

2 TIKVA FRYMER-KENSKY

The Bible and Women's Studies

Source: Daidman, L., Tenenbaum, S., eds. / Feminist Perspectives of Jewish Studies, 1994, pg. 16-39.

In the past two decades there has been a tremendous change in biblical studies. The scientific philosophy that prevailed for more than a century has given way, in biblical studies as in other humanities, to a more sophisticated understanding of the interaction between the now and the then, the reader and the text. Old ideas of history as "what actually happened" and text as having one correct and original meaning have yielded to a current view of the continual interaction of the viewer and what is seen, of the text and its reader. No longer do we believe that there is a truly "value-neutral" way of reading literature or reconstructing history.

Women's studies did not cause this paradigm shift, but they are part of an enormous change in our perception of reality. When only European middle-class Protestant men were doing the reading, they were able to see their consensual understandings as objective. When new voices entered the cultural dialogue—the voices of Catholics, Jews, Asians, Afro-Americans, Africans, people speaking from the perspective of poverty, and women—then the presuppositions that underlay the old objective readings increasingly came to the surface, and the context was understood as part of the reading of the text. This new understanding has made it possible to see beyond the traditional readings of biblical texts to reach newer interpretations and insights.

The impact of this paradigm shift in biblical studies can be seen in several ways. There are increasing numbers of new readings of biblical stories from the perspectives of liberation, the third-world, womanism, and feminism. In addition, literary criticism of the Bible has grappled with the ways that stories have multiple codes that signify meanings and the way that reader responses can be shaped by the text as well as by the culture of the reader. This turmoil in biblical studies has brought a general openness in the field

17 The Bible and Women's Studies

studies to women's studies—an expectation that women's studies can provide fresh perspectives on the texts—and an almost eager receptivity to solid feminist scholarship. There are relatively few people actively doing women-centered analyses of the Bible, but there is general awareness of their efforts and a willingness to learn from them.

Recognizing Patriarchy

The first impact of women's studies on biblical studies has been the recognition that the Bible is a patriarchal document from a patriarchal society. Feminism and women's studies have enabled us to see the parameters of this patriarchy. Biblical society was patrilocal: women left their fathers' households and authority at marriage and physically moved to their husbands' domain. If the husband was still under the authority of his father, then the wife would also come under his authority. Women were subordinate to the men of the household, and men exerted control over women's sexuality.

Patriarchy has a strong economic component. In ancient Israel, women did not normally own land, which made them economically dependent on men, first on their fathers, then on their husbands, and ultimately on their sons. The Bible contains repeated injunctions to care for widows and the fatherless. This humanitarian command is nevertheless predicated on the assumption of patriarchy: the widow is dependent on the concern and good will of males only because she herself has no real property.

Women were not part of the great public hierarchies that developed. The central public organizations of court, temple, and army did not include them. They were not judges, courtiers, or diplomats; they were not military leaders; and they were not priests. To a very large extent, their activity was confined to the private sphere. Yet women were not secluded in their homes. They could be seen in public, they could sing and dance, and women of talent could compose and perform victory dances, love songs, and laments.

Surprisingly, women could be prophets. Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Deborah the judge are both termed prophet in biblical text. Moreover, 2 Kings 22 relates an episode in which the high priest Hilkiah and the scribe Shaphan go to the prophet Huldah, who confirms that the scroll they have found while repairing the temple is significant and, moreover, that God will carry out its predictions of disaster. The text does not comment on the fact that the prophet was a woman. The casual way she is mentioned indicates that her position was not anomalous; women could be expected to be prophets and to have the prophetic authority to declare something a vital part of

*Prophecy - I could be prophets & have some prophetic*

sacred tradition. Yet women were not priests. The presence of women as prophets but not as priestess may be attributed to the fact that prophecy is by its very nature nonbureaucratic. Prophets operate individually, without a hierarchy of command. As a result, their authority is based on personal charisma and believability rather than on an organizational power base. Although women's skill and charisma could help them attain prophetic authority (much as their skills could lead to considerable power in the household), the hierarchical structure of the priesthood was closed to them, as it was to all men not born into priestly families.

In biblical Israel, individual women could become powerful. This should not blind us to the fact that as a group women were not treated the same way as men, and society was structured along gender lines in a way that disadvantaged women. This structure, which we often call patriarchy, was characteristic of ancient Israel. Despite the charged atmosphere in which the Bible's treatment of women is sometimes discussed, however, Israel was neither the creator of patriarchy nor the worst perpetrator in the ancient world. Anthropology shows patriarchy to have been widespread, almost universal, and history shows that all the great historical civilizations were patriarchal, including the civilizations that preceded and surrounded ancient Israel. The patriarchy of Israel was part of an inherited social structure from the ancient world. A comparison of biblical laws with those of Assyria readily shows that the Bible did not rival Assyria in the extent to which it subordinated women.

Nevertheless, we make a profound statement when we acknowledge that the Bible is patriarchal. We are brought to the realization that the Bible contains a fundamental moral flaw: it does not treat all humans as equals. We in the modern world are learning that respect for the equality of all human beings and their common dignity is a moral imperative. Our perception of a moral imperative that does not derive from biblical teaching indicates that the Bible is no longer our only or even our final arbiter of morality. This has enormous religious implications. The authority of the Bible must be tempered with the authority of our experiences as human beings and our principles of morality. It is true that many of our moral ideas ultimately come from the Bible, but it is also true that they have been inspired by our continued reflection on the Bible during the millennia since it was written. The Bible did not eradicate slavery; it was up to people to do so. The Bible did not eradicate patriarchy; that is a task for current generations. The Bible did not eradicate economic oppression, and we do not have a clue as to how to do so.

Because of their implications for our own time, feminist studies of the Bible (and I would argue, all biblical studies) cannot remain isolated from the political implications of their research, nor from their impact on the lives of people. There is no value-neutrality with regard to oppression: if one does not consciously address a problem, one becomes part of the problem. Therefore, there is no absolute cleavage between feminism, feminist theology, feminist hermeneutics, and the study of women in the Bible or in the biblical world.<sup>1</sup> Precisely because of the intersection between politics and biblical study, feminist scholars such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza have urged all biblical scholars to take an active part in the moral and theological discussions of our time.<sup>2</sup>

### The Women

The study of women in the Bible is hindered by the public nature and androcentricity of the text itself. The Bible concerns itself with the communal history of Israel. Women did not play a great role in the public institutions of the ancient world, and the Bible focuses on the movers and shakers. As a result, women are rarely the major actors in biblical stories, and the stories themselves never deal with the lives of women-among-women, to which men had little access. Finding out about the history of women in biblical times often means ferreting out information that the androcentric biblical authors were either not interested in or were not interested in communicating to their audiences.

Uncovering the lives of biblical women poses serious methodological problems that are shared by all attempts to reconstruct biblical history. To fill in the gaps in the biblical record other than by mere speculation, we must turn to such disciplines as archaeology, ancient Near Eastern studies, anthropology, and sociology. Archaeology and ancient Near Eastern studies provide data, written and unwritten, that are independent of the Bible. They can provide details about the size of families, the nature of subsistence, the laws of the surrounding world, and other information. Anthropology and sociology shed light on cross-cultural patterns and provide models that can help reconstruct life in ancient Israel. The most successful attempt to use such social science data to understand women's history was made by Carol Meyers.<sup>3</sup> Basing her work on information and models from peasant societies to supplement our knowledge of Israel in the period of the judges (about 1200–1000 B.C.E.) Meyers points out that when the most important arena of life was the household, where women had an active role and an important

## 20 FRYMER-KENSKY

economic function, they had greater access to power than in later state societies in which the public arena developed and women were excluded. For Meyers, as for others, the period of the judges was a high point in the prominence of women in Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible is more than the record of ancient Israelite civilization, and the woman-centered study of the Bible is more than a reclamation of the history of women in ancient Israel. The Bible is also a work of art. It is a literary text that presents people and ideas in an artistic fashion. There has been a great renewed interest in studying the Bible's major female characters; stories of the Bible's great women and extensive bibliographies are developing on such characters as the matriarchs,<sup>5</sup> Hagar,<sup>6</sup> Tamar,<sup>7</sup> Miriam,<sup>8</sup> Rahab,<sup>9</sup> and Deborah and Yael.<sup>10</sup> From these and other studies it has become clear that the Bible often portrays women as heroines who possess the characteristics that Israel needs to emulate. Women were the saviors of Israel at the beginning and at the end of the biblical period. The savior figure at the beginning is Yael, a marginal woman, wife of the Kenite Heber. Yael took advantage of the fact that the Canaanite general Sisera fled from battle into her tent. She agreed to guard him, gave him warm milk, and lulled him to sleep; then she pounded a tent-peg into his temple to kill him and thus save Israel. The savior figure at the end of biblical history is Esther, another marginal figure. She was a Jew living in exile who became queen of Persia and used her royal connections to foil the villain Haman's plot to destroy Persia's Jews. These women, who conquered mighty enemies by their wits and daring, were symbolic representations of the people and pointed to the salvation of Israel.

**Her Story**

The Bible has many stories in which women play secondary roles. One of the aims of women's studies and a technique of feminist literary criticism is to recover minor characters (and women were always minor) by ignoring the biblical narrators' concentration on heroes, focusing instead on "her story."<sup>11</sup> The biblical scholar Burke Long has focused on the role of the "great woman" of Shunem, who appears in the narratives about the prophet Elisha.

At the beginning of the story, the Shunemite acknowledges the prophet Elisha's privileged position and shows her support by feeding and housing him. At the end of the story, she proclaims his holiness. Nevertheless, at the heart of the story, she is a determined mover and shaper of events who insists that Elisha come to the aid of her son. Long points out that our reading of

## 21 The Bible and Women's Studies

this story as an Elisha tale is socially formed: the story was written to glorify Elisha as prophet and miracle worker; it was preserved as part of a cycle of tales about the prophets Elijah and Elisha and has been read by generations interested almost exclusively in the heroized prophet. When we read it this way, we may not notice that the story is also the story of a great woman.<sup>11</sup>

Focus on the women in such tales can also yield important insights into ancient social structures. In my own study of biblical gender,<sup>12</sup> the Shunemite was noteworthy, first as an independent woman who extends patronage to Elisha and then as a determined petitioner willing to confront everyone—husband, prophet, and king—in her pursuit of the physical and economic well-being of her household.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, read closely, this story indicates how gender intersects with class. The Elijah and Elisha stories take place against a backdrop of great poverty among the rural poor. Most of the miracles that Elijah and Elisha perform involve providing food for a starving peasantry. In contrast to all the poor women found in these stories, the Shunemite is wealthy. This factor gives her striking boldness in her dealings with the prophet; after all, she is his patron and benefactor, the one who provides food and hospitality on his journeys. Wealthy women have greater freedom of action than poor women do, and sometimes even more than poor men.<sup>14</sup>

It is possible to go deeper into the story. The Shunemite stands out among the women of Israel in being independent of her husband. She does not ask his permission when she entertains Elisha, bringing him into the picture only when she wishes to make an addition to her house. Later, when she seeks Elisha, she does not inform her husband why she is leaving. Though she is wealthy, does her economic well-being not depend on her husband's good will? Is she not in danger of divorce? A clue to the answer lies in her puzzling reply to Elisha when the prophet wants to reward her for her beneficence: "I live among my own kin" (2 Kings 4:13). This odd statement seems to contradict what we know about ancient marriage. We expect her to be living among her husband's kinsfolk, not among her own.

The puzzle deepens. When Elisha saves her son, he warns her of famine, and she and her family leave for seven years. When she comes back, she goes to the king to reclaim her property. The king gives instructions to "restore all her property and all the revenue from her farm from the time she left the country until now!" (2 Kings 8:6). The pronouns used are striking: *her* property? *her* farm? This is not the language we expect from the Bible, for the laws indicate that women did not own land. Surely, the land is her husband's, if he is still alive, or her son's. Either there is a greater gap

between the laws and the narratives than we have assumed, or there is something special about the position of the Shunammite. Her statement to the prophet, "I live among my own kin," suggests that the Shunammite might have the status of a daughter of Zelophehad. The five daughters of Zelophehad appear in the Book of Numbers; they petition to inherit the portion of their father, who died without sons. Their petition is granted and it is decreed that if a father dies without sons, the daughters are the rightful heirs.<sup>15</sup> Later, a provision is added that the daughters who inherit are to marry their own tribesmen in order to keep the land in the family.<sup>16</sup> A daughter of Zelophehad *owns* her land for her lifetime. She is not as dependent for her livelihood on men as other women are. If her husband divorces her, she stays on her land. This is probably why the woman of Shunem, singular among the barren women in the Bible, does not actively seek a child before Elisha announces that she will have one. Because she is economically secure, the Shunammite has no need to ask her husband's permission either to seek or entertain Elisha. The same economic security makes it possible for her to enjoy both status and a secure old age even without ever having had a child. The story of the Shunammite can be understood as a biblical example of how women act when the economic constraints of patriarchy are removed.

A similar study can be done of another minor character, Abigail.<sup>17</sup> Abigail appears as the wife of a wealthy landowner, Nabal ("the boor"), during the time when the future king David is an outlaw leader. David appears before Nabal to ask for payment for the protection that David has given Nabal's shepherds during the year. Nabal refuses to pay, reasoning that he has not hired David to protect him. David leaves angry and vows to bring his men back to destroy Nabal's household. The book of Samuel is focused on how David became king, and the story of Abigail is told because she preserved David's chances to be king. When, however, we focus attention on Abigail rather than on David, we see interesting things. Like the Shunammite, Abigail is both wealthy and noted for her bold initiative. She is not present at her husband Nabal's negotiations with David, perhaps indicating that she is less important and less active in her household than the Shunammite is in hers; after all, we have no reason to suspect that she owns her own land. But she is no less decisive. Realizing that David must be angry at her husband because of his refusal to pay David, Abigail acts immediately. She deduces correctly that David might attack her household and quickly intercepts him while bearing him gifts. Her insight saves both Nabal and David from catastrophe, her brilliant rhetoric convinces David not to kill every male in

Nabal's house, and David blesses her and God, who sent her to him. Once again, an intelligent, determined woman is influential far beyond the formal confines of patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> Just as anthropology has come to a more sophisticated understanding of the various types of power and the access of women to informal power, so too in biblical studies it has become apparent that biblical women had considerable influence on their world.<sup>19</sup>

By focusing on the women in biblical stories, feminist biblical scholarship has also illuminated the institutions of ancient Israel. In Israel there existed the position of *gebirah* or queen mother.<sup>20</sup> That it was an actual position rather than an honorific title is indicated by the fact that Asa removed his mother from this position because she had made an *asherah* (a sacred grove, tree, or tree-sculpture) (1 Kings 15:13). The existence of the position of queen opens the possibility that the *gebirah* might have been well situated for harem intrigue, maneuvering to ensure the high status of her sons. In this way, the *gebirah* may have helped determine policy and succession. Bathsheba was certainly active on behalf of her son Solomon. The other queen mothers whose names are known to us (Maacah, mother of Asa; Hannuul, mother of Jehoiahaz and Zedekiah; and Nehushta, mother of Jehoiachin) were, like Bathsheba, the mothers of younger sons who helped put their sons into the kingship. As a result, these women influenced biblical history and attained a particular prominence during their sons' reigns.

### The Bible on Gender

The study of individual women in the Bible has led to several unexpected discoveries. A major example is that even though women were subordinate in the socioeconomic and legal systems, the Bible does not attempt to justify this subordination by portraying women as subhuman or as *other* in any way. The biblical stories portray women as having the same set of goals, the same abilities, and the same strategies as biblical men.<sup>21</sup> To use modern terminology, the Bible is not *essentialist* on gender; it does not consider differences between the sexes to be innate. The same is true of other social divisions in Israel: the Bible has no social Darwinism and does not depict either slaves or poor people as essentially different from "standard" Israelites. The Bible inherited its social structure from antiquity and did not radically transform it.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the Bible did not justify social inequality by an ideology of superiority or otherness. On the contrary, the Bible's explicit ideology presents a unified vision of humankind wherein women and men were

## 24 FRYMERKENSKY

created in the image of God and no negative stereotypes are attached to women, the poor, slaves, or foreigners.

There is a strange dissonance here. The social structure, with its cleavages and oppressions, is not in harmony with the Bible's ideology of equality. Only the Garden of Eden story (Gen. 3-4) seems to note this contradiction, announcing simply that gender inequality is the norm of the imperfed, un-verse. The rest of the Bible does not consider the relation of hierarchical structures to equal worth at all. Of course, the tension between the Bible's ideology and social structure could not endure forever.<sup>23</sup> Postexilic writings pay more attention to gender, and ultimately Israel is greatly influenced by Hellenistic thinking, which treats women as categorically "other." Nevertheless, this later development should not obscure the fact that preexilic Israel had no ideology of gender differences. In the first Temple period, the dualist axes along which the cosmos was perceptually divided were divine-human, holy-profane, pure-tame and Israel-nations. Male-female was not such a category. One of the intriguing questions remaining in biblical scholarship is the place of *woman*, both foreign and Israelite, at the two intersections of Israel-nations and divine-human.

#### Reading with Nonpatriarchal Eyes

The gender blindness of the Bible's view of humanity prevents the Bible from being a completely patriarchal text, and, indeed, one of the significant results of feminist studies in the Bible has been the realization that the biblical text itself, read with nonpatriarchal eyes, is much less injurious to women than the traditional readings of Western civilization. There is much to recover in the Bible that is not patriarchal, even beyond hitherto neglected stories of strong heroines. The enterprise of liberating biblical text from its patriarchal overlay, called *depatrarchalizing* and first advocated by Phyllis Trible, has revealed important aspects of biblical literature.<sup>24</sup>

The most discussed example of depatrarchalization is the Adam-and-Eve story, long notorious for its denigration of women. A new reading was provided by Trible, who pointed out that the creation of Eve implied no inferiority; the word *ezer* (*helpmate*), used to describe Eve, connotes a man-for-superior in the Bible rather than an assistant and is used frequently for the relation of God to Israel (and not for the relation of Israel to God). Moreover, in mythology the creation order traditionally indicates that the last-created is the culmination of creation, which is certainly the implication of the structure of Genesis 1, in which humans are created after the rest of

## 25 The Bible and Women's Studies

creation. In Genesis 2, one might argue that the use of *ezer* for Eve and her last-created position was intended to suggest the woman's superiority over the man. At the very least, the text indicates that humans were destined to be equal partners. Eve shows no inferiority to Adam anywhere in the Garden story, and the subordination of women after the expulsion from the garden is part of the consequences of sin.<sup>25</sup>

Trible's explanation has had widespread acceptance. Some later readings of the story, however, most notably that of Susan Lanser, have pointed out that biblical authors could have expected their readers to respond in certain culturally conditioned ways and that therefore the story relies on patriarchal attitudes to form an indictment of Eve.<sup>26</sup> The truth is that the meaning of the story depends precisely on the assumptions that readers make while reading it. The Adam-and-Eve story is extremely laconic and cannot be retold without the reteller or reader adding additional information. This is true of many other tales in the Bible: they are constructed so that much is left to the reader to fill in and interpret. What one adds to the story determines whether the stories will be liberating or oppressive. In a way, biblical stories may be considered a moral challenge, and it is for the reading community to read them for a blessing rather than a curse.

Biblical stories are often ambiguous. One way, used in the garden story, is by *gapping*: leaving out important details of the story. An additional way is by self-contradiction: the Bible sometimes gives two different readings in the text itself. Judith Plaskow has made the passage in Exodus 19:15 infamous on this point.<sup>27</sup> Moses is preparing the people for the Revelation when he says, "Make ready for the third day—do not go near a woman." Moses looks at the people and sees only men.<sup>28</sup> A similar blindness appears in the tenth commandment with the injunction against coveting your neighbor's wife. Is it all right to covet your neighbor's husband? Women are clearly included in the other commandments and are always considered bound by the covenant of Sinai. Their sudden transformation from subjects of the law ("Do not") to the objects of coveting is startling. The answer may be that women are normally thought of as full persons and legal agents, but the thought of sexual relations transforms women into objects upon whom one acts, or rather, in these cases, into objects upon whom one avoids acting.

A closer look at Exodus 19 reveals that Moses is supposed to be the intermediary between God and Israel, relaying God's words to the people. Yet the narrative has God tell Moses to go to the people and tell them to sanctify themselves for two days, wash their clothes, and be prepared for the third day, when God will come (Exod. 19:10-12). The narrator, who quotes

God, does not quote God as saying, "Do not go near a woman." God is not blind, God sees that the people are male and female.<sup>29</sup> It is Moses, with the shortsightedness of a human male, who suddenly addresses only the males. The narrated text contains complex layers of voices. Is there a critique of Moses implied here? Is the text implying that the patriarchal blindness toward women is certainly *not* from God? This is not the only instance in which we hear the voice of patriarchy and the voice of patriarchy's critic in the same story. In the dialogue between God and Abraham in Genesis 17: 18-19, there are also two voices and, once more, the less patriarchal voice, which I call a countervoice, is divine. In this scene, God reiterates the promise to provide Abraham with children, and Abraham remarks that this promise has been fulfilled with the birth of Ishmael. At that point, it is God who replies that Ishmael will have his own covenant, but that the promise to Abraham must be fulfilled through Sarah, and announces that Isaac will be born to Abraham and Sarah the following season. By relating this interchange, the narrator of the story warns both ancient and modern readers that we should not be too quick to accept Abraham's androcentric view of the nature of the covenant.

The Bible that subtly warns its readers not to focus solely on the men in its text does not sound like the same Bible that has been quoted throughout history as a way of keeping women in their place. Much of the patriarchy that we associate with the Bible and all of its misogyny has been introduced into the Bible by later generations of readers. One of the impacts of women's studies has been to focus attention on this phenomenon and on the question, "How did we get from there to here?" Once we divorce the text from its patriarchal message we must attempt to delineate some of the influences that began to transform, or rather deform, the Bible into a more patriarchal text. Many of these first become visible in the Hellenistic period and grow more intense as Western history continues.<sup>30</sup>

### The Texts of Terror

Another goal of women-centered Bible studies is to focus on the stories in the Bible that look patriarchal, seem to have no possibility of reinterpretation, and clearly read like *texts of terror*.<sup>31</sup> These are the tales of victims, of women abused beyond the structural norm of patriarchy, of women who are physically and emotionally destroyed by others. One such story, the story of Hagar, is well known. Hagar, Sarah's personal slave and Abraham's concubine-wife has no protectors. The text states that Sarah abused Hagar—

that she treated her improperly. Hagar runs away, but God tells her to return and submit, and she does so until Sarah finally sends her and her child away.<sup>32</sup> This story starkly illuminates the relations between women in a patriarchy. Relative to Hagar, Sarah has all the power. Gender intersects with class: Sarah is of the dominant class and therefore in a far better position than Hagar. Moreover, Sarah's actions are perfectly legal. She acts entirely according to customary law when she makes Hagar the surrogate birthgiver. Then, when she feels threatened, she abuses Hagar and finally sends her away. Sarah has a perfect right to do so,<sup>33</sup> she is, after all, only freeing her slave and allowing her to take her son with her. Yet, no one would say that Sarah (or Abraham) has acted with compassion. Sarah's motives are clear: she herself is vulnerable and dependent on Abraham's good will toward her. Ultimately, Sarah lacks both economic security and autonomy, and this makes her incapable of acting well toward her social inferior. The modern reader may be horrified by her actions and yet sympathetic to both her and Hagar.

There is no reason to think that an ancient reader would have reacted differently than the modern reader. As is usual in these biblical stories, the narrator seems neutral and shows no sympathy for Hagar, nor, for that matter, for Sarah. Where would the sympathies of the reader be expected to lie? On the one hand, Sarah is the ancestress of the people reading the story; Hagar is not. There is the matter of race involved here, or at least ethnic consciousness: Hagar starts as a foreigner (an Egyptian) and ends as a foreigner (the mother of the Ishmaelite peoples). Sarah enables Isaac, Israel's ancestor, to be his father's successor. Would not the ancient reader root for the home team? Still, such treatment of foreigners is not supposed to happen in Israel. Over and over again the Israelites are told to be kind to the foreigner, for they too were once foreigners. Israel is also admonished always to be sympathetic to slaves, for they too were once slaves. Sarah and Abraham did not go through the slavery experience of Egypt, but their readers have and should remember these injunctions. The story continues to sound stranger: after Hagar runs away, God tells her to return. Israel's law demands that Israelites *help* fugitive slaves; why does God not help? Furthermore, Sarah mistreats Hagar *before* she herself becomes a captive concubine in the court of Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Afterward (perhaps because she understands what slavery is), Sarah sets her free and allows her to keep her son, but at that point Hagar becomes a freed slave—the very model of what Israel will later become. Hagar, the newly emancipated Egyptian slave, then goes into the wilderness, whereupon she receives a revelation from God and a promise of nationhood.

An ancient Israelite audience could not have missed the many allusions to their own salvation history. Hagar is the prototype of Israel, whose people will be slaves in Egypt, mistreated, and later freed; who will escape to the wilderness and receive God's revelation on Mount Sinai; and who will become the people of Israel. In this story, Sarah who is the progenitress of Israel, and Hagar, the prototype of Israel, are compelled by their situation to be at odds. Israelite readers not only recognize the tragedy of the two women in patriarchy, but they understand how much this tragedy is magnified by the fact that the future Israel is here at odds with itself. The story thereby stands as testimony to the serious problems of a present-day social situation rather than to the personal characteristics of the biblical characters.

Such considerations reveal the great complexity of the tales of terror. They assail the reader's emotions from all directions and make readers distinctly uncomfortable with what is going on. The same play of negative factors is prominent in the tale of Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11).<sup>35</sup> The narrator is ostensibly telling the tale of one of the judges of Israel, Jephthah. The story begins with Jephthah's birth: immediately the readers' sympathies are with him. He is the son of a prostitute whose half-brothers turned him out when their father died. A disinherited fugitive, he (like David after him) forms a private army and becomes known as a warrior. When his town, Gilead, is in trouble, the elders ask him to save them. He agrees to rescue them if afterward they will make him their head.<sup>36</sup> So far, so good: the underdog has made good, the low has become high, the biblical dream has come true. But something terrible happens. The pious Jephthah makes an oath to sacrifice to God whatever comes to greet him first after his victory. Did he expect an animal? Why not specify? In the tragic event, it is Jephthah's daughter who comes rejoicing. She is his only child; besides her, according to the text, he has neither son nor daughter. The problem is clear. If he sacrifices his daughter, he will have no progeny; his name will die. In Israel, this fate, called *karet*, is considered the worst fate that can happen to a man, and the threat of it is reserved as a sanction for serious offenses against divinity.<sup>37</sup> The daughters of Zelophehad use this Israelite attitude to acquire the right to inherit their father's estate, arguing that otherwise he would lose his future name without having done anything to deserve that penalty. The wise woman of Tekoa uses this Israelite attitude to manipulate David.<sup>38</sup> The narrator knows that the audience will react with great horror at the prospect of his killing his only child, and that this horror will be *on behalf of Jephthah*. But what about Jephthah's daughter? Although nameless (at least to us),

she too is known to ancient Israel, for as the narrator reminds us, every year the Israelite daughters go to the hills to lament her passing. Furthermore, the narrator makes the audience respect and admire her, for it is she who declares that vows must be honored and that God must be our primary consideration. Jephthah's daughter is a pious and faithful woman who is remembered in cult and story; surely nobody in Israel viewed her death lightly. Moreover, the Bible does not condone child sacrifice. The idea of a great savior of Israel offering his daughter in sacrifice would have been as horrible to the ancient Israelite as it is to the modern reader.

Once again, the reader is left disquieted: something is very wrong. No character acts with malice, and yet the most vulnerable character is horribly abused. The reader waits for salvation. Why does somebody not stop the sacrifice? In the world of the reader (ancient and modern), such events do not pass. What reader could kill another with impunity? Fathers do not have the right to kill their children. The story of Jephthah and his daughter points to something seriously lacking in the days of the judges: no one can control the fathers. Abraham, too, had the right to sacrifice his son; no human court would have sought him. The family is its own world, and the father is its ultimate authority. Moreover, a careless vow in this instance compels the father to act against his own self-interest. There is no priesthood to help him undo his vow. There is no authority higher than the family. In the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22), God intervenes to save the son, but God does not intervene to save Jephthah's daughter. The story of Jephthah's daughter, like all the stories in the Book of Judges, tells us that God will no longer intervene to save people who are in danger or who are being abused.

The story of the concubine in Gibeah with which the Book of Judges ends brings these issues into focus.<sup>39</sup> The girl is vulnerable; she is a minor wife, a concubine. When she is unhappy, she runs home. But her father gives her back to her husband-master. The father has already given her to another; now he gives her away again. She is solely under the authority of this new man, a Levite. Levites are a dignified class in Israel, but this Levite is suddenly vulnerable. When they stop in a town of strangers, the strangers attack. A stranger is vulnerable, for he travels without his family to protect him. Since he is alone, there is no one to rescue him. His host offers his daughter to assuage the mob; the Levite sends out his concubine. We are shocked: surely, no one can be gracious to another man by sacrificing his daughter to a mob. The story makes us realize that, in those days, men had ultimate powers of disposal over their women. Abraham could give Sarah

to Pharaoh; any man could give his daughter to another as a wife or concubine; Jephthah could sacrifice his daughter to God. The scene in Gibeah is parallel to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19. There, Lot, the only righteous man in town, sent his virginal daughters to the mob that had assembled to abuse his visitors. There is a great difference between Genesis and Judges: when Lot sends out his daughters, the angels of God save them. In the Book of Judges, God no longer intervenes to save individuals, and the concubine is raped to the point of death.

The terror of this story continues. The Levite takes revenge by butchering her body to muster the tribes against the tribe of Benjamin. The civil war that follows nearly wipes out a tribe of Israel; to resuscitate it, hundreds of women are captured into rape-marriages. Horror follows horror, and the narrator caps it with the message: in those days there was no king in Israel, and each man did as he wanted.

This story sets us up to await the kingship as an end to such abuse, and indeed the story has many parallels to the first stories about Saul, the first king of Israel. Nonetheless, kingship does not stop the problems that are caused by society's unequal power alignments. The king may act as a force of control over ordinary men, but who can control the king? King Saul tries to kill David; no one can stop him, and David has to flee. David himself is no guarantee to the end of dominance and oppression. After David becomes king, he sees Bathsheba bathing, covets her, and sleeps with her. Later, when Bathsheba tells David that she is pregnant, and Uriah will not sleep with her because he is engaged in battle, David arranges for Uriah to die in battle. David disposes of people as he wants; there is no one to stop him.<sup>40</sup> Yet, when David's daughter Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon, David does not protect her or avenge her by killing his son, Amnon the rapist. The reader of the story, who expects that the state will provide protection for the vulnerable,<sup>41</sup> now sees that the state cannot control itself.

These biblical tales of terror portray the horrible things that happen to women under patriarchy; they serve as a warning to us to prevent such happenings, and they were probably included in the Bible to show how things went wrong in Israel. Neither the lack of polity of the Genesis ancestors nor the localized sporadic government of the period of the judges could prevent such outrages. But neither could kingship, as the stories of Bathsheba and Tamar clearly show. The Bible, after all, was written as the sky was falling, in the shadow of the disastrous conquests by the Assyrians and the Babylonians.<sup>42</sup> The historical books maintain their faith in the ul-

timinate justice of God and the Cosmos by blaming Israel for its own destruction: because such things happened, Israel was destroyed. This is not misogynist storytelling but something far more complex, in which the treatment of women becomes the clue to the morality of the social order.

### Woman as Symbol

The literary treatment of women illuminates other symbolic uses of women and of the female. Just as women are relatively small and powerless in society, so is Israel small and powerless among the nations. Some of the heroines in the Bible symbolize Israel rising and subduing its enemies. This is particularly true of Yael, the Kenite woman who killed the Canaanite general Sisera at the beginning of the period of the judges, and Esther, the "diaspora Jew," who married the king of Persia and prevented the extermination of the Jews of Persia. *Woman* is also the personification of Israel in the marital metaphor of Israel as the wife of God. This well-known and much-beloved image is not as simple as it first appears. It captures well the intimacy between God and Israel, but it captures equally well the terror that such intimacy can hold with a more powerful force. This is not the equal love affair of the Song of Songs, interpreted either as human love or as the love of God and Israel. This is a patriarchal marriage: the husband has all the power. In today's view the marriage is also abusive, for the husband gets angry, punishes, and then proclaims his love and wants reconciliation.<sup>43</sup> The beloved wife is also a victim, and the woman symbol captures both love and vulnerability.

The marital metaphor has another problem: it codifies the gender of God as male. Monotheism has a potential advantage over polytheism, for it can create a divine world in which there is no gender division, no division of powers or attributes between male and female. This advantage, however, is only a potential advantage. In ancient Israel the gender of God was usually thought of as male because males were predominant in the social order. If the gender of God is *frozen* as male, then the danger is present that males will become the earthly representatives of divinity, and females will be frozen out of what is sacred. This does not fully happen in biblical Israel, which preserves images of God as mother. Nevertheless, the marital metaphor is one example of the dangers of this process.

In postexilic Israel another danger of using woman as symbol becomes clear. The images of Zion as daughter and Zion as mother become combined in an eschatological vision with the idea of the wife of God. In many ways



this is a beautiful vision of wholeness: the madonna (mother Zion) and the virgin (daughter Zion) are fused with the whore. Moreover, Zion is seen as the wife of Israel as well as the wife of God (Isa. 62:5). She becomes a symbol and means of union for God and Israel—they both love her, and their love for her unites them. If Israel is the lover of the woman Zion, however, then there is a danger that Israel will be seen as totally *male* and the women of Israel will become invisible. This is the danger of all the female divine symbols that begin to multiply in the postexilic and second Temple periods. In these periods, the portrayal of wisdom as a lover-woman develops into the depiction of the divine Sophia as the wife of her devotees, and the Torah as the beloved of her sages. Rabbinic writings also have an image of the Sabbath as a bride. In all these metaphors, the human is *male*, his partner is an unearthly female, and flesh and blood women are not part of the image at all.<sup>4</sup> The use of the feminine as a symbol can serve highly patriarchal purposes when human women are left out.

There are many other questions raised by feminist scholarship. Some are questions about sexuality. When the Bible addresses the subject of sexuality and its control, men are seen as agents and women as objects. What does this say about biblical ideas of sexuality, and in turn, how does that interact with our current attempts to construct a nonpatriarchal theology of sexuality? The Bible is not antisex, but it does not develop a clear understanding of sexuality, and postbiblical religion, particularly Christianity, has developed a distinct antisex bias.

There are still other questions being addressed today. Some questions concern the ancient Israelite religion and the role of the Asherah: Was the Asherah the feminine part of God? Was it a case of idolatry? Why was it ultimately exorcised from biblical religion, and did this contribute to or reflect the emergence of God-as-husband?<sup>5</sup> Beyond these are two interlinked questions: Were women better served by polytheism, which created a symbolic straightjacket of what a female and a male can be, and which nevertheless afforded women an undeniable and unremovable part of the sacred, or were women better served by monotheism, which does not necessarily limit the roles and characters of women, but which was clearly used for patriarchal purposes? Can the Bible be the inspiration for a truly liberated monotheism, free of patriarchy and all other forms of oppression? In the past twenty years, as we have come increasingly to appreciate the intricacies, ambiguities, and multiple meanings of biblical texts, it has become ever more apparent that the answer is truly up to us.

### Notes

1. None of the notes in this article is meant to be exhaustive. A complete annotated bibliography of women in the Bible is being prepared by Mayer Gruber and should be published soon. For the many issues involved in feminist studies and the Bible, see the articles in two pioneering anthologies: Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Society of Biblical Literature/Centennial Publications (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985); and Lerry M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "Feminism and Scriptural Interpretation: A Contemporary Jewish Critique," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20 (1983): 534-48; Kaharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology: An Introduction to Selected Issues and Literature," *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 5-18; and Phyllis Trible, "Five Loaves and Two Fishes: Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 279-95.
2. See Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107(1988): 3-17.
3. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford, 1988).
4. In addition to Meyers, see 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*, pp. 15-38 (Boston: Beacon, 1985); and Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 14-29. My own, somewhat different, view is expressed later in this chapter.
5. See, among others, 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*, pp. 183-216 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977); Kathleen M. Ashley, "Interrogating Biblical Deception and Trickster Theories: Narratives of Patriarchy or Possibility?" *Semeia* 42 (1988): 103-16; Samuel Dresner, "Rachel and Leah," *Judaism* 38:151-50; Imtraud Fischer, "Sara: Frauen unter der Verheißung," in Karin Walter, ed., *Zwischen Ökumene und Befreiung. Biblische Frauengestalten*, pp. 23-31 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988); Nelly Furnan, "His Story versus Her Story: Male Genealogy and Female Strategy in the Jacob Cycle," in Collins, *Feminist Perspectives*, 107-16; Society of Biblical Literature, *Biblical Scholarship in North America 10* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985; rep. in *Semeia* 46 [1989]: 141-49); Eva Renate Schmidt, "1. Mose 29-31: Vom Schwesternstreit zur Frauensolidarität," in Eva Renate Schmidt, Mieke Korenhof, and Renate Jost, eds., *Feministisch gelesen*, vol. 2, pp. 29-39 (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1989); Phyllis Trible, "Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah," Gross Memorial Lecture, Valparaiso University, 1989; Marie-Theres Wacker, "1. Mose 16 und 21: Hagar—die Befreite," in Schmidt, Korenhof, and Jost, *Feministisch gelesen*, vol. 1 (1988): 25-32; Mary K. Wakeman, "Feminist Revision of the Matrarchal Hypothesis," *Anima* 7 (1981): 83-96.

## 34 FRYMER-KENSKY

6. Phyllis Trible, "The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," in James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger, eds., *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson*, pp. 221-46. (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/Sheffield: Almond*, 1985); and Phyllis Trible, "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection," in idem, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* 9-35. *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); and Jo Ann Hacket, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," in Peggy L. Day, *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, pp. 12-27 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).
7. Johanna W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 37-67; Calum Carmichael, "Forbidden Mixtures," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 394-415 (on Tamar and Judd); Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy: Between Rape and Seduction," in Mieke Bal, ed., *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 135-56. (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (SS) 81, Bible and Literature Series, 22 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989)); J. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis 38," *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 338-61; idem, "Judd and Tamar," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979): 403-15; idem, "An Examination of a Recent Structuralist Interpretation of Genesis 38," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 79-98; Angelika Engelmann, "2. Samuel 13, 1-22: Tamar, eine schöne und deshalb geschändete Frau," in Schmidt, Korenhof, and Jost, *Feministisch gelesen*, vol. 2, pp. 120-26; Barbara Georgi and Renate Jost, "1. Mose 38: Tamar, eine Frau kämpft für ihr Recht," in Schmidt, Korenhof, and Jost, *Feministisch gelesen*, vol. 2, pp. 40-46; Randy L. Maddox, "Dammed If You Do and Damned If You Don't: Tamar, A Feminist Foremother," *Daughters of Sarah* 13 (1987): 14-17; Susan Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979): 143-49; Helen Schun- gel-Straumann, "Tamar: Eine Frau verschafft sich ihr Recht," *BKi* 39 (1984): 148-57; Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qeḏeṣa*, *Qadīṣin*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989).
8. Rita Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken Only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Carol Meyers, "Of Drums and Dances: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeologist* 54 (1991): 16-27; Annette Renbold, "Und Mirjam nahm die Pauke in die Hand, eine Frau prophetet und tanzt einem anderen Leben voran: Das Alte Testament feministisch gelesen," in Christine Schaub-berger and Monika Maßen, eds., *Handbuch Feministische Theologie*, pp. 285-98 (Münster: Morgana, 1986); Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5(1) (1989): 14-25, 34; idem, "Subversive Justice: Tracing the Miriam Traditions," in Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris, eds., *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Hanelson*, pp. 99-109 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Marc-Therese Wacker, "Miriam: Kritischer Mut einer Prophetin," in Karin Walter, ed., *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung. Biblische Frauengestalten*, pp. 44-52 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988).
9. Elinor Artman, "Between Two Gods," *Journal of Women and Religion* 1 (1981): 8-12; Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as a Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119-39; Yair Zakovitch, "Humor and

## 35 The Bible and Women's Studies

- Theology or the Successful Failure of Israeli Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2," in S. Niditch, ed., *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*. Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 75-98; and "Reply to Zakovitch," Niditch, *Text and Tradition* (1990): 99-106.
10. For Deborah, Peter C. Craigie, "Deborah and Anan: A Study of Poetic Imagery (Judges 5)," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90(3) (1978): 374-81; Stephen G. Dempster, "Mythology and History in the Song of Deborah," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978): 33-53; Katharina Elliger, "Deborah: 'Mutter in Israel,'" in Karin Walter, ed., *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung. Biblische Frauengestalten*, pp. 53-61 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988); J. Cheryl Exum, "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Story Reconsidered," in Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 73-85 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); Jürgen Kögler, "Deborah: Erwägungen zur politischen Funktion einer Frau in einer patriarchalischen Gesellschaft," in Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Traditionen der Befreiung 2: Frauen in der Bibel*, pp. 37-59 (Munich: Kaiser, 1980); Barnabas Lindars, "Deborah's Song: Women in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 65(2) (1983): 158-75; Rachel C. Rasmussen, "Deborah the Woman Warrior," in Bal, *Anti-Covenant*, 79-93; for Yael, see esp. Yair Zakovitch, "Sissera's Tod," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1981): 364-74; and Mieke Bal, *Minder und Differenz: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
11. Burke O. Long, "The Shunammite Woman: In the Shadow of the Prophet?" *Bible Review* 7 (1991): 12-19, 42.
12. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 118-43.
13. *Ibid.*
14. On the other hand, a parallel story about Elijah and a widow-woman indicates that even poor women could have considerable freedom of action. Elijah could live in the widow's house without causing a local scandal. Cf. 1 Kings 17:7-24.
15. Kings 27:1-11.
16. Kings 36.
17. Jon Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 11-28; Moshe Garstiel, "Wife, Words, and a Woman: 1 Samuel 25," in Y. Kaday and Ahalya Brenner, eds., *On Hinnour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 161-68 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1990); and Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 133-34.
18. Jon Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 11-28; and Frymer-Kensky, op. cit. Garstiel, "Wife, Words, and a Woman," 161-68.
19. For a discussion of some of the newer anthropological approaches to power, see the editor's introduction to Jill Dubisch, ed., *Gender and Power in Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3-41.
20. For recent studies of this role, see Niels Erik A. Andreason, "The Role of the Queen

- Mother in Israelite Society," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1983): 179-94; Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the Gebira," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 23-34, with an extensive bibliography; and Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," in Jean-Marie Durand, ed., *La Femme dans le Proche-Orient Antique, Comptes Rendus de la reunion asyriologique* 33 Paris 1986 (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 33-40.
21. For details see Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 118-43.
22. Note that even the prophets sought to ameliorate the condition of the poor and blamed the wealthy for taking advantage of them. They did not advocate uprooting the social order and eliminating economic classes.
23. In our own time we have two major examples of societies whose social structure does not match their ideology. In the former Soviet Union, where the proclaimed Marxist classlessness and economic equality were totally at variance with the reality of life, the ideology and the state that proclaimed it totally collapsed. In the United States we proclaim democratic classlessness and economic equality of opportunity, but the rich are getting richer, the poor are multiplying, and there is a large underclass. How this tension will be resolved remains to be seen.
24. Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 30-48; and idem, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, Overtures to Biblical Theology* 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). More recently, see idem, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies," *Christian Century* (Feb. 1982): 116-18; and idem, "Five Loaves and Two Fishes: Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 279-95. Other such approaches are by J. Cheryl Exum, "'You on Shall Let Every Daughter Live: A Study of Exodus 1:8-2:10,'" *Semeia* 28 (1983): 63-82; idem, "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Story Reconsidered," in Lety M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 73-85 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); and Toni Craven, "'Women Who Lied for the Faith,'" in Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris, ed., *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, pp. 35-49 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). Some scholars are more interested in indicating the Bible, such as Esther Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women: Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 68-83; idem, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5(1) (1989): 35-45; idem, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in Collins, *Feminist Perspectives*, 117-36. So, too, see Pamela Milne, "Eve and Adam: Is a Feminist Reading Possible?" *Bible Review* 4(3) (1988): 12-21, 39; and idem, "The Patriarchal Stamp of Scripture: The Implications of Structuralist Analyses for Feminist Hermeneutics," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5(1) (1989): 17-34.
25. See Trible, *The Rhetoric of Sexuality*.
26. Susan S. Lanser, "Feminist Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2,3," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 67-84. For an overview of the negative argument, see Milne, "Eve and Adam." For a newer depatriarchizing reading of the actions of Eve, see Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 108-17.

27. See Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 25-27.
28. Note that later rabbinic commentators were careful to read women back into this chapter, but Moses was not.
29. Rabbinic Judaism clearly put women back into the picture at Sinai. God's commanding Moses to speak to the "House of Jacob" and the "Sons of Israel" was understood to mean the women (the "house") and the men (the "sons"), and interpreters commented on the reasons that the women were mentioned before the men.
30. See Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 203-12. There is a considerable body of literature emerging on the Bible in the Hellenistic period. See, e.g., Betsy Halpern Amann, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39 (1988): 143-70; Leonie Archer, "The 'Evil Women' in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Writings," in R. Givenon, M. Anbar, et al., Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1986, pp. 239-45; James L. Bailey, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs," in L. Feldman and G. Hata, eds., *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 154-79; Cynthia Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," in Bal, *Anti-Covenant*, 195-209; Leila L. Bronner, "Biblical Prophecies through Rabbinic Lenses," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 40 (1991): 171-83; Sharon Cohen, "Reclaiming the Hammer: Toward a Feminist Midrash," *Triskion* 3:55-57, 93-95; Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Deborah," in A. Caquot, M. Hadas-Lebel, and J. Riand, *Hellenica et Judaica*, 1986, pp. 115-28.
31. This felicitous term was coined by Phyllis Trible in *Texts of Terror*.
32. For readings on Hagar, see Cynthia Gordon, "Hagar: A Throw-Away Character among the Matriarchs," *Society of Biblical Literature Papers* 24 (1985): 271-77; Jo Ann Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," in Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, pp. 12-27 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Sean E. McEvenue, "Comparison of Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories," *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 3 (1975): 64-80; Trible, "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection," 9-35.
33. Near Eastern contracts differ on whether the wife can sell the slave woman even after she has born the master's children. For details see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchal Family," *Biblical Archaeologist* 44 (1981).
34. The alternation of names may be confusing to someone not familiar with these biblical stories. When God announces that Sarai will give birth to Isaac, God also renames her Sarah, a name that means "princess." Similarly, Avraham (Abraham) is a renaming of Abram to indicate that he is the father (Av) of many.
35. Peggy L. Day, "From the Child Is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, 58-74 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); J. Cheryl Exum, "The Tragic Vision and Biblical Narrative: The Case of Jephthah," in J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, pp. 59-83; Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies, 1989; Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization,

## 38 FRYMER-KENSKY

- Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5(1) (1989): 35-45; Beth Geerslein, "A Ritual Processed: A Look at Judges 11.40." in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal, pp. 175-93. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (SS): 81, Bible and Literature Series, 22 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); W. Lee Humphreys, "The Story of Jephthah and the Tragic Vision: A Response to J. Cheryl Exum." in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, 85-96, Society of Biblical Literature Semelia Studies (1989); Michael O'Connor, "The Women in the Book of Judges," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1987): 277-93; Anne Michele Tapp, "An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19.1-11, Judges 11.30-39 and 19.22-26." in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal, 157-74, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (SS): 81, Bible and Literature Series, 22 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); Phyllis Trible, "A Meditation in Mourning: The Sacrifice of the Daughter of Jephthah." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36 (1981): 59-73; idem, "The Daughter of Jephthah: An Inhuman Sacrifice," in *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 93-116.
36. This pattern of the warrior becoming king is well known in both history and mythology. Marduk became king of the gods in this way, as did the Greek tyrants.
37. For the penalty, see Donald Wold, "The Karthi Penalty in P. Rationale and Cases," in P. J. Achtemeier, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1979 Seminar Papers* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), vol. 1, 1-46. For its uses, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," in ed. Carol Meyers, *And the Word of the Lord Will Go Forth* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbraun's, 1983), 399-414.
38. See the story in 2 Samuel 14. The wise woman pretends to be a widow, one of whose two sons has killed the other in a fight. If she delivers the killer to the family for execution (as Israelite law demands), then, she declares, her husband, a good man, would be left without a name or remnant. David responds by placing the killer's son under his own protection, and the wise woman then makes David realize that it is his own son, Absalom, who needs pardon for having killed his brother.
39. For this story see Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 365-78, and Trible, *Texts of Terror*. The conclusions expressed here, however, are my own.
40. For the story, see 2 Samuel 11.
41. Deuteronomy reflects the transfer of much power over the family from the father to the community. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky "Deuteronomy," in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 52-62.
42. The Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and decimation of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was in 722 B.C.E.; Judah survived until it was conquered by the Babylonians in 589 B.C.E..
43. See Renita Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," *Semelia* 47 (1989): 87-104, and Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 144-152.

## 39 The Bible and Women's Studies

44. See Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, pp. 142-60 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); and Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 175-183.
45. See Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, for discussions of sex and of the asherah. The questions I am asking here, however, remain unanswered.