 must of necessity mention Hagar, since it is she who differentiates this line from the other Abrahamic lines; while primary lines are traced through the father, secondary lines of genealogies are traced through mothers.[12] No other women are mentioned because after Hagar and Ishmael, the pedigree of this line, conveyed through the right mother in P,[13] is of no importance. It may also indicate that the Ishmaelites had a different social structure than the Israelites or the Edomites. The latter have the only other non-Israelite genealogy reported in the ancestral history, and various mothers are included in the list. Notably, the structure of that list, particularly the listing by chieftains or clans that includes differentiations according to mothers, looks remarkably similar to the lists of Jacob's sons, which are grouped according to mother as well; this will be discussed further below.

Genesis 25.20 gives a fairly detailed account of Rebekah's lineage, noting not only that she is Isaac's wife, but also that her father is Bethuel and her brother is Laban. Steinberg has argued that the stories in Genesis 11–50 are concerned with tracing proper Israelite lineage, specifically the right mother: a woman of the line of Terah.[14] Steinberg does not deal with source-critical issues, and she argues that the genealogical material and the narrative material work closely together. Steinberg posits a final redaction of the Pentateuch in the postexilic period, a redaction whose goal was to establish that only the line of Jacob—that is, those with Terahite mothers—had the right to return to Israel.[15] Sarah's lineage is never given, but according to Steinberg she is a Terahite since she is Abraham's sister (cf. Gen. 20.12, 16). The fact that this detail comes from a non-P source is not a problem for Steinberg because she is not concerned with source-critical analysis.

However, if we distinguish between sources, a different picture emerges. Although non-P gives some genealogy for the Terahite line (Gen. 11.28-30;

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12. Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, p. 48.

13. As, for instance, with Sarah; with the proper Bethuelite mothers Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah; and with the ancestry of Phinehas. Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, p. 43, argues that Hagar is the only mother listed in a P תולדת formula; she posits that Hagar is included because of the geographical distance of Ishmael's father. Fischer also claims that other traditions of women in genealogies are older traditions, and therefore not truly P material (p. 56).

14. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, pp. 5-7.

15. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 143.

22.20-24), providing a link between Terah and Bethuel, P preserves no such genealogical tradition. This could mean one of two things: (1) P presupposed the non-P genealogical material, or possibly contained duplicate material that was lost at some point;[16] or (2) P did not trace the lineage of the matriarchs back to Terah, but rather to Bethuel. The latter option is better supported by the evidence, especially the specific notice in Gen. 11.31 that Sarah is Terah's daughter-in-law. (This also keeps P in line with its own incest laws. Indeed, Gen. 11.31 may well be intended by P to make clear, in the face of a non-P tradition that it knew, that Sarah and Abraham were not related.) Sarah is established as the proper mother in her own right, but after her, women from the line of Bethuel are required. P does not, however, maintain the tradition that these are kinsfolk of Abraham.[17] As will be noted further in the discussion of Genesis 17 below, P is concerned with the right wife as the mother to the right heir, but her lineage only seems to become important with Rebekah.

The fact that P mentions Laban in this verse as well sets the stage for the later introduction of Rachel and Leah. P has no specific reference to Rachel and Leah as daughters of Laban until Gen. 45.18, 25 but Gen. 28.2 says Jacob should marry (from among) Laban's daughters, thus clarifying their lineage. In general the P material on Rachel and Leah is scant and mostly focuses on their lineage, lending credence to the idea that this is P's primary interest where women are concerned.

Genesis 35
Verses 22b-26 of this chapter contain a list of the sons of Jacob according to their mothers.[18] Jacob's daughter Dinah is not mentioned, although in the P genealogy in Genesis 46 she is. The list of sons contains no use of the verb ילד until the passive in the summary אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ (v. 26). Zilpah and Bilhah, while not Bethuelites, are mentioned because they are still legitimate as surrogate mothers;[19] their children count as Rachel's and Leah's, respectively.

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16. This argument would also require that P know the tradition that Abraham and Sarah were siblings, reflected in non-P in Gen. 20.

17. Although Gen. 26.34-35 and 27.46–28.9 specifically mention Canaanite wives as less desirable than wives from other, specific families, P never explicitly prohibits exogamy. Within the Pentateuch, the prohibition against intermarriage (only with Canaanites) is found most explicitly in D (Deut. 7.3-4), although Exod. 34.11-17 (non-P) seems to contain a similar prohibition; see Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 241-62. Knoppers, 'Intermarriage', pp. 15-30, argues that even the Chronicler is not opposed to exogamy; it is rather with Ezra and Nehemiah that the insistence on endogamy in Israel reaches its height.

18. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 548, is typical of scholars who attribute this section to P.

19. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, pp. 16-17.

By its very structure, the genealogy makes clear that all the children are legitimate. Jacob's line is always delineated in matrilineal order in Genesis (Gen. 35.22-26; 46.8-26), owing to its context in the ancestral narratives. The mothers do not appear again in the numerous tribal lists in the remainder of the Pentateuch.

Genesis 36

This genealogical listing is the most extensive list involving women in P.[20] In it, the tribes of Esau (Edom) are traced according to their mothers. The list looks remarkably like the tribal genealogies of Jacob's sons, which are also traced by maternal line, probably an indication of the closeness of Israel and Edom as nations.[21] The fact that Jacob and Esau stem from the same generation of the same family also supports this possibility. For P, the lineage as traced through the mother is important, and P retained this tradition for Edom, although as Steinberg observes, P is emphasizing that Esau's lineage is the *wrong* lineage, traced back through multiple generations of non-Bethuelite women.[22] Notably, the only other major non-Israelite genealogy given in the ancestral history is Ishmael, another non-Israelite son of a patriarch. However, beyond Hagar, none of the wives and mothers of Ishmael's offspring are delineated, perhaps indicating that the Ishmaelites are not as closely linked or as socially similar to the Israelites as the Edomites were.

   P preserves different names here for Esau's wives than those given elsewhere in P (Gen. 26.34; 28.9), although one of them is still the daughter of Elon, and one is the daughter of Ishmael, consistent with the other P material. Such a discrepancy is uncharacteristic of P. Westermann suggests that here P had divergent traditions and resisted harmonizing them, except for the addition of 'sister of Nebaioth' for Basemath.[23] Alternately, these differences may indicate different layers of P, one more freely narrative in structure and one more genealogical, or it might suggest a P layer and a redactional layer.[24]

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   20.   On assigning this chapter to P, see, e.g., von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 344-47; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, pp. 561-69; Blum, *Komposition*, pp. 432-33, 449-51; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 96; most of them recognize that there are likely multiple layers of tradition here.

   21.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 562.

   22.   Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, pp. 117-18. Cf., however, Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, p. 56, who argues that the women are here because the lists stem from an older, historical tradition. Fischer's solution in many cases is to argue that traditions about mothers are necessarily older and thus to remove from P most material about women.

   23.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 562. Wilson, *Genealogy*, p. 181, concurs that P here is independent of the narrative traditions.

   24.   For this reason, Israel Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 103 n. 150, argues that some or all of this chapter belongs to H. However, as he notes, the chapter generally 'closely resembles common PT style', and the variants on the wives' names are not enough to posit H here.

P placed the genealogy here to bridge the surrounding narrative traditions,[25] but with the close of this genealogy, the non-Israelites are quite literally 'written off' and the focus through the rest of the Pentateuch is on the Israelites alone.

Genesis 46

Genesis 46.6-27 details all the members of Jacob's family who went down to Egypt with him.[26] Verse 7 notes that Jacob took various 'sons and daughters', and the detailed list of sons is registered according to matriarch—Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, and Bilhah, as in the P genealogies discussed above. The verb ילד appears in the active voice when a woman is the subject (vv. 15, 18, 20, 25) and the passive voice when a man is (vv. 20, 22, 27), in accord with P's usual precision of language with this verb.[27] Why the genealogy shifts subject this way is not apparent, especially as both appear in v. 20.

Verse 15 mentions Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, and v. 17 lists Asher's daughter Serah.[28] Asenath, Joseph's wife, is also included (v. 20). Asenath also appears in non-P in Gen. 41.45, 50 and, as noted above, in both non-P and P she is always called אסנת בת־פוטי פרע כהן אן, 'Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, priest of On'. As in non-P, there is no hint here that Joseph's marriage to a foreign woman is perceived negatively by the author. Likewise, v. 10 reports that Simeon has a Canaanite wife. Since P suggests elsewhere that Canaanite wives are unacceptable,[29] perhaps this is meant to be an oblique condemnation of Simeon, explaining why that tribe was absorbed into Judah and disappeared.[30] P's primary point in this passage is that Jacob's entire family goes with him to Egypt—that is, no Israelites are left in the land of Canaan. The women are apparently included in this, although v. 26 states that the count of 70 people does not include Jacob's sons' wives. Notably, P includes only a note about one of Simeon's wives and Joseph's wife; once we reach the generation of Jacob's sons, descent is traced from the father and women are mostly left out. These women must be included because they had some place in the tradition, even if that place is no longer apparent to the reader.

25. Wilson, *Genealogy*, pp. 182-83.

26. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, pp. 157-58, notes that most scholars, including himself, attribute this section to P. Verses 8-27 are a P expansion of vv. 6-7.

27. See Hendel, 'Begetting'.

28. Serah is also mentioned in Num. 26.46, discussed below. Cf. Leila Leah Bronner, 'Serah and the Exodus: A Midrashic Miracle', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (FCB 2, 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 187-98.

29. Gen. 26.35; 27.46; however, this should not be confused with a general condemnation of foreign marriage, which never appears in P.

30. Steinberg, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 185.

2. *Narrative Material*

Genesis 1.1–2.4a

As with the non-P material, so also in P the first text in Genesis has been taken to be more important than it likely deserves. This text is not P's systematic prescription for human life, which is found rather in the legal sections of P, particularly in the book of Leviticus. However, unlike the non-P creation story, P's creation does set the stage for the rest of the P narrative, as it introduces certain recurrent themes.[31] In this sense, it may be an interpretational key, and was probably composed freely by P. Certain elements within the chapter may draw on earlier traditions,[32] but the chapter as a whole is so infused with P's concept of an ordered universe that it cannot be said to fully represent any older mythic tradition. The fact that it deals so centrally with the theme of proliferation of the human species, a major motif in Genesis that is found hardly at all in the remainder of P, argues against taking Gen. 1.1–2.4a as anything more than a preface to the ancestral history.

The historical impact of this unit can hardly be understated. The relevant verses concerning women are 1.26-28. This small section has been the subject of innumerable studies[33] and its statements concerning the relationship of women to men have historically been taken—particularly by theologians—to be of paramount importance. However, the text's placement should not be seen as indicative of its significance. Rather, the reader should keep in mind that in its context, Gen. 1.26-28 tells us only about priestly theology, reflected in the strict ordering of creation, and is not any more important for that theology than any other P text.

Over the centuries, interpretations of Gen. 1.26-28 have mostly revolved around the relationship of humans to deity, especially concerning how humans are like or unlike God.[34] This is true of theological as well as scholarly analyses, although many of the earlier (i.e. nineteenth and early twentieth century) scholarly interpretations were largely based on theological presuppositions about the similarities between God and humans, both physical and spiritual.[35] The relationship of women to men on anything more than a biological level is not typically raised as an issue in these older interpretations.

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31.   Similarly, although with a slightly different focus, see Michaela Bauks, 'Genesis 1 als Programmschrift der Priesterschrift (Pg)', in A. Wénin (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (BETL, 155; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2001), pp. 333-45.

32.   Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. 297; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 10.

33.   See Gunnlaugur Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1.26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (trans. Lorraine Svendsen; rev. Michael S. Cheney; ConBOT, 26; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988) for an overview of the scholarship.

34.   Cf. Jónsson, *Image of God*; Garr, *In His Own Image*.

35.   Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 112; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 58; Jónsson, *Image of God*, p. 100.

Unsurprisingly, feminist interpreters moved in a different direction, focusing on what the passage reveals of the specific relationship between women and men. Phyllis Trible was the first to seriously undertake a re-evaluation of the text.[36] Trible's interpretation is specifically meant to combat sexist interpretations, which generally rely on the non-P story, not on this P passage. That certainly does not invalidate Trible's interpretation of Gen. 1.26-28, although it is important to remember that she does not distinguish between the sources, but rather treats Genesis 1–3 as a continuous narrative. She is also not concerned with the theology of the author(s), focusing instead on the role of the text in contemporary theology. Her interpretation is often taken as an indicator that the *priestly author* had an egalitarian view of women's status; it should be stressed that Trible does not in fact make this claim.

According to Trible, Gen. 1.27 employs a metaphor equating 'the image of God' with both male and female in a poetic tricolon that uses synonymous parallelism.[37] The phrase בצלם אלהים, 'in the image of God', in the second colon echoes בצלמו, 'in his image', in the first colon and is parallel and synonymous with זכר ונקבה, 'male and female' in the third colon. Trible concludes that godhead thus includes both male and female and therefore the sexes are equal in their creation. One problem with this interpretation is that it assumes that because God contains both male and female, the two are equal—equally like the divine, perhaps, but also of equal status because they have the same relationship to the deity. Trible does not address this assumption, although she does caution that the reader should not mistake the metaphor for the actual image of God.

Phyllis Bird takes issue with Trible's interpretation, seeing progressive parallelism where Trible sees synonymous. Bird argues that while אדם is like God, it has the *additional* feature of also being male and female.[38] According to Bird, the creation of various beings is functional and sexual differentiation is thus purely practical.[39] 'Male and female' is not an aspect of godhead but is instead particular to humans. Sexual differentiation is required for the goal of increase, a key theme. Humans are therefore like the animals, not like God, in having sexual differentiation. Bird concludes that there is no notion in P that women are equal to men, and that when P uses the phrase

36. For the extent to which Trible's interpretation has become part of the feminist mainstream, see, for instance: Newsom and Ringe (eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary*, p. 16; Schottroff, Schroer, and Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Interpretation*, p. 135; Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 45; Schüngel-Straumann, 'Creation of Man and Woman', p. 75.

37. Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 22.

38. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 144.

39. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 133. Bird's interpretation is adopted by Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 86.

אדם generically, he has in mind the male specifically.[40] Bird's interpretation moves closer to fitting the text within P's larger theology, but it does not move beyond the immediate context of creation.

The preceding and following verses provide important contextual information for interpreting the key verse, v. 27. Verse 26 states that humans will be created and have dominion over all the animals and all the earth. While the specific form נעשׂה, 'let us make', is unique in this chapter, the roots עשׂה and ברא appear elsewhere in the chapter and so neither verb singles this act out as unique or different from any other of the creative acts. According to v. 26, the humans are to be given dominion over everything in the sea, in the sky, and on the land. This order follows the larger structure of P's creation, in which everything is divided into the three spheres of sea, sky, and land. Although the order may suggest a hierarchy among the species from least to greatest,[41] the key is the existence of order, and that it is maintained in the larger structure of the text.

Verse 27 contains the interpretational crux of the account, specifically the phrase זכר ונקבה ברא אתם, 'male and female he created them'. In context, these words are nothing more than another programmatic aspect of P's ordering of the cosmos. The phrase זכר ונקבה, 'male and female', is central: how much are we to attribute to these two words? Are they, as Trible maintains, of greater significance because they are unique to the creation of humans?[42] On close inspection, it is not clear that this is the case. As noted above, the creation of the humans is not unique in its use of the verbs עשׂה and ברא; likewise, humans as well as birds and fish all receive the blessing and command to be fruitful and multiply.[43] What importance does this major difference, the use of זכר ונקבה, have in light of such similarities? Does this phrase really indicate that P viewed men and women as social equals, as Trible maintains?

The specific phrase זכר ונקבה is unique to the primeval history, and the pairing is always found in P contexts related to propagation.[44] It features particularly in P's flood story, where it modifies and expands upon other terms or phrases meant to denote specificity, including מין, 'kind', שׁנים שׁנים, 'two by two', and שׁנים מכל, 'two of each', all of which are predominantly P

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40.   Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 145.

41.   Such a claim, although conjectural, is made, for instance, by Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 11.

42.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 15.

43.   1.28; cf. 1.22.

44.   Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 160, notes that the phrase is characteristic of P; cf. Gen. 5.2; 6.19; 7.9, 16. The use of the phrase in a non-P context, Gen. 7.3, is best explained as a P/R addition; see Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 391, 427. Outside of Genesis, the pairing of זכר and נקבה occurs several times, with various intervening prepositions and/or conjunctions, in Lev. 3.1, 6; 12.7; 15.33; 27.5-7.

phrases.[45] These specifications have to do with procreation, with ensuring that two of each kind of animal survive to perpetuate their species after the flood. זכר ונקבה is thus a common syntactic pair found often in P texts where specificity is desired.

Within the primeval history זכר ונקבה is a biological designation linked to the ability (and the requirement) to reproduce. Should it be treated as more than this, then, as Trible argues? As in the flood story, where it is associated with מין, 'type', so too in the creation of humans it is a phrase of biological specification. The animals are created according to their מין, 'type', meaning that there are various species of birds, of fish, and of land animals.[46] However, there is only one type of human. What differentiates them from each other is instead their sex.[47] Thus, they are created זכר ונקבה.[48]

There is more to sexual differentiation than P's need for specificity, however. Verse 28 contains God's blessing of the humans and his command that they 'be fruitful and multiply' and have dominion over the animals. The roots פרה and רבה are a popular P pair, occurring together only in this source in the Pentateuch.[49] They are part of the promise and the covenant and thus are an essential facet of human and, later, Israelite existence. However, as noted above, fish, birds, as well as humans receive this command. Notably, land animals do not. P has again covered the three domains of sea, air, and land. The fish are to increase and fill the sea; the birds the sky; and humans—not animals!—the earth, over which they have dominion. Humans do have dominion over fish and birds, but because sea and sky are not the domains in which humans live, fish and birds are free to proliferate in those areas. Each domain, then, has specific primary occupants who are to constitute its dominant life forms. Sexual differentiation in v. 27 is a precursor to the command to humans to increase in order to fulfill their role as the primary occupants of the land. Both male and female are needed for this. The need for humans to be fruitful and multiply, not the fact that they are created simultaneously as male and female, is therefore the point of their creation.

45.   מין: Gen. 1.11, 12, 21, 24, 25; 6.20; 7.14; Lev. 11.14, 15, 16, 19, 22, 29; also Deut. 14.13, 14, 15, 18; Ezek. 47.10; שנים שנים: Gen. 7.9, 15; also 1 Chron. 26.17; שנים מכל: Gen. 6.19, 20; 7.15.

46.   Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 126, also notes that מין means 'species or genus', that is, it is a biological designation, meant to distinguish one species of animal from another.

47.   Animals certainly have sexual differentiation as well, but it is simply understood; more important for P is the distinction between different kinds of animals. Cf. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 160.

48.   Similarly, see David J.A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup, 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 43-44.

49.   Gen. 1.22, 28; 8.17; 9.1, 7; 17.20; 28.3; 35.11; 47.27; 48.4; Exod. 1.7; Lev. 26.9.

Trible is right in noting that both male and female are given dominion over the earth, while neither is given dominion over the other.[50] But the biblical text says nothing about the relation of male to female, and as the previous discussion has shown, that relationship is not P's concern here. P's concern is rather with how humans generally fit into the order of creation. Trible argues that 'male and female' is a sign of 'the uniqueness of humankind in creation',[51] but P's creation in fact shows the very opposite: humans are but one element of a strictly and carefully ordered creation. While this creation story may contain older mythological elements,[52] its correlation with the larger priestly program of strict categorization as well as the motifs of promise and increase suggests that in the main it is a free composition of P, not a received tradition. As such it does not belong to the earliest layers of P.

That P deems it important enough to note that male and female are included within the category of 'human' should not be surprising, given P's desire for specificity and strict ordering of the universe and, especially, of the cultus. That women would be no less human than man in P's estimation also fits with P's view of human existence, in particular in relation to the cultus and the purity of the land. Women, no less than men, are culpable where the purity of the land is concerned.[53] If women are to be equally responsible for cultic purity, then it must be made clear from the beginning that they are included with men as creations who exist in a special relationship both to the land and to God.

Genesis 1.26-28 must be read in the context of Gen. 1.1–2.4a, the preface to P's larger work. As Bird argues, the creation of man and woman is not concerned with the equality of the sexes or with statements on the nature of God. Rather, P is concerned with sexual dimorphism as a necessary precursor for the increase of humans on the earth and, later, the fulfillment of the promise (and ultimately with an eye on the Temple and its cult). The parallelism of v. 27 is progressive; it is not defining God, but rather is explaining how humans are biologically constituted as a species. The creation provides an introductory 'earth genealogy' before P moves into the genealogies of people. As such, this first chapter provides an interpretational 'key' for the following material, where its theological message is reflected, particularly in terms of the roles women play in the developing Israelite story.

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50.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 19.
51.   Trible, *Rhetoric*, p. 19.
52.   See, for instance, Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 119; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 80-82; Jacob Milgrom, 'H$_R$ in Leviticus and Elsewhere in the Torah', in Rendtorff and Kugler (eds.), *The Book of Leviticus*, pp. 24-40 (34-36).
53.   See, for instance, Lev. 15.33; Num. 5.3, where P is careful, in ambiguous cases, to note that both men and women are included in a cultic restriction.

Genesis 6–9

Only five verses in P's flood story concern women, specifically Noah's wife and his sons' wives. Four of these (Gen. 6.18; 7.13; 8.16, 18) occur in clear P contexts and can thus be safely ascribed to the P writer. The fourth (7.7) is frequently ascribed to non-P, most likely because assigning it to P results in a repetition of Noah's entry into the ark.[54] However, the previous verse gives P's dating formula according to Noah's age, and the following verse begins P's enumeration of the entry of the animals into the ark. Verse 7 is thus better read as P. The listing of Noah's wives and daughters-in-law, because they appear elsewhere in clear P contexts, may be used as additional evidence in assigning this verse to P. Once again, we find that P is concerned with specificity, making sure that all the people and animals required to preserve life in the post-flood world are carefully included; the listing of the wives belongs in the same semantic category as 'male and female' and 'sons and daughters'.

   That this is the case is made clearer from the instances in which P could mention the wives and does not. In Gen. 8.1, God remembers Noah and all the animals, but nothing is said of the sons or the wives. Noah is the protagonist of the story; no further significance in mentioning only him is apparent. The omission of the wives in Gen. 9.1, 8, 17 is more complicated. In these verses, Noah and his sons are blessed and brought into a covenant with God. The use of פרו ורבו (9.1, 7) repeats the motif found in Genesis 1, where both male and female are addressed, and thus it is surprising that the women are not mentioned in Genesis 9. However, the addition of the covenant theme, which in P is a distinctly male phenomenon, offers some explanation. P has made clear earlier in the chapter that the women are preserved and thus it is possible for Noah and his sons to increase their numbers; but P shifts to a focus on the men in bringing Noah and his sons into a covenant relationship.[55] Thus the women are absent here because the covenant promise is directed to the men.[56]

Genesis 16

Although some of the P material in this chapter is genealogical, it has a discursive style, containing a birth and naming scene, and offers an alternate version of the narrative non-P material. For these reasons, I treat the P text

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54. Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 63; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 63; Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 63.

55. Covenant in P will be discussed further below, in relation to Gen. 17.

56. David A. Bernat, 'Circumcision and *'Orlah* in the Priestly Torah' (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2002), p. 110, observes that in P women gain their covenant status through the males with whom they are associated. They are 'part of the community by proxy' in P. Cf. also Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

here as a narrative as well. Only vv. 1a, 3, 15-16 are typically assigned to P.[57] The evidence is clearest in the case of vv. 3 and 16, where chronological notes of a decidedly P style appear. Nothing in v. 15 specifically indicates that it belongs to P, but v. 16 reads awkwardly without it; assigning v. 15 to P produces the most fluid reading. We might also expect Hagar to do the naming in non-P, since she is the one who received the naming instructions from the messenger of Yhwh; the fact that here Abraham names Ishmael offers additional support for assigning the verse to P. Without v. 15, though, non-P is missing an announcement of the birth of Ishmael; this is not necessarily a problem, but a birth notice is expected in the narrative. It may be that parts of this verse were also original to non-P, or that the non-P announcement has been lost.

P contains a few notable features here: first, Sarah is not described as being barren. If P knew non-P, then it would not have been necessary for P to mention that she was barren; however, we might expect to see the term עקרה repeated here in that case, especially as the phrase לא ילדה appears.[58] Genesis 17, however, suggests that P instead knows the tradition in which Sarah is old and past menopause rather than barren, the same tradition found in Genesis 18 (non-P). This is probably the tradition reflected here as well, and it fits better with P's received genealogy, with its statement that Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born (Gen. 21.5).

In v. 15, Abraham, not Hagar, names Ishmael. This is a particularly acute instance of P's shift toward fathers naming children, as v. 11 very explicitly instructs Hagar to name Ishmael. Westermann notes this shift as well and ascribes it to a change in family naming customs.[59] While it is possible that this is the case, there is no real evidence to support the claim that fathers took over naming in the later centuries of Israelite history. Instead, P's shift should be seen in the context of P's own theology. P's genealogies focus almost entirely on men, and the narrative generally skips over the traditions about women represented so heavily in non-P.[60] While P and non-P have similar traditions of childlessness and Abraham and Sarah's attempt to remedy the situation, P sets the stage for the birth of the 'right' heir through the 'right' mother; only this son will enter into Yhwh's covenant.

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57.   Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 183; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 13; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 236; cf. Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 285; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 191; Blum, *Komposition*, pp. 315-16; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 11; Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 55.

58.   On the close connection of these terms, see the discussion of women's childbirth narratives in Chapter 1.

59.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 249.

60.   See Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 290-91, who also observes that P (R[P]) concentrates on men.

The P material discussed thus far has begun to develop a picture of P in which men are the primary concern, and women are generally included only as the narrative requires. P has arranged the narratives to explain why Israel alone is Yʜᴡʜ's covenant people. While Sarah's activity in v. 3 might seem atypical of such a P, the depiction of Sarah's full involvement in the episode absolves Abraham of any mistreatment of either Sarah or Hagar. P provides a corrective to the non-P version and makes clear that not only was this Sarah's idea, but Sarah executed as much of the plan as possible. Sarah's claim in non-P, that Hagar's haughty demeanor toward her is Abraham's fault, cannot stick in the P version. No problems arise from this exchange in P, as they do in non-P, and thus Abraham and Sarah are clear of accusations of wrong-doing or cruelty.

Genesis 17

One of the few large blocks of P material in Genesis appears in ch. 17. The chapter brings together a number of elements found elsewhere in the non-P ancestral material: covenant, promise of land, promise of numerous offspring, and promise of a specific son. The roots פרה and רבה occur in vv. 2, 6, and 20, connecting this chapter with P's creation and flood accounts. P's trade-mark, circumcision, also appears. Covenant and circumcision dominate the chapter, the word ברית, 'covenant', occurring thirteen times, and words or phrases deriving from the root מול, 'circumcise', ten times. All the other promise elements are brought together as part of the covenant to be fulfilled by God, while circumcision is the covenantal obligation of all human males of Abraham's issue as well as of his larger household. P is more interested in this chapter in advancing a specific theological picture of Israel and the covenant than in telling a colorful story. As a careful composition intended by the priestly writer(s) to encapsulate their particular theology, then, this chapter is very important for our picture of the priestly attitude toward women.[61] It is far more central to P's theology than is Genesis 1, and it is to this chapter, rather than to Genesis 1, that scholars should look for P's attitude toward women.

Sarai/Sarah is mentioned in five verses in this chapter; she is the only woman named. In v. 15, God instructs Abraham to change Sarai's name to Sarah; whereas a reason is given for Abraham's name-change in vv. 4-5, no reason is given here for Sarah's renaming. Possibly the following verse is meant to provide some sort of indirect reason, but this is never stated explicitly. Verse 16 contains a blessing for Sarah, a promise that she will bear Abraham a son, and a promise that she will give rise to many nations and

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61. The importance and centrality of this chapter have been noted by numerous scholars; see, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 256; Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 281.

kings. This blessing is very similar to three other texts: a promise to Abraham in v. 6; one for Ishmael in v. 20; and a promise to Jacob in Gen. 35.11:[62]

והפרתי אתך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים ומלכים ממך יצאו

I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you (17.6).

וברכתי אתה וגם נתתי ממנה לך בן וברכתיה והיתה לגוים מלכי עמים ממנה יהיו

I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her' (17.16).

ולישמעאל שמעתיך הנה ברכתי אתו והפריתי אתו והרביתי אתו במאד מאד שנים־עשר נשיאם יוליד ונתתיו לגוי גדול

As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation (17.20).

ויאמר לו אלהים אני אל שדי פרה ורבה גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך ומלכים מחלציך יצאו

And God said to him, 'I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase; A nation, yea an assembly of nations, Shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins' (35.11).

These passages have a number of similarities, and at first glance Sarah appears to be singled out for blessing and promise, unlike other women in Genesis. In all four, the recipient will be the forebear of nations and kings, Sarah apparently no less than the others. On closer examination, though, Sarah's status is less singular. While several specific words appear in all four verses, there are subtle differences in the ways they are used. For instance, Sarah and Ishmael are both blessed (ברך), but unlike Abraham and Isaac, neither is made part of God's covenant. All three promises made to men use the roots פרה, and two also use the root רבה; these verbs are major elements of the P promise motif, but neither one appears in v. 16. Furthermore, although the verb נתן appears in all three verses from Genesis 17, in v. 16 it is used in reference to Abraham receiving a son *through* Sarah (וגם נתתי ממנה לך בן, 'I will give you a son by her'). These differences immediately set Sarah apart from Abraham, Isaac, and other male members of the covenant with YHWH, in which women are specifically not included. In this regard, Sarah's status is closer to Ishmael's.[63]

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62. Cf. also Jacob's recollection of this blessing in Gen. 48.4.
63. Similarly Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?*, p. 13.

The repetition of the blessing in the second half of v. 16 leads to the next problem, namely, the evidence of a number of textual witnesses for this second half of the verse. Whereas MT reads the whole verse as pertaining to Sarah, LXX, Syr., and Vulg. all have masculine forms in part b of the verse ('I will bless him and he will become nations; kings of people will come from him'), meaning that they read the second half of the verse as a prediction about the son promised at the end of the first part. There are other compelling reasons to believe this is the original reading. MT is slightly awkward, repeating the verb of blessing, albeit with a pronominal suffix the second time. More persuasive, though, is the fact that phrases ending with the word בֵּן followed immediately by the conjunction וְ- are often followed by the naming of the child just mentioned—that is, they are followed by a statement about the child, not the parent.[64] Likewise, annunciation scenes usually follow the announcement of the son with predictions or statements about the son, not about the mother, as here.[65] Thus, the emendation fits the majority of biblical evidence as well as the textual witnesses.

In the context of Genesis 17, too, the emendation is preferable. The entire point of the chapter is the covenant that God is establishing with Abraham and his numerous, non-Ishmaelite progeny. The as-yet-unborn Isaac is everywhere present and critical for this chapter. Furthermore, P contains no promise to Isaac; if this verse were emended to follow the ancient versions, then P would have the full complement of blessings and promises for all the patriarchs. The blessing in part b of the verse is also typical of the promises addressed to men. Sarah is blessed in part a, but the verse is really about Abraham and Isaac.

A primary emphasis of Genesis 17 is not only the covenant and circumcision, but also establishing who is Abraham's rightful heir, the only one of his sons who will be the recipient of God's covenant. The answer is Isaac, and the emphasis on Sarah in this chapter serves to differentiate Isaac from Ishmael as the rightful heir. Two of the verses that mention Sarah follow immediately on verses concerning Ishmael: in v. 18, Abraham asks why Ishmael might not be his heir, and in v. 19 God replies that Sarah will bear Abraham a son who will be the one to receive the covenant. In v. 20, God extends a promise to Ishmael, and in v. 21 he explains that nonetheless the covenant will (only) be with Isaac, the son of Sarah. Implicit in each of these verses is the statement 'Sarah, *not* Hagar'. Hagar is nonexistent in this chapter, perhaps in order to make clear just how uninvolved in any of this she is. She is the wrong mother. Sarah is the right mother, but she is little more than that.

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64. E.g., Gen. 4.25, 26; 16.11, 15; 17.19; 19.37, 38; 29.32-35; 30.23; 38.3-5; Exod. 2.10, 22; Judg. 8.31; 13.24.
65. See Gen. 16.12; Isa. 7.15-16; 8.4; perhaps also Gen. 25.23; Judg. 13.5.

Finally, v. 17 contains a reference to Sarah, this time through Abraham's reaction on learning that he and his aged wife are to have a child. Abraham points out that he and Sarah are old, with the implication that Sarah is well past her childbearing years.

The tradition here is remarkably similar to the one found in Gen. 18.12, but whereas in Genesis 18 it is Sarah who laughs, in Genesis 17 it is Abraham. The similarities suggest a close relationship between the two chapters. P is cognizant, if not of Genesis 18, then of the same tradition preserved in it; he is specifically responding to and reshaping this tradition in his composition of Genesis 17, shifting the action to Abraham. In the annunciation and instructions for naming delivered to Abraham, we find terms and phrases that appear elsewhere in women's childbirth traditions. These instructions for naming are executed by Abraham in the P parts of the birth scene in ch. 21, in contrast to non-P birth and naming scenes, where mothers so frequently do the naming. Indeed, women never name children in P. Sarah is present in Genesis 17 in name only; her name is changed and she is blessed, but this is mediated through Abraham: Abraham is told that Sarah will become many nations, and he is told that she will bear him a son. This chapter, particularly in contrast to Genesis 18, is a hallmark example of P's tendency to focus on males and male lineage.

Genesis 17 is a free composition of P meant to delineate the theologically important concepts of promise and covenant and is the key chapter of P's ancestral narrative. It does not belong to the earliest layer of received traditions found elsewhere in P. Neither, however, does it belong to a late redactional layer. It articulates a central tenet of P's patriarchal history and thus belongs with the main composition of that narrative. It probably knows Genesis 18, and is incorporating that version of the promise into its own theological vision, a vision in which women's roles are diminished. P's combination of motifs in ch. 17 makes clear that the promise of a specific son, elsewhere separate from the general promise of numerous progeny, is understood in P as the fulfillment of the promise for numerous offspring, as in fact all the promises are now unified under the rubric of covenant.[66] This comes together explicitly in v. 16. The previously childless Sarah and her promised son have been made part of the greater promise of increase made to Abraham. Thus the woman's childbirth tradition, independent in non-P, has been subsumed by the promise to the patriarch and the covenant for which this promise is now God's pledge. This combination is organic and essential to the composition of Genesis 17.

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66.   See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 255.

Genesis 21.1-5

P resumes in Genesis 21 with the birth of Isaac. The larger scene, Gen. 21.1-7, is a combined P/non-P text, and the original strands are difficult to separate. Verses 4-5 contain common P elements, including circumcision and citation of Abraham's age at Isaac's birth. However, the assignment of vv. 1-3 and 6-7 is less clear. As the discussion will show, the hand of the redactor is heavier in this text than it has been in previous narratives; the redactor has incorporated elements of non-P quite thoroughly into P, making the text more difficult to separate and forcing phrases like ותהר ותלד, 'she conceived and gave birth', at the beginning of v. 2 to do 'double duty' in reconstructing the original traditions. However, enough of the original traditions remain to indicate that there are two independent threads here.

Verse 1 uses the divine name YHWH, which argues for non-P, but it could serve as an introduction to the birth for either source. Both threads read better if v. 1 is divided between them, although the use of the divine name YHWH in both halves of the verse is problematic. The beginning of v. 2 fits well with P's general narrative flow, moving straight into the conception and birth (cf. Gen. 16.15) and focusing on Abraham as the recipient of the promise. On the other hand, the promise in Genesis 17 does not mention a specific time frame for the birth, whereas this verse does. The term למועד, 'at the appointed time', occurs elsewhere in P, as well as in non-P childbirth-promise narratives (cf. Gen. 18.10, 14; 2 Kgs 4.17). The use of לזקניו, 'in his old age', repeats in v. 7; perhaps a redactor lifted it and put it in v. 2 as well, or perhaps it is original to both P and non-P. Likewise, the names of Sarah and Abraham and the fact that the child was a son would have been common elements to both traditions. If the naming of Isaac in v. 3 is substantially P,[67] then non-P is missing the naming; the circumlocutions and redundancies in v. 3 suggest that here, too, P and non-P have been combined, resulting in parts of each being lost.

While the combination of material in vv. 1-3 has resulted in a number of shared elements, the rest of the narrative is more easily separated into two sources. Verses 4-5 (and indeed parts of v. 3, as noted above), contain hallmarks of P such as circumcision, age notices, and precise use of verbal conjugations. Verses 6-7, on the other hand, shift back to Sarah and offer two additional etiological elements with the root צחק; these verses belong to non-P.[68] Thus, vv. 4-5 belong to P and vv. 6-7 to non-P, while vv. 1-3 are shared between the two. The non-P parts of these verses focus almost entirely on

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67. Scholars are fairly unanimous on this; cf. those cited above. Particularly telling is the niphal form of ילד; cf. Hendel, 'Begetting', pp. 38-46.

68. So von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 230-31; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 225; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 333.

Sarah, whereas P includes the elements specifically related to Abraham, including most of vv. 2-3.

The striking features of P are the reference to the promise to Abraham—not Sarah—in v. 2 and Abraham—not Sarah—naming the child in v. 3.[69] As in Genesis 17, P has severed the link between Sarah and the name of her son; in contrast, non-P retains a link between them in v. 6. In v. 3, P uses awkward wording to clarify that Sarah bore the son to Abraham; this serves again to emphasize Isaac's proper lineage, distinguishing between Sarah and Hagar and between Isaac and Ishmael. The way in which P and non-P have been interwoven here suggests that while there are markers of an independent P narrative, focusing especially on genealogical elements but linking the birth to the promise in Genesis 17, there is also a heavy redactorial hand.

Genesis 23 (and 49.31)

Genesis 23 includes some genealogical elements, but the majority of it is a narrative. The entirety of the chapter, the story of Sarah's death and the purchase of the cave at Machpelah, is frequently attributed to P.[70] Rolf Rendtorff and Norman Whybray are two of the few scholars to break with this opinion. Whybray notes that the style of the chapter is more akin to that of non-P narrative.[71] Some scholars have previously noted this, but as a solution argue that P incorporated earlier traditions into the chapter, providing them with a specifically P framework.[72] The cave of Machpelah is mentioned three more times, in Gen. 25.9 (Abraham's death and burial); 49.30 (Jacob's instructions to his sons for his burial); and 50.13 (Jacob's burial), all of which are generally attributed to P.[73] Sarah is mentioned again in 49.31, a reiteration of the tradition here in Genesis 23.

Parts of the chapter can be assigned to P with some certainty. Verses 1-2a detail genealogical material consistently with other P passages; the notice in v. 2b, however, that Abraham mourned for Sarah, is somewhat surprising in this otherwise taciturn source. Possibly this refers to rites for mourning, although this is not a rite attested elsewhere in P.[74] Verse 19 is also part of the P genealogy and belongs with v. 2.[75] Verse 20, the conclusion, is the cement

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69.   Cf. Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, p. 368.

70.   See, for instance, Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 114; Van Seters, *Abraham*, p. 166; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 371; Blum, *Komposition*, pp. 444-46; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 111-12.

71.   R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (JSOTSup, 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), p. 109.

72.   See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 376.

73.   E.g., von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 262, 429, 431; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 394; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 197.

74.   See Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 373.

75.   Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 375.

holding the story and the genealogical frame together. Very little can be said definitively about the source for the remainder of the chapter. It is certainly not the deliberate construction in the style of P that Genesis 17 is, but it is possible that it has been embedded by P and thus is meant to be read as a part of the larger P composition. Whether, as Rendtorff and Whybray argue, it should instead be assigned to non-P, Sarah's role in the story is incidental. She appears only in vv. 1-2, 19, which are a framework in the P genealogical style and thus independent of the remainder of the story. In the rest of the chapter, Sarah is referred to only indirectly, as the 'deceased'.

Sarah's inclusion in P's genealogy is unsurprising, given that she is important for P as the 'right' wife and mother for the covenantal line. She also undoubtedly played a significant role in Israelite tradition, as evidenced in other Pentateuchal narratives, and P most likely inherited these traditions in some form, however minimal. She appears here as a segue into the tradition of the purchase of the cave at Machpelah because, as the first person buried in the cave, she is inextricably linked with the tradition. The verses specifically mentioning her are largely genealogical and are similar to the notice of Miriam's death in Num. 20.1 (P); both also have a specific geographical location attached to them. Sarah is a significant enough character to warrant such notices, but that is all that can really be said of her appearance in this chapter.

Genesis 26.34-35; 27.46–28.9

These verses are two parts of a single P narrative[76] that has been interrupted by the insertion of Gen. 27.1-45 (non-P); the redactor responsible for this insertion also added 27.46. The first part, 26.34-35, reports the marriage of Esau to two Canaanite women, noting that both Isaac and Rebekah are unhappy about Esau's marriages. The notice of Rebekah's reaction alongside Isaac's is in line with her role in the continuation of the P account in Gen. 27.46–28.9, which centers on the requirement that Isaac's heir must marry a Bethuelite wife.[77] Genesis 26.34-35, detailing Esau's marriage to two Hittite women, serves as P's explanation of why Esau is not the rightful heir.[78] P contrasts him with Jacob, who in 28.1-5 leaves to find a wife of Bethuel's line, thus offering a full complement of reasons for Jacob's place as heir and

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76. Scholars almost unilaterally attribute this section to P; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 264; Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 214-16; Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 307; von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 281-82; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, p. 446; Blum, *Komposition*, pp. 264, 427; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 85-88.

77. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 95, argues that P requires Isaac's heir to have a Terahite wife, but it is more accurately described as the requirement to take a Bethuelite wife.

78. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 96.

Esau's disinheritance. A (priestly) redactor then artfully used the notice in 26.34-35 and the account in 27.46–28.9 to frame the non-P narrative account of Jacob receiving his father's blessing, which in non-P is the pretext for Jacob to leave.

Genesis 28.1-9 contains two sections: one in which Isaac blesses Jacob and sends him off to find a Bethuelite wife (28.1-5), and one in which Esau marries an Ishmaelite wife, having realized that his parents do not approve of his Canaanite ones (28.6-9). These verses are replete with characteristic P terminology, including Paddan-Aram (28.2, 5, 6, 7); El Shaddai (28.3); פרה and רבה (28.3); קהל (28.3); and ארץ מגריך (28.4). P's style is particularly prominent in the blessing and promise of numerous progeny (28.3-4).

After the introductory notice about Esau's Canaanite wives, Isaac blesses Jacob and sends him off to Paddan-Aram to find a suitable (Bethuelite) wife. The combination of the promise with the instructions concerning marriage suggest that in P, although the promise and covenant are made with men, they are closely associated with the right wife/mother and are in some sense carried through her. In this vein, Rebekah is mentioned in vv. 2, 5 where Jacob is told to marry one of his mother's kinswomen. The narrator need not mention Rebekah and the kinship relation here; that he does so indicates an emphasis on this element.

Rebekah is mentioned again in vv. 7 and 8, where Esau sees that Jacob was blessed and realizes that marrying local women displeases his parents. Esau's reaction—he goes and marries an Ishmaelite woman—indicates that he remains incapable of solving the problem and thus validates his continued exclusion from the promise and covenant. He marries a woman whose family is in the Abrahamic line, but not in the Bethuelite line. Why P has specifically chosen to focus on Bethuelites is not entirely clear and may point to a received tradition; although P emphasizes this lineage, he was likely not responsible for inventing it. More important is the shift from the requirement of a Terahite matriarch in non-P to a Bethuelite one in P. Whereas non-P's use of Terahite lineage allows a larger group of people to claim kinship with the Israelites, P narrowly circumscribes membership in the group. However, P's insistence on specific wives ends with Jacob (as does non-P's); after this point, although women appear to validate certain lineages, they do not all come from specific families or ethnic groups. The authors only focus on a single family of suitable wives in establishing who constitutes the people of Israel, P being more restrictive than non-P on this matter.

Rebekah also appears in Gen. 27.46, which contains the most active presentation of her character in this passage; she is credited as the instigator in ensuring that Jacob does not marry a Canaanite woman. Rebekah's role here is surprising in a P text, where we have seen very little active participation by female characters. Her role is related to the priestly redactor's efforts to

drive home the point that marrying the proper woman is so important; emphasizing both parents serves this end, and placing the initial dictum concerning foreign wives on the lips of a Bethuelite woman heightens the importance of proper marriage. However, 27.46 goes further than the rest of the passage in emphasizing the ethnicity of Esau's wives as Hittites and as 'daughters of the land'. This latter phrase appears again in 28.1, but there it is not coupled with other ethnic descriptions. Likewise, the reference to Esau's wives as daughters of Hittite men in 26.34-35 does not use any other terms to describe them. The combination, describing the women as both Hittites and as 'daughters of the land' in 27.46, points to this verse being a redactional addition meant to bridge the gap between 26.34-35 and 28.1-9 formed by the insertion of 27.1-45. The redactor, in composing this verse, chose to emphasize the ethnic, or exogamous, element of Esau's marriages. This marks a departure from the stance of P in the earlier layers, which does not expressly forbid exogamy,[79] and suggests a later hand, in line with the ideas of Ezra–Nehemiah.[80]

Genesis 48.7

This verse is difficult in its context; it does not follow from the previous material, nor is it clear why blessing Joseph's sons should be related to Rachel's death.[81] Westermann points out the remarkable similarity of Gen. 48.7 to Gen. 35.16, 19, arguing that one must be dependent on the other.[82] The placement of this specific reference to Rachel's death and grave site in 48.7 is awkward and the logic linking Jacob's adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim with Rachel's death remains elusive. It is best explained by reference to Genesis 35; just as blessing, birth, and death are linked in that chapter, so they are here as well. The promise to Jacob in Genesis 35 is linked with Bethel (35.15); the death of Rachel follows this, taking place on the road from Bethel to Ephrath. In Genesis 48, Jacob recounts the promise made to him at Luz—namely, Bethel[83]—and this leads naturally into an account of the other significant event near Luz: the death of Rachel.

   Many scholars concur that the person responsible for 48.7 had the tradition from 35.16-20 in front of him, possibly even the entirety of Genesis 35.[84] Genesis 35 is a difficult composite text, and it seems to bear some relation to

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   79.   Cohen, *Beginnings*, pp. 260-62.
   80.   See Knoppers, 'Intermarriage', pp. 15-30.
   81.   On whether this passage should be attributed to P, cf. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 186.
   82.   Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 186.
   83.   See Gen. 28.19; 35.6.
   84.   Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 186; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, pp. 90-91. Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 414-15, argues that 48.7 is impossible to assign to a source.

Genesis 28—another difficult chapter—in that it contains an alternate version of similar events. Chapters 28 and 35 contain threads of an early Jacob account, but both have undergone significant redactional activity.[85] It seems that Genesis 48 has undergone a similar process, possibly by a hand that drew on the earlier combined materials. Thus, 48.7 is likely to be the work of the priestly redactor, who knew the combined non-P/P text of Genesis 35, as indicated by the reference to Paddan (cf. 35.9; P) and to the promise (35.11-12; P), as well as to the non-P verses cited above. This redactor added 48.7 because the mention of the blessing at Luz in 48.3-6 evoked the combined text of Genesis 35.

3. *Conclusions*

Genesis is the story of the birth of Israel as a nation; even Genesis 1–11, which deals with all peoples, is part of this Israelite prehistory, explaining the early roots of the people. God creates his people, beginning with nothing and ending with the twelve tribal ancestors; this new nation begins its history together in Egypt, ready for the reception of the law and the journey back to the land of Israel. For P, this nation is traced through a lineage of fathers, and P focuses on them as much as possible, even revising non-P's traditions by shifting birth and naming scenes to the father's perspective. However, at times the inclusion of women is necessary. Within Genesis, P mostly includes women at points where it is concerned with establishing Israelite lineage. Because there could only be one husband for any woman, patrilineage was not a problem. However, in cases where there was more than one wife, P had to establish which was the right wife. When one wife had multiple sons, as with Jacob and Esau, P also had to establish which was the right son, the heir. For P, that was determined not only by his matrilineage, but also by his choice of wife. Thus, while Esau has a proper Bethuelite mother, because he takes Canaanite (non-Bethuelite) wives he is excluded from the Israelite lineage.

For P, the entire purpose of Genesis is that Abraham's descendents be built up into great enough numbers to create the nation of Israel. This is punctuated at points by promises of great numbers of progeny. This promise is not restricted to the rightful Israelite heir, and thus the lists of the non-heirs' offspring are included as evidence of YHWH's fulfilment of this prom-ise. The covenant, however, is the specific right of the heir. The motif of 'be fruitful and multiply' is behind all of P's narrative in Genesis, and it is in light of this motif that the creation of man and woman together in Genesis 1 should be understood. Man and woman are created so that they can imme-diately commence the business of being fruitful and multiplying, with the

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85. So, e.g., Blum, *Komposition*; Carr, *Reading the Fractures*.

goal of the creation of the nation of Israel. In the flood story, too, P includes women in order to emphasize the importance of procreation; the first thing that God says to Noah upon his exit from the ark is 'Be fruitful and multiply'. Women are necessary in this endeavor, but there is never any doubt in P's mind that men are the focus of this promise and the related covenant.

The births and deaths of a few important women are included by P in Genesis, as are various genealogical lists including women. Mostly these women are the wives and, particularly, the mothers of important male figures. Nearly all the references to women in P in Genesis are part of genealogical or itinerary lists. The blessing of Sarah in Genesis 17 seems at first to be the one major exception to this rule; however, on closer examination, Sarah is mentioned only insofar as she is the 'right' mother, the mother of Abraham's heir who will be the next step in the creation of Israel. Sarah is there in her capacity as Isaac's mother, to offset Ishmael and the unspoken presence of his mother Hagar. Genesis 17 is the culmination of P's theology of promise and covenant, and it is to this text, not to Genesis 1, that readers should look to find P's fundamental valuation of women in relation to men.

It is true that P's entire narrative in Genesis is not much larger than the genealogies and itineraries. Beyond the creation and flood, the promises in chs. 17 and 35, and the purchase of the cave at Machpelah in ch. 23, there is little else to P's Genesis, in contrast to the much-fuller non-P narratives. Given the limited amount of material in P in this book, the treatment of women is all the more striking. While women are by no means left out, their roles are handed over to men when at all possible. Thus, little remains of the birth narratives that originally focused on the mothers, and little is left of the independent actions of women found in the older traditions. Women exist almost entirely for their capacities as mothers and wives. They are an important building block in the developing nation of Israel, but they are little more than that.

WOMEN IN P'S EXODUS–NUMBERS

The narrative in Exodus, as well as Leviticus and Numbers, shifts markedly to focus on Moses and Aaron, both in non-P and in P. Scholarship on women in Exodus tends to focus on the narrative in the first few chapters of the book, and on Exodus 15, all of which material on women belongs to non-P. Although there are still substantial sections of priestly material, including the plagues and the episode at the Reed Sea, the start of the wilderness wandering, and the beginning of the cultic instructions at Sinai, Exodus offers significantly fewer examples of women in the P narrative than did Genesis, and the women are depicted in even less colorful terms than the women in the non-P parts of the book.

Most of Leviticus, which is unanimously attributed to the priestly corpus, inclusive of the Holiness School, is legal material, but there are two small sections of narrative mixed in, one in Lev. 10.1-7 and one in Lev. 24.10-23. The latter concerns women, as the mother of the central figure is referred to several times. Numbers also offers a blend of narrative and law, and once again there are several narrative passages that involve women. Two of these, the episodes involving Zelophehad's daughters, go on to promulgate laws based on the cases brought forward in the narrative. As in Genesis, the narrative in Exodus–Numbers includes both genealogical material as well as more discursive narratives. There is a greater quantity of H in these passages as well; this will be treated in individual instances.

1. *Genealogical Material*

Exodus 6.14-25
Several women are mentioned in this genealogical section, which scholars generally agree is P.[1] The first is the Canaanite woman in v. 15 who bears

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1. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 111; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 266. The passage has some R additions as well. Propp argues that the genealogy is entirely the work of R, a compilation based on important figures who appear later in composite (JEP) or R texts (p. 267). But his argument is weak: he says that this genealogy must be by the same hand that composed

Simeon's son Shaul. Three more women are mentioned, two by name and one by family: Jochebed, Amram's wife and Aaron and Moses' mother (v. 20); Aaron's wife Elisheba, who bears Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (v. 23); and Eleazar's wife, the mother of Phinehas, from among the 'daughters of Putiel' (v. 25). In addition to listing wives, Levi, Kohath, and Amram's ages are given as well. The section traces the Levite lineage through the line of Amram down to Phinehas; the mothers of everyone after Amram are named. The genealogy begins with Reuben and Simeon, as is typical, but stops after Levi.[2] The ultimate goal of this genealogy is thus Phinehas and this genealogy traces his line: Levi → Kohath → Amram → Aaron → Eleazar → Phinehas. Phinehas's importance as the ancestor of the Zadokite priesthood was of great importance to P,[3] who is thought to be affiliated with the Zadokites.[4] The concern of the passage is the status of this priestly lineage.

The inclusion of wives/mothers in this genealogy serves, as one scholar notes, to validate the priestly lineage.[5] The different families from which the women come—Jochebed is the daughter of Levi, Elisheba is a Judahite,[6] and Putiel's daughter's lineage is not given—make it difficult to determine the parameters of this pedigree, however. Jochebed's Levite lineage is clearly appropriate. The inclusion of Elisheba, a Judean woman, is perhaps intended to link the priesthood with the line of David.[7] It is impossible to say whether Putiel's daughter is an Israelite and, if so, what tribe she might have been from. Elsewhere in the priestly material (in this case, the related H corpus), a priest is required to marry 'one of his own people' (Lev. 21.14), but P does not necessarily follow priestly laws in this passage, as reflected in Amram's marriage to his aunt, which is expressly prohibited in Lev. 18.12. (P is also apparently responding to non-P's story in Exodus 2, taking the description of Jochebed in v. 2 as בת לוי to literally mean 'a daughter of Levi' rather than the more general 'a Levite woman'.[8]) As P does not forbid intermarriage, a

Num. 26.9b-11, because the latter mentions Korah's sons, and that Num. 26.9b-11 must be R because it knows the composite Num. 16 story. The latter point is true; however, Num. 26 only mentions that Korah had sons, without naming them (as Propp admits). Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 61, believes that the addition of this genealogy is the work of a late H editor who used it to introduce the character of Korah. However, Knohl depends too heavily on this single connection, and ignores the fact that the emphasis of the genealogy itself is not on Korah, but rather on Phinehas.

  2. Cf. Noth, *Exodus*, p. 58.
  3. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 280.
  4. *ABD* VI, p. 1036; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 284.
  5. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 277. Cf. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 89 n. 22; Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 69.
  6. According to Num. 1.7; 2.3; 7.12; 10.14, Amminadab is a Judahite.
  7. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 279. Cf. Ruth 4.20-22; 1 Chron. 2.10-15.
  8. See Blum, *Studien*, p. 231.

non-Israelite origin for Phinehas's mother is not necessarily problematic. However, it makes it difficult to determine what, if any, qualifying criteria are being used of the women here. Perhaps there are none, and the presence of the women is meant as validation in and of itself.

Although descent is generally traced patrilineally in ancient Israel (tribes and clans, for instance, are traced through fathers), distinguishing between several sons of the same father of necessity must move to mothers as a means of distinction. The same is true of tracing the lineage of the patriarchs in Genesis—Sarah is the 'right' mother for Isaac, and when Rebekah has two sons, the heir is the one who marries the 'right' wife. Thus, while each of the men in this lineage has multiple sons, it is the line with a specific, named woman as mother and wife that yields the priestly line of Phinehas. No other women in the Levite line are named at all. The births of Aaron and Moses are reported (v. 20), but not that of Miriam. Some Hebrew manuscripts, LXX, and Sam. do add 'and Miriam, their sister' in v. 20, but this is probably a harmonization with Num. 26.59, and is to be rejected.[9] The list here is concerned only with mothers and wives, not with daughters, in the ancestry of Phinehas.[10]

The placement of this genealogy is also odd: placed between the theophany to Moses and the appointment of Aaron as Moses' mouthpiece, it interrupts the narrative. If it were meant to introduce both Moses and Aaron, we would have expected it to appear earlier. This is the case, for instance, with the lineage of Noah in Genesis 5–6; with Abram in Genesis 11; and with the list of Israelites in Egypt at the beginning of Exodus. The genealogy may also come at the end, as with Ishmael and Esau, and with Jacob's children, which list is placed at the end of the narratives centering on Jacob, before the Joseph narrative. The list in Genesis 46 also occurs at a pivotal point, as Jacob is bringing his family down to Egypt, but again it is placed between two separate sections of narrative. Exod. 6.14-25, on the other hand, interrupts a single narrative unit; it is placed after P's introduction of Moses, but before P has introduced Aaron. Its main purpose, then, is to introduce Aaron, and to offer the genealogical credentials of the priesthood, credentials that include clarification as to the mothers of the relevant figures.

The placement of the genealogy here may also be significant in terms of the redaction history of P and non-P. Its appearance at this juncture suggests that the P narrative at some point existed separately from non-P, as otherwise P would have placed the genealogy at the first appearance of Aaron in the combined non-P/P text. Furthermore, P seems to be interacting with the tradition about Jochebed's lineage in non-P, indicating that P is aware of

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9.   So Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 264; Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 89 n. 21.
10.   Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 277-78.

non-P, despite the fact that he is composing a free-standing narrative. The placement of this genealogy also argues against it being the work of a redactor, as the redactor would more logically have placed it elsewhere.

Numbers 20.1

The first mention of a specific female figure in Numbers comes in 20.1, with the brief mention that Miriam has died. It is the only priestly reference to Miriam outside of the genealogical listing in Num. 26.59.[11] While it is not strictly a genealogy, it is a brief notice more akin to the genealogical than to the narrative material. Noth points out that the deaths of all three siblings— Miriam, Aaron and Moses—are included in P; he concludes that there is no older grave tradition behind Num. 20.1, but rather that P fabricated it in order to position Miriam's death at the right historical moment.[12] The fact that P has not previously mentioned Miriam raises the question as to whether he was aware of non-P Miriam material, or of other Miriam traditions. Miriam's otherwise abrupt appearance here offers compelling evidence that this was the case.[13] The narratives about Miriam in non-P suggest that she was an important figure in Israelite tradition, and thus it is not surprising that P would mention her. While he need not have been relying on non-P material to do so, introducing Miriam out of the blue in such a fashion is a little odd and it makes more sense if P presupposes references to her. If, on the other hand, she was simply included in a genealogy or itinerary list from which P drew material, the previous absence of Miriam would be less surprising.

  The (non-P) traditions of Miriam elsewhere present her as a 'prophetess' and as a challenger to Moses' authority. Although P includes other caution-ary tales about such troublesome figures (e.g. Num. 16), perhaps he leaves the traditions about Miriam out as too problematic where Aaron and Moses' authority is concerned. Regardless, the notice of her death marks the impor-tance of Miriam as a wilderness figure—she was still important enough to P that he could not leave her out entirely and felt that it was appropriate to include a notice of her death alongside Moses and Aaron. However, includ-ing more traditions about her, if indeed P was aware of such traditions, would have run counter to P's own interests in establishing the authority of Aaron.

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11.   Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 94, attributes Num. 20.1-13 as a unit to H, although he acknowledges that the unit contains remnants of P traditions; he does not specifically discuss v. 1 or justify its inclusion with H and the rest of the passage. V. 1 has no narrative connection with the following narrative. Knohl does not include the only other priestly mention of Miriam, Num. 26.59, in H, nor does he usually attribute passages about the wilderness itinerary to H. Thus, I see no reason to include this verse with H.

12.   Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, pp. 182-83.

13.   Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 77.

Numbers 26.46

Here P mentions Asher's daughter Serah; she appears last in the list of Asher's line, after the clans of his sons and grandsons. Serah appears in Gen. 46.17, as well as 1 Chron. 7.30; apparently her name was preserved in the genealogical lists, if nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. There are no biblical narrative traditions about Serah, despite the fact that she appears three times. However, it is likely that the references in Numbers 26 and 1 Chronicles 7 are related to and dependent on Genesis 46, which goes back to an old genealogical list; P incorporated this list, which included the reference to Serah, into his work.[14] The appearance of Serah in Genesis 46 is less surprising, given the overall use of women in that genealogy and perhaps also given its antiquity; her appearance in the other two passages is a direct result of their dependence on Genesis 46.

Serah became quite a significant figure in rabbinic legend, and according to those legends, she was immortal and was responsible for a number of remarkable deeds, including playing a key role in the exodus.[15] The tradition that she was immortal is apparently based on a deliberate misinterpretation of the references to Serah: the rabbis took the reference in Numbers 26 to mean that Serah was still alive when the census was taken after the exodus. Based on this interpretation, however, the rabbis seem to have developed a rich tradition concerning Serah and her role in events before and during the exodus. It is possible that these stories reflect older traditions that did not survive in the written biblical text, but any such traditions must remain a matter of conjecture. The repeated references to Serah in the Hebrew Bible are best explained as repetitions of a single genealogical reference, not as remnants of a fuller narrative tradition.

Numbers 26.59

This genealogy of Amram and Jochebed's children includes Miriam alongside Aaron and Moses, in contrast to Exod. 6.20, where Jochebed is mentioned but Miriam is not.[16] Rita Burns explains the inclusion of Miriam in Num. 26.59 as part of P's generally inclusive stance throughout the chapter.[17] She

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14.   Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 329, 332; Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, p. 159; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 15.

15.   Marc Bregman, 'A Lady of Legend: Serah Bat Asher' (1996; accessed October 13 2006; available from http.//www.huc.edu/faculty/faculty/pubs/pbregman.html); Bronner, 'Serah', pp. 187-98.

16.   The syntax of the phrase about Jochebed here is difficult, although it does not change the meaning or significance of the verse. See Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 327; Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 229; Joüon §155d, e.

17.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, pp. 89-90.

argues that the tradition of Miriam as sister of both Moses and Aaron must be late;[18] originally the traditions of Aaron and Moses as brothers and Aaron and Miriam as brother and sister existed separately. However, whereas Noth believed the tradition of Miriam as the sister of Aaron, not Moses, was early,[19] Burns argues instead that this relationship is created later and only in P. All references to Miriam as Aaron's brother in non-P contexts are thus secondary (P) additions.[20] In light of Miriam's role as a 'cult official' (Exod. 15.20), according to Burns, P felt the need to associate her with his cult official extraordinaire, Aaron. There are problems with this argument, though. P does not have any other female cult officials (the women of Exod. 38.8,[21] being too obscure, are excluded); why would he suddenly want to validate this one? P also does not preserve any other traditions about Miriam (that is, in identifiably P contexts) beside her death. While P may well have known the traditions preserved in non-P texts, his inconsistent application of the label 'sister of Aaron' to Miriam is hard to explain.

The combination of Miriam with Aaron and Moses as siblings suggests that P knows the non-P traditions, or something like them, because it is the totality of those traditions that makes the combination possible. Although the specifics of the process by which Miriam, Aaron, and Moses were brought together as siblings are not clear, the final result can be seen in P. This leaves the question as to why P includes Miriam here but not in Exod. 6.20. Noth argues that Miriam was left out of most P genealogies because she is a woman,[22] but this does not explain the present text, and it ignores the fact that P's genealogies often include women, if not in great numbers. Burns concludes that Miriam must have been important to P for him to include her in Numbers 26.[23] The notice of Miriam's death does not specifically mention her relationship to Moses and Aaron, making implicit that she is indeed important in her own right. Num. 26.59 is the product of a redactor, as indicated by v. 9, which knows a combined tradition of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. This later P redactor finally adds Miriam to Amram's family, an element not found in the initial genealogy in Exodus 6 or in other traditions about Miriam. This editor ensures that Miriam is not a major challenger with her own independent powers, but rather belongs to a family of prominent men.

18.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 90.
19.   Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 182, although he does not seem to believe that they originated as siblings in the very earliest stage of (oral) tradition.
20.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 84.
21.   See the treatment of this passage below.
22.   Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, p. 183 n. 511.
23.   Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken*, p. 90.

2. *Narrative Material*

Exodus 35.20–36.7

The appearance of women in these chapters has elicited almost no comment from scholars. Childs has little specific to say about the entire section of Exod. 35.1–40.38; Noth's comments summarize the passage with little exposition. Feminists have more to say, but still limit their discussions to a general overview of women's role in domestic arts.[24] Following Knohl, who argues that the involvement of women here reflects H's 'all Israel' focus, this passage is assigned to H.[25] However, as the following discussion will show, there is more to the presence of women than an interest in inclusivity.

Women appear in 35.22, 25, 26, 29; and 36.6. In 35.22, women as well as men bring offerings for YHWH; in vv. 25-26 'wise/skilled women' spin yarn and bring it as a donation. Verse 29 repeats that every man and woman who so desired brought donations for YHWH. In 36.6, both men and women are specifically instructed to stop bringing offerings, as too much is being donated. There is a slight difference in terminology between 35.25 and 35.26, which appear fairly repetitious at first. However, when these verses are compared with v. 23, a pattern emerges. There, the different fibers and skins donated (by men only!) are enumerated in some detail. In vv. 25-26, the women spin the fibers (although notably they do nothing with the skins). Two different phrases are used to describe the women in the two verses: the women in v. 25, who deal with colored fibers, are called אשה חכמת־לב בידיה, 'skilled woman', or perhaps more literally, 'woman with skilled hands'. Exod. 36.1, 2 explain that those (males in this instance) who are חכם־לב have been endowed with their special skills by YHWH. The women who work with goats' hair in v. 26, on the other hand, are called הנשים אשר נשא לבן אתנה בחכמה, 'women who set their minds to it with skill'. The meaning of this awkward phrase is not entirely clear, but I suggest that it indicates that these women are determined to help out and have some skill, but do not belong to the special group of skilled artisans; thus it is left to them to work with the less-valuable goats' hair.

The first group of women spin the various fibers donated in v. 23, presumably in their own homes, and then bring them back, as v. 25a indicates: וכל־אשה...טוו ויביאו מטוה, 'Every skilled woman spun and brought her spinning'. The list of what they spun then follows. The second group of women spins; there is nothing saying that they then bring their spinning. Perhaps for this simpler spinning, then, the women worked in the place where the donations had been made. The fact that the women are not said to

24.   See, for instance, Meyers, *Exodus*, pp. 275-77; Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, pp. 201-202.
25.   Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 193.

be imbued with divine skill, whereas the men are, is also an important difference, and points to the different valuation of contributions by men and women. While the women's work is noted and seen as a positive aspect of the involvement of the entire community in the project, the skills of the men are nonetheless held to be of special, and higher, divinely guided status.

When it comes to carrying out the instructions for crafting the tabernacle and its various appurtenances, there is a notable absence of women. Bezalel and Oholiab oversee the crafting of the various items, but whereas 35.25-26 mention 'skilled women', in 36.1, 2 there are only 'skilled men'. Carol Meyers argues that despite the fact that there is only mention of men in the building and crafting, women should be understood as contributors as well, the 'default' masculine vocabulary masking their presence.[26] However, given that 35.22, 29; 36.6 mention both men and women, we might expect the larger narrative to continue mentioning men and women as well. Bird concludes that the shift is 'an example of male professionalization of female crafts', although she admits the ambiguity of the masculine verb forms.[27] While both Meyers and Bird are undoubtedly correct in noting the association of women with certain crafts, neither goes far enough in understanding this passage. Meyers, in particular, is too willing to assume that women are involved without being mentioned, and Bird's argument is belied by the fact that the traditional women's crafts like spinning and weaving are still attributed to women. Verses 25-26 mention women because they are drawing on their specific skills there to work with the materials donated in v. 23, but once the materials are prepared, the work becomes the purview of male artisans like Bezalel and Oholiab, those who are specifically said to be endowed with divine skill.[28]

Exodus 38.8

This verse, about the 'women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting', is an interpretational enigma. Knohl assigns it to H because, as with the previous passage, he believes the inclusion of women is part of H's all-Israel focus.[29] However, this difficult verse defies classification within any priestly

26. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 202.
27. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 95 n. 36.
28. Knohl, *Sanctuary*, pp. 63-68, 193, argues that Exod. 35.4–40.38 are H, whereas Exod. 25.1–31.11 are P material that has been adapted and edited by H. While the instructions are addressed to Moses, the account of the actual construction extends to all Israel. Moses himself does not build the tabernacle or make the priestly vestments (although presumably this would have been understood as beyond Moses' abilities). Both men and women are included in the list of people making contributions, a fact that he sees as indicative of the Holiness School's tendency to be more broadly inclusive of 'all Israel'. There is, however, a notable absence of explicitly H terminology here.
29. Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 193.

rubric. Traditional interpretations have often assumed that the women appear here in either a service/custodial or a sexual capacity,[30] drawing a comparison to 1 Sam. 2.22. Unfortunately, the meanings of two key words, מראת and צבאת, and the nuance of the verb צבא remain obscure. מראת is usually taken to refer to mirrors. צבאת and צבא are slightly less problematic in terms of translation, as 'serve' works well and allows a range of meaning. Although the root is used most often in reference to military service and troops,[31] it also appears in reference to cultic service at the tent of meeting required of Levites.

מראת is more difficult. This feminine noun occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible, always with the meaning 'vision(s)'.[32] Why it should have the meaning 'mirror(s)' here and only here is difficult to understand. On the other hand, 'visions', at first glance, does not help clarify the verse any more than 'mirrors' does. The verb עשה ב-, however, may be of some help in this matter. While עשה ב- frequently means to make something out of something else,[33] it can also mean to make something *according to* something else. This meaning appears in Exod. 25.40, where Moses is instructed to follow the design that God has shown him. This allows for the possibility that Exod. 38.8 should be translated 'He made the basin of copper, and its stand of copper, according to the visions of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting'.[34]

To see a priestly author reporting that the washstand was made according to the visions of women serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting would be surprising in the extreme. One possible explanation is Meyers's proposal that the verse may be a remnant of a much older tradition about the

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30. Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, p. 636; Meyers, *Exodus*, pp. 278-79; Janet S. Everhart, 'Serving Women and their Mirrors: A Feminist Reading of Exodus 38.8b', *CBQ* 66 (2004), pp. 44-54 (47).

31. See *HALOT* III, pp. 994-95.

32. Gen. 46.2; Num. 12.6; 1 Sam. 3.15; Ezek. 1.1; 8.3; 40.2; 43.3; Dan. 10.7, 8, 16. In five of those instances it occurs in the plural, as here; notably, all the examples from Ezekiel, an author close to P, are in the plural.

33. Cf. Exod. 31.4; 38.30, etc. However, in Exod. 37.24; 38.3, the phrase 'to make something out of something else' uses a double accusative, rather than an accusative and ב.

34. Arguing against this is the fact that the LXX, Vg., and Tg. Onq. have 'mirrors'. The mention of visions in the instructions suggests that perhaps Moses is the unspoken subject of the visions here as well, and the women are the object; this suggestion was made to me by Professor Baruch J. Schwartz, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (personal communication, February 2006). The resulting translation would then be, 'He made the basin of copper, and its stand of copper, according to the visions (of Moses) of the serving women who served at the opening of the tent of meeting'. Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem of the women's presence and function.

Tabernacle as a place of oracular activity.[35] However, if the women really are performing some kind of cultic service, then the verse cannot stem from P or H, where such an idea would be impossible. The fact that this verse appears in a priestly context at all suggests that the women were not involved in cultic service, or at least that the author did not understand their activity as such. Alternatively, the verse may be intended highlight the fact that these women no longer exist at the time of the text's composition.[36] Whether P/H intends by this to enforce the end of a cultic practice of women or whether the passage is simply incidental to the construction of the tabernacle, is impossible to say. If it preserves a tradition of women as visionaries—or even as cultic officiants of some other type—outside the tent, this adds an entirely new dimension to the reconstruction of ancient Israelite religion.

Leviticus 24.10-16, 23

Leviticus 24.10-23, a passage from the heart of the H corpus, presents the case of a man who gets into a fight and blasphemes YHWH. The legal section gives laws concerning blasphemy as well as talion, both of which are to be applied to 'stranger and citizen alike' (v. 22). Scholarship on this passage tends to focus on the nature of the violation or 'blasphemy' committed.[37] Details concerning the culprit's parentage, both mother and father, are largely ignored or explained in relation to the laws' application to both Israelites and resident non-Israelites. The fact that the man's Israelite mother is mentioned should not simply be glossed over, however. As we have seen elsewhere in the priestly material, reference to mothers is frequently significant. It remains to determine its significance here, though.

The mother, Shelomith, is the only woman mentioned by name in Leviticus.[38] (She is the only specific woman mentioned at all.) A surprising amount of detail is given about her, especially as the names of the son and the son's father are not given. The blasphemer is not called an Israelite, but rather the 'son of the Israelite (woman)', while the man with whom he fights is called an Israelite. This contrast indicates that the ethnicity of the blasphemer was at issue, and the continued emphasis on the mother suggests that she is the significant parent. According to Shaye Cohen, the Hebrew Bible traces Israelite identity patrilineally.[39] This is supported by much of the material covered thus far: although P places a great deal of emphasis on having the

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35. Meyers, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 202.
36. See Everhart, 'Serving Women', p. 53.
37. Dennis H. Livingston, 'The Crime of Leviticus xxiv 11', *VT* 36 (1986), pp. 352-54; J. Weingreen, 'The Case of the Blasphemer (Leviticus xxiv 10 ff.)', *VT* 22 (1972), pp. 118-23.
38. Frymer-Kensky, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, p. 154.
39. Cohen, *Beginnings*, pp. 264-67.

right mother, family lines are nonetheless traced through fathers, as evidenced particularly in the genealogical lists. The same ideology is reflected in H in this passage. Israelite women who married foreigners would thus have ceased to be Israelites for all intents and purposes.[40] The text in Leviticus 24, however, deals with the case of an Israelite woman whose foreign husband relocates to her family rather than staying with his own.

Leviticus 22.32, which deals with profaning YHWH's name בתוך בני ישׂראל, 'in the midst of the Israelite people', provides a relevant parallel. The same phrase occurs in Lev. 24.10 in reference to the place where the fight occurs; it is not such a common phrase that its use should go unnoticed in these passages. In particular, this phrase can refer to the place where YHWH dwells (Exod. 29.45; Num. 35.34). The law in Lev. 22.32, though, would seem to cover the case of an Israelite who blasphemed, even if that law was meant to be read in its immediate context only. But it would not cover the case of the stranger, nor does it provide a clear judgment for someone with mixed heritage, whose identity might not initially be clear. The case in Lev. 24.10-16 is meant to cover these other contingencies; it artfully uses a case of mixed parentage to illustrate the law for both the Israelite and the foreigner, and the mother's identity here is thus a key aspect of the case, although it is limited to genetic concerns.[41]

Numbers 25.6-18[42]

The episode in Num. 25.6-18, properly assigned to H,[43] is often treated as though it is linked to and expanding upon the preceding non-P story in vv. 1-5, as both mention Peor.[44] However, the two accounts refer to two different events, as the details of the stories show. The non-P tradition, reflected also in Deut. 4.3, Hos. 9.10, and Ps. 106.28, involves the worship of a foreign god. The H account bears more resemblance to Josh. 22.17;[45] neither text

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40. Cohen, *Beginnings*, p. 266.

41. Simeon Chavel suggests that the inclusion of Egyptian parentage is meant to explain how an Israelite could be capable of the act of blasphemy (personal communication, February 2006). See also Simeon Chavel, 'Four Novellae in the Pentateuch: The Blasphemer (Lev 24.10-23), the Second Passover (Num 9.1-14), the Sabbath Wood-Gatherer (Num 15.32-36), and the Daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27.1-11)' (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006).

42. For a far more detailed treatment of this passage, see Shectman, 'Women as Looking Glasses'.

43. Knohl, *Sanctuary*, pp. 96-98.

44. See Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 278-80. Blum, *Studien*, pp. 114-16, attributes the entire chapter to his K[D].

45. On the possible priestly character of this verse, see Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 60; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 279, 506.

mentions Baal, nor is there any hint of worship of foreign gods. Instead, Peor seems to be only a geographical name in this tradition.[46] Likewise, whereas non-P involves Moabite women, with whom the Israelites have sexual relations, H concerns a single Midianite woman and no explicit sexual activity. Furthermore, in H only a single Israelite man is involved, a mysterious plague ravages the Israelites, and non-P's judges are replaced by Phinehas. It is not a stretch to conclude that these two narratives were originally quite independent of each other. The H account is not about idolatry or pagan worship, as in non-P, but is rather about the encroachment of two people, Zimri and Cozbi, on the sanctuary and on the priestly prerogative. Because this event also mentions Peor, it was placed with the altogether-different non-P Baal-Peor story, much in the same way that Numbers 11, 12, and 16 combine thematically related stories that are in fact about different events.

Numbers 25.6 reports that the Israelite man, Zimri, brings a Midianite woman, Cozbi, to some kind of public gathering. The verse ends with the notice that 'they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting', but the subject of this clause is not clear. Is it Moses and the other Israelites, or is it Zimri and Cozbi? Or is it all of them? And why are they weeping? According to the traditional interpretation, the entire community is weeping because of the idolatry narrated in vv. 1-5, or because of the plague (which is only mentioned two verses later), or possibly both.[47] The plague, however, must be caused by the actions of Zimri and Cozbi, because the response of Phinehas in vv. 7-8 stops it.[48]

However, if we look at the passage in its original (H) context, then a different possibility for the cause of the weeping appears: the people are still weeping over Aaron's death, mentioned in Num. 20.29. Originally Num. 25.6-18 followed directly on the account of the death of Aaron in Num. 20.23-29.[49] The whole community is thus assembled at the entrance to the tent of meeting, where Zimri brings the Midianite woman, Cozbi. This is typically taken to indicate his intent to marry her and/or have sexual relations with her,[50] but it is unlikely that he would be bringing her before the entire community to announce these intentions. Additionally, like P, H does not forbid marriage to foreign women and so this, in itself, would not constitute

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46. Peor also appears as a mountain in Num. 23.28, and as a place-name, Beth-Peor, in Deut. 3.29; 4.46; 34.6; Josh. 13.20.

47. Noth, *Numbers*, p. 198; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 286.

48. Cf. also Num. 31.16; Josh. 22.17.

49. So David P. Wright (personal communication, January 2006). According to Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 105, the death of Aaron is also H. Two intervening passages, Num. 21.1-3 and 22.1, are also attributed to the priestly source, but they are probably redactional; Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, pp. 60-61; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 79, 139.

50. See e.g. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 286-88.

the kind of grievous transgression that the text implies took place.[51] Thus, we can discard illicit sexual relations or marriage as the concern of the story.

The narrative continues: Phinehas sees the couple, rises and takes a spear, and enters a structure called הַקֻּבָּה (v. 8), probably a tent of some kind, killing the man and woman. He kills the woman specifically by driving the spear through קֻבָתָהּ, 'her stomach' (v. 8). Phinehas thus stems the heretofore-unmentioned plague, whose victims total twenty-four thousand (v. 9), and is rewarded for his action, described as 'making atonement' (כפר, v. 13) for Israel, with the priestly covenant.

As one scholar aptly notes of this H episode, 'More is omitted than said',[52] and as a result, interpreters frequently read many details into the story, particularly in relation to vv. 1-5.[53] There are two words in particular that cause major problems for the H passage: הַקֻּבָּה and קֻבָתָהּ. The first is a *hapax legomenon*; comparative linguistic evidence suggests that it is some kind of tent,[54] although its precise nature is unclear. According to Levine, it was a Midianite tent—probably belonging to the woman's prominent father's clan—where Zimri and Cozbi were 'engaging in pagan worship'. Cross offers a more compelling explanation: this tent is the same as the other tent mentioned in the passage, namely, the tent of meeting.[55]

Further evidence supports this claim, beginning with the word קֻבָתָהּ. This precise word does not appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; it is often taken to be the same as the noun קֵבָה found also in Deut. 18.3 in reference to the stomach of a sacrificed animal, although the two are vocalized differently. Alternately, it is taken to be the same word as קֻבָּה earlier in the verse, refer-ring more specifically to 'her tent',[56] although the ungeminated beth and the initial vowel pose a problem for this interpretation as well. While the evi-dence does not allow us to give a firm answer for translating this word, it does suggest that in any case we are working in a certain semantic field. Both

51. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 1584-85.

52. Helena Zlotnick Sivan, 'The Rape of Cozbi (Numbers xxv)', *VT* 51 (2001), pp. 69-80 (71).

53. For varying examples of all the following, see, for instance, Noth, *Numbers*, pp. 198-99; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 280; Barbara E. Organ, 'Pursuing Phinehas: A Synchronic Reading', *CBQ* 63 (2001), pp. 203-18; Stefan C. Reif, 'What Enraged Phinehas: A Study of Numbers 25.8', *JBL* 90 (1971), pp. 200-206; Sivan, 'Rape of Cozbi', pp. 69-80.

54. Frank Moore Cross, 'The Priestly Tabernacle', in G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman (eds.), *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 201-28 (217-19); Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 287-88; *HALOT* III, pp. 1060-61.

55. Cross, 'Priestly Tabernacle', pp. 218-19; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p. 202.

56. So, for instance, Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 288; *BHS* note a.

words refer to something inner or interior. Rather than force the more-problematic קֵבָתָהּ into a definition that does not quite fit its form, I suggest that it is an entirely different word, not attested elsewhere, but using the same root with the same range of meaning:[57] it is an internal part of the human body. Both Hebrew terms could thus be translated 'inner part', one a physical structure and one a part of the body, perhaps one specific to women. The author is making a deliberate play on words: these people have illegally entered the inner part of the enclosure and the woman is, fittingly, stabbed in her 'inner part'.[58]

However, while H may be making a word play, the couple are not, as some have argued, guilty of sexual transgressions, a position based on the erroneous association of this episode with vv. 1-5. They are guilty of some other offense. H considers a number of offenses serious enough to warrant the death penalty,[59] but sexual relations with a foreigner are notably absent from this list, and the only forms of idolatrous cultic worship included are offering children to Molech and possession by ghosts or familiars, neither of which is the offense here. Of the offenses that require the death penalty, only encroaching on the tabernacle or, possibly, on the priestly duties, can feasibly be posited as the offense committed by Zimri and Cozbi. Of course it is possible that H here reflects a situation not covered elsewhere in the legal material, but if a corresponding situation can be found within the laws, it is better to base the interpretation on that than on some hypothetical law. Encroaching on the tabernacle is the most likely choice.

Verse 6 very clearly states that Cozbi and Zimri appear in the sight of the whole community, who were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting, putting Zimri and Cozbi in close proximity to the tent. Numbers contains several passages that cite death as the punishment for both non-Levite

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57. Reif suggests a plausible similar scenario in which the word, whose meaning was lost, was given a vocalization 'reminiscent of the word בֹּשֶׁת' (Reif, 'What Enraged Phinehas', p. 206).

58. On word plays in the Hebrew Bible, including in some priestly texts, see Gary A. Rendsburg, 'Word Play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection', in Scott B. Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), pp. 137-62.

59. These are offenses for which it is explicitly stated that the offenders shall be 'put to death', using the hophal of the verb מות. The ascription of these texts to H follows Knohl, *Sanctuary*, pp. 105-106. The texts include breaking the Sabbath (Exod. 31.14-15; 35.2; Num. 15.32-36); offering one's children up to Molech (Lev. 20.2); insulting one's father or mother (Lev. 20.9); improper sexual relations of various kinds (Lev. 20.10-13, 15-16); possession by a ghost or familiar (Lev. 20.27); pronouncing YHWH's name (Lev. 24.16); killing a human (Lev. 24.17; Num. 35.16-18, 21, 31); and encroaching on the tabernacle (Num. 1.51; 3.38) or on the priestly duties (Num. 3.10; 18.7); anyone who has been proscribed must be put to death as well (Lev. 27.29).

Israelites and non-Israelites who encroach on certain parts of the tabernacle or tent of meeting.[60] The specific verb used of encroachment is קרב, and it connotes close proximity as well as violation of priestly authority.[61] This is the very root used of Zimri bringing Cozbi before the community in v. 6. The best explanation of this passage is therefore that Zimri and Cozbi were guilty of coming too close to the sancta. This also explains the plague, which according to Num. 8.19 and 17.11-12 (H) is the result of encroachment on the sanctuary. Phinehas is also said to have atoned for the Israelites by killing the encroachers, just as Aaron does in Num. 17.11.

What, then, is H's point in Num. 25.6-18? The narrative is apparently preserved as a cautionary tale for those who would encroach on the sanctuary. Whatever its original *Sitz im Leben*, in the context of the narrative, it serves three primary purposes: (1) it illustrates a law about encroachment; (2) it legitimates Phinehas's ascendancy to the high priesthood; and (3) it justifies the Midianite war (Num. 31.1-54), which may have at one point followed immediately on this unit. Like the case law in Leviticus 24, the characters are chosen for what they represent: both non-Levite Israelite as well as foreigner, both male as well as female. The people are symbolic, representing the full range of those forbidden from approaching too near the sanctuary. It is an important distinction in H's theology that mere proximity to the sanctuary constitutes encroaching;[62] *what* the encroachers are doing there is not the issue for H. In this specific instance, non-levitical Israelites are dangerous as well, although the emphasis is on the Midianite, as this episode is used as a pretext for the Midianite war in Numbers 31. The fact that details about her name and lineage appear may in part be owing to this connection, or it may be a holdover from an older story. In any case, the fact that this Midianite is a woman is largely incidental; unlike the non-P story in vv. 1-5, there is no intimation of sexual relations, cultic or otherwise, to suggest a negative judgment on foreign women in particular.[63]

Numbers 26.33; 27.1-11; 36.1-12

This group of passages, concerning the inheritance of a certain man of the tribe of Manasseh who has only daughters, is often touted by feminists as a

60.   Num. 1.51; 3.38; 17.28; 18.4, 7.

61.   Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp. 342-43; Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology*. I. *The Encroacher and the Levite; The Term 'Aboda* (UCNES, 14; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 16-20.

62.   See Knohl, *Sanctuary*, pp. 192-93.

63.   As noted previously, P/H is not opposed to foreign marriage. This is much more the stance of Deuteronomy, a fact that prompts Blum to assign the entirety of Num. 25 to K[D] (Blum, *Studien*, pp. 114-16).

biblical example of women's rights being protected.[64] However, a closer look indicates that while Zelophehad's daughters temporarily appear to have been awarded inheritance rights, it is in truth the inheritance of men that is ultimately being protected. The women serve as hereditary placeholders until another male can resume the chain of inheritance.

The first mention of Zelophehad's daughters, in Num. 26.33, appears in the context of a genealogy given in a census list. This genealogical list is fairly uniform in structure; certain breaks in that structure suggest an editorial hand.[65] The list of Zelophehad's daughters was probably added here,[66] most likely by a priestly redactor, in anticipation of the account of their inheritance that follows. The remainder of the case of Zelophehad's daughters, Num. 27.1-11 and 36.1-12, belongs to H.[67]

In Num. 27.1-11, Zelophehad's five daughters bring their case to Moses: their father has no sons, and his name will be lost if they are not allowed to receive his due portion in the allotment of the land. Moses takes the case to YHWH, who supports the daughters' claim and tells Moses to give them their father's portion, effectively making them their father's heirs. YHWH also makes this case the basis for a continuing statute concerning the right of daughters to inherit if there is no son. At first glance, this judgment has the appearance of empowering women as heirs of their fathers. However, they are given this right only when there is no son, with the practical outcome, as Numbers 36 shows, that they are only temporary inheritors. As soon as a daughter married, her inheritance would become part of her husband's holding and would pass on to their children in his name. Thus, while the law delays the disappearance of Zelophehad's name for one generation, it is only a temporary measure.[68]

The phrase used for women's inheritance in the law expounded in Num. 27.8 is ‏-ל נחלה העביר‎, 'transfer property to'. This phrase does not appear

64. See, for example, Katharine D. Sakenfeld, 'Zelophehad's Daughters', *PRSt* 15 (1988), pp. 37-47; Ankie Sterring, 'The Will of the Daughters', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp. 88-99; Tal Ilan, 'The Daughters of Zelophehad and Women's Inheritance: The Biblical Injunction and its Outcome', in Brenner (ed.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion*, pp. 176-86; Sakenfeld, in Meyers (ed.), *Women in Scripture*, pp. 220-21.

65. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 308, notes that vv. 8b-10, 33, 57-65 are probably explanatory glosses. Vv. 29ab, 46 are possibly additional as well, as they also break the otherwise-rigid pattern of the chapter.

66. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 230.

67. Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 100.

68. The biblical evidence on whether or not women could own property is ambiguous; their rights of ownership seem mostly to involve dowry, which becomes the property of the husband upon marriage but over which they retain some claim; see Westbrook, *Property*, pp. 152-53.

anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, and must refer to the specific and pecu-
liar situation of women as inheritors.[69] The use of the verb העביר, 'to pass
through; set aside', indicates that the women are temporary placeholders.
Thus, while the daughters ask for their own land as a possession, they are
given the right to act as temporary inheritors instead.[70] The daughters of
Zelophehad themselves say that they are looking to maintain their father's
name; their request is not about their own legacy, but his. However, in the
end, their land will pass to male children who are their husbands' heirs, and
so ultimately they are not preserving their father's name at all. The only
difference is that the inheritance 'jumps' via the wife instead of following a
straight progression through a line of males.

    Numbers 36 confirms this interpretation; in this chapter, kinsmen of Zelo-
phehad's daughters, members of their clan, approach Moses with a problem:
if the women marry outside their tribe, then their land will be transferred to
their husbands' tribes. Behind this objection is the assumption that women's
possessions transfer to the male line as soon as there is one—and the line is
that of the husband, not of the father, meaning that the line of Zelophehad
will not in fact be preserved. The men seem to have a reasonable claim, as it
would be awkward for one tribe to have a holding within the boundaries of
another tribe. The daughters are thus instructed to marry within their clan and
again the statute is applied to all Israel. Verse 8b makes the concern with pre-
serving male inheritance explicit, stating, 'in order that every Israelite [male]
may keep his ancestral share'. This half-verse shifts the focus to men; the
rule restricting a female heir's marriage options is in service of keeping male
holdings within the proper male lineage.

    Many scholars have explained the case of Zelophehad's daughters as a sort
of corollary to the law of the levir; it covers a similar scenario, but the
woman's father, rather than the woman's husband, has died without a male
heir. Both the law of the levirate (Deut. 25.5-10) and the laws of the female
heir make stipulations for continuing the male lineage where there is no
direct male heir.[71] The comparison is apt; the levirate is not about women's
rights but rather about ensuring that the man's inheritance is carried on. It is
carried on, however, by finding a substitute male line, rather than allowing
the female line to take over.

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    69.   So also Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 232; Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 347; Sterring, 'The
Will of the Daughters', p. 91.
    70.   See also Jan A. Wagenaar, '"Give in the Hand of Your Maidservant the
Property…" Some Remarks to the Second Ostracon from the Collection of Sh.
Moussaïeff', *ZABR* 5 (1999), pp. 15-27 (23), who describes what could best be called a
custodianship.
    71.   See, e.g., Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 358; Norman H. Snaith, 'The Daughters of
Zelophehad', *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 124-27 (124-25).

Numbers 31

In Numbers 31, the Israelites go to war against the Midianites, as Yhwh instructed them to do after the incident at Peor (Num. 25.16-18). Women come up again several times in this chapter. After engaging in battle with the Midianites, the Israelites kill all the men and in v. 9 the narrator reports that the Israelites took the women and children captive, along with animals and possessions taken as plunder. When the Israelite troops return with the women and children, Moses is dismayed that they have let the women live, reminding them that the Midianite women were responsible for the incident at Peor that led to the plague (vv. 15-16). Inexplicably, Balaam is blamed for causing the Midianite women to do whatever it is that they did. Although Balaam is connected with the Moabites, Midianites appear a few times in the Balaam story (Numbers 22–24) as well; these references are generally recognized as secondary P additions.[72] The addition of the references to Midian in the Balaam pericope, as well as the combination of Num. 25.1-5 (concerning Moabites) with 25.6-18 (concerning a Midianite), may thus be an attempt on the part of an editor to create a connection between Moab and Midian. The combination may also indicate that the combined non-P/P(H) text of Numbers 22–25 was known to the author of Numbers 31, thus indicating that a later P tradent was responsible for this chapter, or for some parts of it.[73]

In Numbers 31, Moses tells the people to kill all the male children and all the women who are not virgins. The remaining girls and women are allowed to live; they are included in the spoils to be divided up and apportioned among the Israelites. Several features of this story are remarkable and bear further comment. In particular, v. 16, which refers to the events at Peor and blames the Midianite women for their role as instigators, raises certain questions. The verse mentions multiple women, in contrast to the single Midianite woman, Cozbi, in Numbers 25. Two options present themselves here: the first is to infer that the Midianite women are assumed to all be of a type with Cozbi, and therefore to bear collective responsibility. The second is that the author of this text knew the combined non-P/P text of Numbers 25. Given the addition of Balaam here, as discussed above, the latter is the preferable option. Furthermore, the entire episode is called not 'the matter of Peor' or 'the matter of Cozbi', as in Numbers 25, but rather 'the matter of Balaam'. Despite the fact that this passage has more points of contact with Num. 25.6-18 than with Num. 25.1-5, the explanation that the author knew the combined text of Numbers 25 provides the simplest answer to the various issues with Numbers 31. This also bolsters the suggestion that Numbers 31 is a later layer of H.[74]

72. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 144-45.
73. This is the position of Noth, *Numbers*, p. 229, who argues that Numbers 31 is later than regular P and knows the composite Pentateuch.
74. See Knohl, *Sanctuary*, p. 97.

The actions of the Midianite women, at the instigation of Balaam, are described as למסר מעל, 'to instigate sacrilege/trespass'. The verb מסר appears only here and in v. 5. Normally, the noun מעל appears with the cognate verb מעל, and it may be that the text should be emended here.[75] The broader use of the noun מעל in the priestly corpus, however, confirms that it may refer to encroaching on the sancta.[76] Thus, while this passage does not confirm the interpretation that encroachment was the offense committed at Peor, it certainly allows it to remain within the realm of possibility. It also precludes the idea that the Peor offense was sexual (but not cultic) or marital, as neither of these would constitute מעל.

The demand that all but the female children and virgin young women be killed also raises some questions. If the Midianite women are such trouble-makers, then why allow any of them to live? And why only virgin women? Did sex with a man somehow usher these women into a different state of personhood? It would have been permissible for the Israelites (except for the priests) to marry them; since all the men were killed, the women would all have been widows.[77] The implication is rather that the older women would have been more fully identified with Midianite religion, whereas the younger women would have been more malleable and therefore easier to incorporate into the Israelite community without the risk that they would turn back to the ways of their native religion. There is no concept of a process of conversion to Israelite religion in the Hebrew Bible, marriage constituting the closest thing to it; a woman would have taken on the religious identity of the man she married (or at least this is the assumption).[78] A woman who has married a Midianite man, therefore, is more fully a Midianite, religiously speaking. An unmarried virgin, however, has not yet cemented her loyalties in such a fashion.

3. *Women in the Priestly Laws*

Because of the close relationship between the priestly narrative and the priestly legal material, a brief discussion of the status of women in the latter is in order.[79] Just as women are included in the narrative primarily when they

75. Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp. 259, 328 n. 28.

76. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 346-47; cf. 2 Chron. 26.16, 18; 29.19, Milgrom extrapolates מעל beyond these specific references.

77. Possibly the concern was that some married women might already be pregnant, although they could easily have been quarantined for some months to see if this were the case; cf. Deut. 21.10-13, which allows captive women a month-long period for mourning.

78. Thus Cohen, *Beginnings*, p. 265.

79. Closer analysis of this matter is certainly called for; however, extending the scope of this work to include a detailed discussion of the legal material would render it unwieldy, and so the laws are for the most part left out.

are expedient for the author's purposes, the same is true of the legal material. Although women are allowed, and even required, to participate in certain cultic activities, they are excluded from many others. P's laws are primarily concerned with women's culpability (along with men) in maintaining the purity of the land and the temple. Inasmuch as women, like men, may incur guilt and be required to make expiation, to offer sacrifices, and to purify themselves, P is careful to include them in his legislation. In this way, women are treated similarly to men: just as both women and men are necessary for the creation and perpetuation of the species, so too they are both necessary for the continued well-being of Israel where cultic purity is concerned. However, while the laws show that women are culpable in many cultic matters, they also show that women are nonetheless of secondary status to men, as they also are in the priestly narrative.

The two main sections of purity regulations for women are those about childbirth in Leviticus 12 and about menstruation in Leviticus 15. The latter follow the laws for male discharges, indicating that the laws governing menstruation are parallel to the discharge laws for men; the law does not single menstruation out as inherently worse than, or as significantly different from, the discharge a man may experience. Leviticus 12 deals with impurities after childbirth, which obviously has no male parallel; however, like the menstrual laws, this chapter is also lacking any hint that childbirth is more offensive than other kinds of impurity. The most remarkable feature of this chapter is that the period of the mother's impurity after the birth of a daughter is longer than that for a son. The significance of this difference is elusive,[80] but it is likely that the longer period of impurity after the birth of a girl is related to the status of females in P.[81] Thus, while P's laws tend not to single women out as less pure than men, they also do not treat them as fully equal.

Most of the other priestly laws that pertain to women, particularly those in Leviticus 18–20 (H), use a distinctly male perspective.[82] The law of the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5 is another example of case law that, while it involves a woman, is primarily concerned with the man's right, in this instance his right to prosecute his adulterous wife on the basis of suspicion rather than fact.[83] Women may also make vows, and it is incumbent on them to fulfill them. The nazirite vow, which conveys a special religious status on the person who takes it, seems at first glance to promote women to an equal station with men. The law in Numbers 6 mentions that a man or a woman

80.   Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 750.
81.   Gruber disagrees with such an assessment, arguing that 'greater defilement is not necessarily an indication of lesser social worth' (Gruber, 'Women in the Cult', p. 43 n. 13; see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 751).
82.   Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1412.
83.   On this text, see, e.g., Frymer-Kensky, 'Strange Case', pp. 11-26.

may take this vow, but Numbers 30 qualifies this by noting that if the woman's father or husband discovers that she has made a vow (of any kind), he may cancel it if he wishes.[84] If the vow is allowed to stand, though, the woman is responsible for fulfilling it. As with the purity laws, this is another instance where women must uphold their cultic obligations; the power of the vow itself becomes a matter of purity and the woman is therefore responsible for it.[85] Nevertheless, the fact that their fathers or husbands may cancel their vows indicates that women are not fully autonomous in this area either.

4. *Conclusions*

The picture of women in Exodus–Numbers differs in some ways from what we saw in Genesis. As the Israelites leave Egypt, receive the law, and begin the conquest of the land, P has an even more limited vision of the role of women. They are still called into action for validating certain lineages, and they are very minimally included elsewhere in genealogical lists. The situation is not much different in H, where women appear in a limited role in the construction of the tabernacle. The 'serving women' of Exod. 38.8 are still a mystery, but seem to preserve some kind of special tradition about women.

Women also appear in the narrative explications of some case laws, although here again, their presence is limited to certain aspects of the case. Thus, the blasphemer's mother is mentioned because of the concerns of parentage, and Zelophehad's daughters appear when the inheritance of a man with no sons arises. While Zelophehad's daughters bring their case on their own behalf, the ruling only marginally takes their interests into account; in truth, it is the interests of male inheritors that are ultimately protected. In the Midianite war recounted in Numbers 31, the interests of women are even less protected; there, they are simply chattel and scapegoats on whose actions the entire pretext for the war is based. This is ostensibly related to the encroachment at Peor in Numbers 25, but whereas in that episode the nationality is more important than the sex of the perpetrator, in Numbers 31, the treatment of the Midianite women focuses on their sex. The parlaying of the Peor story into the basis for a war against the Midianites turns on the woman, effectively ignoring the role of the man in the episode.

Although I have not undertaken a thorough treatment of women in the larger corpus of priestly laws, the situation there is similar: women have some autonomy, but in general this is limited. The primary aspect of women's cultic involvement concerns impurity, where they are responsible

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84. See Gruber, 'Women in the Cult', pp. 37-38.

85. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, p. 428, notes that failure to fulfill a vow 'constituted profanation', indicated by the use of the verb חלל in Num. 30.3. Vows are thus a matter of cultic purity as well as of legal responsibility.

for helping to maintain the purity of the temple and the land by attending to purity concerns around their own bodies. While women may also make vows, they are limited in their rights to do so, and again their obligation to fulfill the vows is related to purity: once a vow is uttered, assuming it is not nullified within the requisite time period, it must be fulfilled as a matter of cultic observance and in order to avoid defilement.

Some conclusions about the nature of P can be advanced here, in light of the evidence presented. First of all, the systematic inclusion of women for genealogical purposes, as well as the systematic shift toward focusing on men wherever possible, indicates that P has a high degree of coherence as a source. While some of this can be attributed to redactional work, it is pervasive enough to suggest an ideological tendency on the compositional level as well. The inclusion of certain traditions, such as the women in Exod. 38.8, or the mention in genealogies of women like Asher's daughter Serah, who have no further function in the genealogy, suggest that P was also working with some received material, which he did not see fit to simply edit out. The existence of competing versions of events, like those of the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21, suggest that parts of P, at least, had an independent narrative existence before they were combined with non-P. The episode at Peor in Num. 25.6-18, previously considered by most scholars to be dependent on the non-P story preceding it, has also been shown to be an independent narrative, which likely originally followed directly on the death of Aaron in Numbers 20. The narrative nature of P thus cannot be doubted. On the other hand, there are clear markers of redactional activity in P as well. P as a source seems to have undertaken redaction of certain traditions to fit his own agenda, as with the shifting of naming scenes to men. H follows this layer of P, and there is evidence of later H or redactional layers as well, as with the addition of the Midianite war in Numbers 31. Finally, there is a post-H redaction that knows the combined non-P/P text, as seen, for instance, in the incorporation of Miriam into the family of Aaron and Moses. The portrait of P that develops from an examination of women, then, is increasingly complex; in particular, the composition of Genesis and Exodus–Numbers appear to have been quite different, and to have been motivated by different concerns on the part of the author. The findings on H here are preliminary, and bear further investigation; however, this initial analysis suggests that H is generally in accord with P.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary feature that has emerged from this analysis is the difference in treatment of women between the sources non-P and P. In the former source, women are represented in much more detail and as much more active figures; quantitatively speaking, they have a greater role in the narrative than do their P counterparts. Non-P incorporated pre-existing, independent traditions about women into the text and while both non-P and P contain similarly long lists of women, the narratives about them in non-P are longer and afford them more active roles than those in P. In the case of the matriarchal traditions, in particular, the women appear in considerable detail and are independent of male-centered themes such as the promise to the patriarchs. Nevertheless, non-P's work conveys the patriarchal mores of the ancient Near East; the women in these stories are still largely defined in relation to men, as mothers and wives, and the more prominent the male characters, the less prominent the women.

This trend, whereby women's roles decrease as men's roles increase, becomes more notable in Exodus–Numbers. Non-P shifts away from narratives about women as Moses emerges as the protagonist. This may reflect not only the attitudes of non-P's own time, when women's roles were increasingly circumscribed, but also his ideas about the distant past. In the author's perception, the period before Moses seems to have been a period of greater fluidity of gender roles, a time when the creation and survival of the Israelite ancestors depended on the actions of both men and women. Just as in P the earlier generations, up to the patriarchs, live longer lives, so in non-P the women of those generations are more active figures.[1] With the arrival of Moses in the narrative and the increased civil and cultic regulation resulting from the promulgation of YHWH's laws, women's involvement in non-P's narrative decreases. These are literary, rather than historical, observations; the shift is related to non-P's perception of history, as reflected in the narrative.

While women in P appear in similar roles to those in non-P—mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters—they are less active in the P narrative, and some of the roles that women in non-P have, like naming children, are even

1. See Ackerman, 'Is Miriam also among the Prophets', pp. 47-80.

relocated to men in P. Women in P are primarily important for genetic reasons. Within Genesis, P's limited narrative focuses on the patriarchs, but this interest is related to the promises and covenant, and the formation of the Israelite people as a nation. The matriarchs, beyond their reproductive role, are of little interest. P is much more narratively colorful in Exodus–Numbers, and this is no coincidence: P's main concern is Moses and Aaron and the establishment of the cultus. Women supply pedigree here, but little more. The picture is not much different in the Holiness material, where, despite the 'all Israel' focus of the author, women appear in very limited roles.

Non-P is a collection, mostly of older traditions, compiled with minimal editing. It is not the source that Wellhausen envisioned, combined from independent J and E documents. Nonetheless, it is a source, in that it is a single document that can be separated from the other major source in the Tetrateuch, P. It is difficult to separate the layers of non-P's tradition much further or to say how much older certain layers are, although an analysis of the layers here would likely yield interesting results as well. The layers in P are also quite complicated. This source incorporates some older material, like genealogies and itinerary lists, but also composes some of its own, like Genesis 1 and 17. P also indicates that it knows non-P, for example in the dependence of Genesis 17 on Genesis 18. However, while P may be responding to non-P at times, the overlap in certain narratives (e.g. the birth narratives in Genesis 16, 21) indicates that non-P and P existed separately from each other for some time, and were only secondarily combined.[2]

H is later than P, though it too incorporates older narrative elements. The first layer of H was added to P before P and non-P were combined. Evidence for this appears in Numbers 25: the H portion of this narrative (vv. 6-18) originally followed directly on the end of Numbers 20; the non-P portion (vv. 1-5) was interposed later. To the initial P/H composition, a later H layer has been added. This layer is responsible for the continuation of the Peor story in Numbers 31, and for the addendum to the case of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers 36.[3] The reasons given for the Midianite war in Numbers 31, including references to Moabites and to Balaam, indicate that this late-H author knew the combined non-P/P text of Numbers 22–25. This author may therefore also be the redactor responsible for combining non-P with P.

The Pentateuchal texts, both non-P and P, give very few internal indicators of the time in which they were composed. There are no overt references to datable events, which is why the argument on the dating of the sources has become so heated. Likewise, the language of the texts offers little help; while

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2. Similarly, Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 114.

3. There are certainly other texts that bear witness to the layers within H; these comments are limited to the texts about women, which are few in number. On layers in H, and an H redactor, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, pp. 1439-43.

non-P is written in standard biblical Hebrew, this leaves open a fairly broad range of options within the pre-exilic period for dating.[4] The language of P, while it bears evidence of a transition from standard to late biblical Hebrew, is also difficult to pinpoint for a variety of reasons, the most persuasive of which is the conservative cultic nature of the text, which is likely to result in the use of fixed formulations that mask the time of composition. It is possible as well that non-P and P are contemporaneous, but a diachronic solution makes better sense of the differences between the two, especially where it seems that P knows non-P. Additional evidence is therefore needed, and this is typically found in the development of legal institutions and in the ideology of the text. An important, and often ignored, component of this ideology is located in the depiction of female characters. As noted in the Introduction, the evidence gathered from the texts about women is not enough to independently justify dating the texts. However, it adds a new piece of evidence to the scholarly consensus, which dates P to the exilic or postexilic period. A central aspect of this dating is the assertion that P presupposes centralization,[5] and this is where the material about women becomes especially relevant: the movement in ancient Israel toward centralization was likely responsible for a change in women's status, and this change is reflected in the Pentateuchal text.

Many feminist historians have observed a correlation between centralization and a decrease in the status of women, a phenomenon that is supported by cross-cultural evidence. As Carol Meyers notes, centralization results in a decrease in the autonomy of the local family headed by the *paterfamilias*, which tends to be more egalitarian in its social structure.[6] Naomi Steinberg argues that this shift is reflected in the laws of Deuteronomy, which purportedly protect women but in fact do the opposite.[7] Hennie Marsman also argues that extended-family structures were maintained in the monarchic period, but that a decrease in local familial autonomy in the exilic and postexilic periods would have negatively affected the role of women in the family.[8] Likewise Tikva Frymer-Kensky notes that women have more power and prominence when there is less centralization.[9] Susan Ackerman ties her observations

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4.   The transition to late biblical Hebrew seems to have happened some time in the early Persian period, as evidenced by the transitional nature of Ezekiel, an exilic work; see Mark F. Rooker, *Studies in Hebrew Language, Intertextuality, and Theology* (TSR, 98; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 19-44; Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. John Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 112-14.

5.   Lev. 17.4.

6.   Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 190.

7.   Steinberg, 'The Deuteronomic Law Code', pp. 161-70.

8.   Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, pp. 62-63.

9.   Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, p. xvii.

about women's status and centralization to a program of cultic reform, which emphasized centralization.[10] Phyllis Bird also connects centralization and women's role in the cult with a decrease in women's status.[11]

These scholars suggest a range of dates for the centralization of both the monarchy and the cultus in ancient Israel, and for its impact on women. Meyers and Steinberg place it in the first half of the first millennium BCE, Ackerman connects it to Josiah's reform in the seventh century, and Bird suggests a culmination with the entrenchment of the Zadokite priesthood, although she does not specifically date this phenomenon. Thus, while these arguments tend to posit a diachronic development, they are mostly too vague; they also leave aside discussion of differences in the Pentateuchal narrative sources. Just when, then, did centralization take hold, and how might it relate specifically to the dating of non-P and P?

Although monarchies and the temple in Jerusalem had existed for some centuries, the impact of these institutions was limited between the tenth and early eighth centuries BCE.[12] It was the second half of the eighth century BCE that witnessed the rise of the state as a central power in both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.[13] At the same time, the Assyrian Empire was an increasing threat, and the efforts of the kings of Israel and Judah to ready their defenses, requiring money, troops, and supplies, resulted in a further increase of the centralized power of the monarchy.[14] When Israel fell to Assyria in 722, many refugees fled south to Judah, causing Jerusalem to expand even more in this period;[15] these refugees

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10. Ackerman, 'Digging Up Deborah', p. 181.

11. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 93.

12. The extent to which Solomon carried out centralizing activities is questionable. See John Rogerson and Philip R. Davies, *The Old Testament World* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), pp. 66-67; Ash, 'District? List', pp. 67-86; Miller, 'Separating', pp. 1-24; Miller and Hayes, *History*, pp. 205-207. Likewise, the first two centuries of the divided monarchy were characterized by political instability; Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, pp. 75-79.

13. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 70-71.

14. Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy*, p. 70; Walter Houston, 'Was There a Social Crisis in the Eighth Century?', in John Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (JSOTSup, 406; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 130-49 (147-48); William M. Schniedewind, 'Jerusalem, the Late Judahite Monarchy, and the Composition of the Biblical Texts', in Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (eds.), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (SBLSymS, 18; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 375-93 (383); Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, pp. 81-84.

15. Yairah Amit, 'When Did Jerusalem Become a Subject of Polemic?', in Vaughn and Killebrew (eds.), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology*, pp. 365-74 (366); Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, p. 81.

also brought their religious traditions with them,[16] and Jerusalem in the eighth through seventh centuries saw a flowering of the literature that would become the Hebrew Bible.[17]

In the face of the continued Assyrian threat, Hezekiah, king of Judah, undertook several projects intended to protect his city during attack.[18] Having lost revenues from trade routes, which had been seized by the Assyrians, he required more materials from his own people, especially farmers; the economic impact of these demands on the people of Judah resulted in a social crisis, reflected in some of the literary prophets of this period.[19] Centralization was thus widespread in the last decades of the eighth century, and its impact was felt throughout Judah.

The Assyrian king Sennacherib finally besieged Jerusalem in 701, after he had already decimated much of the Judean countryside. Jerusalem withstood the siege, although Hezekiah was forced to pay a heavy tribute. Jerusalem's survival proved to many Judeans the city's chosenness and importance to YHWH, who would seemingly protect it always. This theology, in turn, further reinforced the move toward centralization.[20] It is this period that saw the creation of non-P's work, which combined traditions, oral and perhaps also written, brought south from the northern kingdom with those native to Judah.[21] Many of the stories in non-P stem from older oral traditions that feature women in prominent roles, for instance in the childbirth/promise traditions that existed independently of the male-focused themes of promise. It is impossible to say just how old many of these traditions are, but it is apparent that they stem from a time when women's roles were not curtailed by the shift in local authority that came as a result of increased centralization.

Non-P set down his composition in writing some time in the late eighth or, more likely, seventh century, as centralization was taking hold.[22] This is evident in several features of the text, including the prominence given Moses and Aaron, and the resulting obscurity of Miriam. Similarly, the influence of centralization manifests itself in the beginnings of the absorption of women's

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16.   Amit, 'Subject of Polemic', p. 369.
17.   Schniedewind, 'Jerusalem', p. 383.
18.   Amit, 'Subject of Polemic', p. 366.
19.   Houston, 'Social Crisis', pp. 147-48.
20.   Rogerson and Davies, *Old Testament World*, p. 82.
21.   For a similar explanation, see, Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987), pp. 70-88. However, rather than two written sources being combined by a redactor, my model proposes a single author combining traditions, some of which may have been in written form, but which were not part of any complete source prior to their collection into non-P. Cf. Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 290.
22.   A date for non-P in this period also explains why there are certain pre-D or proto-Deuteronom(ist)ic elements in the Tetrateuch.

childbirth/promise traditions into the promise motif, apparent in Genesis 15 and in the general arrangement of the Genesis narrative. However, although they have been incorporated into the larger narrative, the women's childbirth/promise traditions are not explicitly connected with the patriarchal promises, and thus they retain their original independence within the text; the roles of women are for the most part undisturbed.

The centralizing trend, linked to the growing belief in the divinely protected status of Jerusalem, continued through the seventh century and into the beginning of the sixth. In 586 BCE, however, catastrophe struck: the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, sacked the temple, and deported the leaders of the population. The Babylonian exile was a cataclysmic event for the people of Judah. Not only did the destruction of their capital, a city that they had thought to be under divine protection, produce a theological crisis for some,[23] but deportation to Babylonia also created the need to preserve the community in exile, where it was faced with assimilation.[24] Although the exile, at least at the beginning, was a period of social upheaval, the exiled priesthood would certainly have been concerned with preserving their community, setting down their cultic and historical traditions and strictly delineating what set them apart from their neighbors. William Schniedewind calls this a period of 'retrenchment',[25] the codification of the laws of a cult that was now in peril, with the hope that it would one day be restored. Setting down the laws also provided a means by which to define the community and preserve their common identity, even without the temple as the physical locus of their religious system.[26] The importance of preserving this tradition was borne out with the return to Yehud and the building of the second temple.[27]

The exile had other remarkable effects on Israelite religion. Whereas the Jerusalem priests in the pre-exilic period had been under the control of the monarchy,[28] during the exile, particularly under the influence of Babylonian

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23. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 133.

24. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 137.

25. Schniedewind, 'Jerusalem', p. 379.

26. See Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. II. From the Exile to the Maccabees* (trans. John Bowden; OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 465-66. It is also possible that P was an idealized text and was never put into practice, but even if this were the case, it reflects certain ideals of its authors which are reflective of a certain social and political situation.

27. It is also possible that the upheaval of the exile allowed for some increase in women's status in certain circles not preoccupied with this kind of retrenchment. If so, then the non-P traditions about women might also be linked with this period, either as a period of composition or of renewed interest, yielding the combination of the non-P and P traditions. See the discussion of Ackerman on women and liminality in Chapter 1.

28. Albertz, *Israelite Religion*, I, pp. 129-30; see also Deborah W. Rooke, 'Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy', in John

temples, which were more independent of the Babylonian monarchy, the priests began to exert sole control over the cult.[29] Of course, the priests were aided in this by the fact that there was no longer a functioning monarchy. Although there was also a council of lay elders, it existed in parallel to the priests, rather than the two groups being hierarchically ordered.[30] The limitations placed on the cultic involvement of lay leaders like the נשיא, 'prince', in P, H, and Ezekiel indicate that the religious and civil leadership were separate.[31]

The transition to Persian rule in Babylon in 539–538 BCE was very smooth,[32] and it was soon followed by Cyrus's edict allowing the exiled Judeans to return home to what was now the Persian province of Yehud, and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.[33] The Persian Empire was also a highly centralized bureaucracy, and this, too, had its effect on the religion of the Hebrew Bible.[34] Yehud had its own centralized government, as well as the temple, but the two existed separately from each other. While the local government was administered by the Persians, and while the council of lay elders also had some authority, the temple was left to the Israelite priests. The Persian authorities further affected the religious establishment in Yehud through their control of immigration; they allowed the return of the deportees who considered themselves the rightful heirs of pre-exilic Judah, including the monarchy,[35] and it was this group that was given charge of the rebuilding and administration of the temple. The returning priests distinguished themselves and the other returnees from the people 'of the land',[36] emphasizing their status as the true Israelites, those descended from Jacob via the

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Day (ed.), *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup, 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 187-208.

29. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 130.

30. Albertz, *Israelite Religion*, II, p. 446.

31. *TDOT* X, p. 51; see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1415.

32. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), pp. 87-88.

33. Diana Edelman has recently proposed that the grounds for such an early date for the rebuilding are based on a later attempt to fit the rededication of the temple within the seventy years prophesied by Jeremiah for the desolation of Judah (Jer. 25.11-12; 29.10), and that the rebuilding of the temple actually took place in the reign of Artaxerxes I, between 465 and 425 BCE; see Diana Edelman, *The Origins of the 'Second' Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (BibW; London: Equinox, 2005), pp. 340-51. Nevertheless, the rebuilding would have happened some time within the first century or so of Persian rule.

34. Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 131-32.

35. Berquist, *Judaism*, p. 133.

36. Berquist, *Judaism*, p. 133.

Bethuelite matriarchs. This is reflected especially in priestly texts that emphasize a particular genealogy.[37]

The laws set down by the priests of Yehud stemmed from the pre-exilic period, largely portraying the cult as it existed up until the destruction of the first temple. The influence of centralization is evident in these laws, which pertain to a single sanctuary; they also reflect a very limited involvement of women in the cultus. The influence of the exile and the Persian period is apparent as well, particularly in the idea of a strictly ordered universe found in P's creation story.[38] P avoids references to Israelite kings, who could have been perceived as a threat to the Persian empire.[39] Similarly, the religion of the priests of Yehud—those who had been to Babylon and returned—was, as a result of their experience, probably different, and more strongly monotheistic, than the forms of Yahwism practiced by other communities of Israelites.[40]

The impact of centralization on the status of women is also reflected in P, where the roles of women are increasingly narrowed and diminished in comparison to non-P. Bird sees women's status in P as a reflex of priestly interests and the priestly conception of holiness, which distinguished not between male and female, but between priest and layperson.[41] This shift in the priestly perception did not mean that P therefore considered women and men to be equals, but rather that issues concerning women fell by the wayside as men became the representatives of humanity.[42] There is no indication in P that women are considered inferior to men, that they are inherently more impure or less human. Instead, P, like the Israelite cultus itself, is primarily focused on categories of holy and not holy. As a result, in the patriarchal world of ancient Israel, men become the default. The priesthood is male, the covenant mark of circumcision is a rite only males observe, and the general shift toward centralization emphasizes the authority of men, from the now-defunct monarchy to the council of elders to the priesthood. P's world is one in which only men are full citizens. Women are generally dependent on men, and although this is true of earlier periods in Israelite history as well, the shift in power centers from local family groups to centralized civil and religious

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37. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 246; Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage*, p. 143.
38. Berquist, *Judaism*, pp. 134-35, 139.
39. P makes clear that the נשׂיא is in most respects 'indistinguishable from the layman' and therefore not a threat to political rule; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1415. Milgrom argues that P's silence on the king is owing to the source's origins in the pre-monarchic period. On the absence of the king from H, however, Milgrom is more than willing to see a post-monarchic view, in which the author eschews a human king in favor of a divine one.
40. Edelman, *Origins*, p. 347.
41. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 102; Fischer, *Erzeltern Israels*, pp. 377-78.
42. Bird, *Missing Persons*, p. 145 n. 55.

authorities meant that women lost many of the informal rights they had previously enjoyed in their own local settings.

P opens his narrative with an illustration of Bird's principle: male and female are created together for their common purpose, and set in contrast to the deity by whom they were created. As I have argued, however, this does not indicate the equality of women and men, but rather is meant to group them together in terms of their basic human function: reproduction and the fulfillment of the promise and covenant that symbolize Israel's special status. P's concern with boundaries is also reflected in certain genealogical accounts, which set Israel apart from other nations, but which also set priestly lineages apart from the rest of the Israelites, as is particularly evident in Exodus 6. Women are a key element in making these genealogical distinctions, but it is primarily their biological function that is being invoked. They do not exist as independent characters as such.

Women in P's narratives appear almost entirely in relation to men; they marry and bear children, but they do not name them. Their births and deaths may be noted, particularly if they are related to important men, but few specific details appear. Women may not inherit land or other property, although as daughters they may briefly serve as hereditary placeholders in the absence of sons. Bird's point is also illustrated in the priestly purity laws, where women are equally responsible for the observance of regulations. However, there is still a disparity between men and women where the cult is concerned, not only in the exclusion of women from the priesthood, but also in their lack of autonomy in making vows.

The culmination of the trend to subsume women to men, however, comes in P's hallmark text, the promise and covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. Here, P acknowledges Sarah's role as the mother of Abraham's heir, but she is excluded from the covenant. Most notably, though, her primary role in Genesis 18 is handed over to Abraham in Genesis 17, and the etiology for Isaac's name is linked to Abraham's laughter, not to Sarah's. Likewise, Miriam's role all but disappears in P; her threatening status as a leader of the people is obviated by bringing her into the family of Moses and Aaron, making her the harmless little sister. The relatively diverse women's traditions preserved in non-P disappear almost entirely in P.

This work demonstrates the importance and the value of combining the study of women in the Hebrew Bible with source and redaction criticism. These disciplines have existed apart from each other for too long. The trend toward new literary criticism among feminist biblical scholars is based on the faulty presupposition that women's history cannot be recovered, and that historical-critical tools serve the interests of mainstream male scholarship. At the same time, the rejection of feminism by most historical-critical scholars is the

result of an assumption that feminism is biased, in contrast to their own objective stance. However, this notion of objectivity has become outdated. The emergence of social-science models in biblical studies indicates the value of cross-disciplinary approaches and of new methodological combinations. Feminists and historical critics have much to offer each other, both in terms of reconstructing the history of women in the Hebrew Bible, and in terms of formulating models for the composition of the biblical text.

Wellhausen delineated four 'pillars' in his study of the differences between the Pentateuchal sources: the location of the sanctuary, the system of sacrifices, the festivals, and the priesthood. To this may be added a fifth—a fifth column, if you will: the status of women. A close analysis of the depictions of women not only reveals useful evidence of the existence of multiple sources, but it also exposes major differences in the treatment of women between these sources. These differences reflect a diachronic development related to the rise of centralization and the consolidation of priestly control over Israelite religion and tradition. The evidence adduced here also shows that far from being in crisis or even dead, the traditional tools of Pentateuchal criticism are as useful as ever. The incongruities in the text, the shifts in vocabulary, theology, and subject matter, all indicate that the Pentateuch consists of multiple, often independent traditions. Even those scholars who argue for a single author must admit to the layers of accreted tradition, and in particular to the existence of a priestly author as distinct from the author(s) of other texts. Such crypto-documentarians may try to mask the fact that they, too, are positing layers of tradition by insisting that because Wellhausen's original formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis can no longer be entirely accepted, Pentateuchal criticism is 'in crisis'. Their own arguments, however, prove that documentary explanations, albeit revised, still provide the best models for the composition of the Pentateuch.

This study has necessarily limited itself to women in the Pentateuchal narrative. However, the methods used here, and the results achieved, show that the combination of feminism and traditional historical-critical methods may be of much value in other areas of biblical research, not only in Pentateuchal law, but also in studies of the Deuteronomistic History, the prophets, or Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles, to name a few. Feminist biblical scholars have too often abandoned historical study in favor of literary analysis, much to the detriment of those who wish to learn something of the history of ancient Israel and the Bible's impact on women. The Hebrew Bible has played too great a role in western culture to limit discussion of it to a few points of view. The more methods that are applied, the better we will understand this text and its historical legacy.

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INDEXES

INDEX OF REFERENCES

INDEX OF AUTHORS