From Fertility to Manipulation: Female Characterizations and

the Birth Narratives in the Hebrew Bible

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This dissertation has its genesis in my PhD studies at Tel Aviv University almost 15 years ago, which I was unable to complete due to maternity leave. My frustrating experience of academic career disruption caused by mother's responsibility for child-rearing led me to completely change the subject from "Structural Function and Thematic Continuity of the HB birth narratives" to the present one, which examines female characters and approaches it from a feminist perspective. Indeed, this dissertation is the result of a long journey and I am indebted to my earlier teachers at Tel Aviv University. Prof. Frank Polak who was my previous Doktorvater, Prof. Shlomo Izre'el, Prof Edward Greenstein, and Prof. Yair Hoffman are all people for whom I feel much gratitude. Special thanks to Prof. Yairah Amit, who strongly encouraged me to return to my studies.

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Abstract

This thesis examines all of the birth narratives of the Hebrew Bible, and provides coherent features of female characterization. In the birth narratives in Genesis, women are more concerned with the issues of fertility and procreation, the family inheritance, and perpetuation of the family line than are their husbands or the paterfamilias. In the birth narratives outside of Genesis, mothers contribute to shaping the child's future destiny. They bestow a special status or privilege on the child, paving the way to make him a divinely chosen charismatic leader.

In the HB birth narratives, female characters play a central or even a dominant role. They demonstrate distinctive competence in problem-solving on their own initiative. Despite being considered social underdogs, they actively resist dominant androcentric norms or challenge patriarchal authority, and thus frequently overpower men. In addition to using trickery, they are prominent in the employment of knowledge and wisdom as weapons against powerful authorities. Their resourcefulness, in particular, stands out: they utilize existing social structures and religious practices in a variety of ways to achieve their goals. They exert control over the situation, particularly during a new move — the transitional stage.

The narrator presents women as contributing to the fulfillment of the divine covenant, which serves as the theological foundation for group identity formation. Further, the overarching narrative focalization on women, representing them as contributors to the development of nationhood, reflects that the implied narrative agenda could be to encourage women's roles in community reconstruction and rehabilitation, which proposes the post-exilic Yehud as the social context of these stories' production. The image of women that is desired by the community of this new era is that they are strong, proactive, and interested in socioeconomic rights and positions, not submissive or obedient to a major authority.

Abbreviation

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	T&T Clark approaches to Biblical Studies
ACJS	Annual of the College of Jewish Studies
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJS Review	*The Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies*
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATT	Ancient Texts & Translations
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
AYRL	The Anchor *Yale* Reference Library
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BH	Bible in History
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies Book
BL	Biblical Limits
BLS	Bible and its Literature Series
BM	*Beth Mikra*
BMW	Bible in the Modern World
BR	Biblical Refigurations
BRev	*Bible Review*
BRS	The Biblical Resource Series
BS	Biblical Seminar
BSS	Bibliographical and Special Series
BT	*Black Theology*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BTF	*Bangalore Theological Forum*
BW	Bible and Women
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBETh	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CBR	*Community Bible Reading*
CDSR	*The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*
CJ	*Conservative Judaism*
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
CmSTC	Commentaria: Sacred Texts and Their Commentaries: Jewish, Christian and Islamic
Comm	*Commentary*
COS	The Context of Scripture. Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible. Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Beckinand Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995. 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999
DSB	Daily Study Bible
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary

EETh	Einführung in die evangelische Theologie
ESS	Emerging Scholars Series
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GTS	Gender, Theology and Spirituality
HACL	History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant
HALOT	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the sup under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HB	The Heritage of Biblical Israel
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testamen
Hor	Handbuch der Orientalistik. Erste Abteilung. Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HT	*History and Theory*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBCTP	Interpretation, a Bible commentary teaching and preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
IUPAL	Indiana University Publications in Anthropology, [Folklore] and Linguistics
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JFI	*Journal of the Folklore Institute*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scripture*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPSTC	JPS Torah Commentary. Jewish Publication Society of America
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LAIn	Library of Ancient Inscriptions
LAPO	Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient
LBI	Library of Biblical interpretation
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Series
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LTQ	*Lexington Theological Quarterly*
MBI	Methods in Biblical interpretation
MQ	*Mankind Quarterly*
MS	Mythos Series
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
Numen	*Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*
NVBS	New Voices in Biblical Studies
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library

OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OTRM	Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs
PAFS	Publications of the American Folklore Society
PEGLMBS	*Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PIBA	*Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*
PPFBR	Publication of the Perry Foundation for biblical research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Proof	*Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*
PRS	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RA	Rewriting Antiquity
RV	Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart
RAIGBI	Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland
SBLAIL	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and Its Literature
SBLCP	Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Publications
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Studies
SBLSemeiaSt	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writing from the Ancient World
SCCNH	Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians
SCS	Septuagint Commentary Series
SEA	*Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok*
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplements to Numen)
SiBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SIDIC	*SIDIC (Journal of the Service internationale de documentation judeo-christienne)*
Siph	Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the study of Judaism
SPSM	Studia Pohl: Series Maior
SRKAE	Schriften reihe der katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
ST	Studies and Texts
STS	Semitic Texts and Studies
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
TatC	Texts @ Contexts Series
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1 Why Birth Narratives?

Nearly every nation has its own founding myth that shapes its national and cultural identity.[1] Ancient Israel in common with other groups in the ancient Near East elaborated stories about birth that explain the origin of its people: how they took root in a certain territory and developed as a nation. Appropriately, large numbers of birth narratives are contained in Genesis: Abraham–Sarah–Hagar (Ishmael and Isaac), Lot–his two daughters (Moab and Ben-ammi), Isaac–Rebekah (Esau and Jacob), Judah–Tamar (Perez and Zerah), Jacob–Leah–Rachel (twelve sons and one daughter).

Then what births do we find after Genesis? Surprisingly, only a limited number of characters have a birth narrative: Moses, Samson and Samuel. They are more or less legendary figures who served as the divinely elected leaders of the Israelite community that takes over the territorial and cultural heritage Abraham left, prior to the establishment of monarchy. This could mean they are tied to a foundation myth: the birth of religious standards and regulations represented by commandments, the birth of sovereignty, the birth of theocracy governed by a charismatic leader in religious, military, and political domains which pave the way the monarchy to emerge.

The underlying aspect that is the focus of this particular study is the prominent involvement of women in all these birth narratives. They take the initiative so that the stories center on them, furthering the story development through specific actions. For example, they take part actively in perpetuating the family line (ancestral mothers; Lot's two daughters; Tamar), choose their

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[1] Either in written text or in oral transmission.

favorite son as an heir (Sarah; Rebekah), save the child's life (Hagar;[2] Moses' mother) and get involved in making the child's future life (Moses' mother; Samson's mother; Hannah). Considering such active and decisive roles, I read, in this project, the birth narratives of the Hebrew Bible (HB) as the stories of women who engage in the formation of national identity.

This project examines all of the HB birth narratives, focusing on female figures, then presents their coherent characteristics reflected in these texts. My goal is to demonstrate women's distinctive competence in resolving problems or dealing with the situations they face within the texts that I analyze. I argue that the overarching theme is that, in achieving their goals, these women not only challenge patriarchal authority but also are able to overpower men. My reading takes into account their resourcefulness while focusing on the methods they employ: manipulation, knowledge and information, trick, wisdom, social and religious structures.

Since the last third of the twentieth century, a considerable amount of work on reinterpretation of numerous female characters in Scripture has been done,[3] especially within the discipline of feminist criticism.[4] With the rise of reconstructing attitudes towards women in the Bible and refashioning stereotyped gender ideologies, scholars have attempted to correct previous biased readings and provide various new fresh viewpoints to fit the need of the current zeitgeist and changing social values.[5] However, despite the fact that the topic of the birth

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[2] This issue shall be discussed in Chapter 2.

[3] Fueled by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*. On this point see Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13–38.

[4] For example, the series *Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible* edited by Athalya Brenner since 1993 out of Sheffield Academic Press, *Searching the Scriptures* (2 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1994–1995), ed., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; *Women in the Hebrew Bible,* ed., Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999). For further information see Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (ed.), *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, BW 9.1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

[5] This is an ongoing project in a wide range of scholarly study not only within HB, but also NT studies, and also in Rabbinic literature. The increasing presence of Jewish feminist scholars in biblical studies is particularly worthy of consideration. For example, see the series *Feminist Companion to the New Testament* (FCNTECW)*,* edited by Amy-Gil Levine since 2001; *The Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on*

narratives is reproduction and childbirth, precisely the point where sex and gender are most to the fore,[6] feminist criticism has only dealt with selected texts on this subject: the focus of discussions has been on either the mothers in Genesis, or on the barrenness motif repeated throughout Genesis and in the narratives of Samson's mother and Hannah, Samuel's mother. The complete set of HB birth narratives has not been analyzed extensively and thoroughly from a feminist perspective.

My readings, through the analysis of all the HB birth narratives, challenge conventional gender ideologies and authoritative traditions of interpretation established in the male-centered academic world. These include: male dominance and female subordination; chosen and blessed patriarchs as the beneficiaries of the covenant; male fertility threatened by female infertility; male supremacy and male sexual initiative; passive and powerless women; the necessity of motherhood; the conventional paradigm of a good wife and a wise mother; submissive and obedient woman conforming to male authority and so forth.

I acknowledge that there are gender norms and a gender hierarchy in the biblical world. The birth narratives I examine also reflect a male-dominated cultural context. For example, it is a patrilocal society; one could argue that Jacob is an exception because he had a matrilocal marriage; but he returns to his father's land with his family. Sarah requires Abraham's authority to send away Hagar and Ishmael, while Rebekah requires Isaac's authority to send Jacob to Haran. Laban trades his daughters for his financial gain, as if they are his possessions. Lot tries to offer his virgin daughters as surrogate victims for sexual assault to men of Sodom. Judah even has legal authority to sentence Tamar, his daughter-in-law, to death. Lot deprives his

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the 54 Weekly Torah (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000) edited by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein; The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology edited by Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jane Schaberg et al., eds., On the Cutting Edge: The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds (New York: Continuum, 2004); Susanne Scholz, Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

[6] In a sense that 'birth' is the result of male-female sexual relationships and it encompasses subordinate topics like fertility, procreation, inheritance, and parental partiality and influence and the like.

daughters of marrying while Judah deprives his daughter-in-law of remarrying. Only Hebrew males are regarded as potential threats by Egypt's pharaoh. Manoah, the father of Samson, attempts to direct events and exert control over his wife. Elkanah, the paterfamilias, decides how the sacrificial meal is distributed to his family members; the high priest in Shiloh is, of course, a man. Furthermore, it is a *male* child Hannah wishes to have. Therefore this research is premised on a recognition that within biblical narratives men appear to represent the strong in a power imbalance relationship, while women represent the weak.

Nevertheless, the literary works of the birth narrative genre portray men as passive characters in comparison to active women characters. Men do not actually care, or at best care less than women, about ensuring the provision of progeny although this is commanded as part of the divine promise to the patriarchs. They are not interested in women's childlessness after they get an heir (Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Elkanah) and do not exert influence on the child in comparison to the women (Manoah,[7] Elkanah). They may otherwise be almost absent in the narrative (Moses' father) and, if present, show lack of responsibility (Lot, Judah) and lack of communication skills (Jacob, Elkanah, Eli). I will demonstrate how these narratives depict men's limitations and their proclivity to cause trouble rather than solve problems.

In my efforts to restore underestimated female power, I endorse Carol Meyer's observations that "women are nowhere portrayed as less intelligent or capable than men; rather, they often appear as clever, competent, and sometime heroic figures."[8] At the same time my reading challenges the claims of other feminist criticism that the androcentric biblical text and its patriarchal setting successfully limited women's roles to motherhood. In contrast, I contend that women in these narratives are not content with simply having children; they are involved

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[7] When he demonstrates father's desire to get actively involved in the upbringing of his child, he is disapproved by divine authority.

[8] Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; rev. ed. of *Discovering Eve*, 1988), 203. My consent to her opinion is only on the narrative level, not in terms of historical reality.

in giving their children a better future, in choosing which child is regarded as the heir, in exerting influence over family members and resisting oppressive authority.

The subject of female trickster or female wisdom has already been extensively discussed.[9] However, my reading emphasizes their resourcefulness beyond the tricks and deceptions which have received a lot of attention. That is, in the HB birth narratives, women utilize and manipulate these existing social structures and religious practices in a variety of ways to achieve their goals. Individual narrative analysis in this project will delve into specifics of their actions.

My reading, on the other hand, makes no claim that these women are morally perfect. I place greater focus on the ambiguous, complex, and multifaceted human nature which cannot be judged as all good or all bad. Hence I attempt to reconsider prior readings of both negative and positive assessments of female characters[10] and offer a plausible ideological counter reading drawn from the diversity of voices in the narrative, even positing a devil's advocate to trace antithetical voices. Furthermore, I will reconsider dominant interpretations that have previously been taken for granted.

These are some key questions I raise in this research: Why are women so eager to become mothers? Is Sarah completely callous and passive? Did Hagar abandon her child under the bush? Did Rebekah truly act to fulfill God's prophecies? Do two sisters, Leah and Rachel, only disagree with one another? Can't we see Rachel's pestering Jacob from a different perspective?

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[9] Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, BLS 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985); Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000); first publ. as: *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, NVBS (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration*, OTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) [esp. Ch. 2 "Trickster Matriarchs: Lot's daughters, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Tamar"], 41–66.

[10] This logic holds true for male characters as well. However, because this project is about female characters, my efforts may be limited to discussions of them, though this is not always the case.

Should the incest of Lot's daughters and of Tamar be interpreted in a negative light? Did Moses' mother explicitly disobey Pharaoh's decree? Is it true that Manoah's wife an ideal Israelite woman? Is Hannah simply a devoted and ideal mother? Who benefits from her vow and dedication of her child? By raising these critical questions, not only patriarchal ideologies but also previous feminist criticism are challenged.

I would like to add another important aspect in which this project sheds new light on this subject. So far, no attempt has been made to identify an overarching framework that runs through the HB birth narrative genre. As I mentioned above, I regard these stories as founding myths, and put emphasis on the thread of continuity that runs throughout these narratives. The birth narratives in Genesis, for example, are concerned with the preservation of a family lineage and the selection of an heir across multiple generations, resulting in the establishment of the Israelite people. Outside of Genesis, the focus shifts from a 'family' level to a 'public' level, as charismatic heroes are born, paving the way for these people's nation to emerge. The overarching principle is that YHWH elects his people; however, in many cases it is the mother who elects the heir. Mothers frequently contribute to enabling the child's election by YHWH.[11] In sum, women are central to the covenant's continuation and the divine call. Understanding the entire HB birth narratives in this regard raises the following important questions, which will be answered by the findings of this project.

  –Is it true that women's roles are limited to motherhood? Would God's covenant have been fulfilled if women had not taken initiative?

  –What messages are conveyed through the image of an indomitable, defiant, and tenacious woman that is continually mirrored in the birth narratives?

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[11] Or YHWH chooses a specific mother for his plan.

–What is implied by these texts of women's defiance and triumph over repressive and unjust patriarchal authority?

  –Are women merely supporting characters who help men stand out? How do they pursue their ambitions and desires?

  –What is the theological framework implied in the birth narratives?

  –Did ancient Israel's tradition, at least as reflected in the storytelling of these presumably male-authored texts, completely exclude women from its historical and theological agenda?

  –What sociohistorical circumstances and theological presuppositions are likely to be embedded in the idea of female power and dominance in this specific narrative genre?

In the remainder of this Introduction, I offer a review of previous research on this subject, then present the methodological issues of this project.

1.2 A Review of Previous Research on the Subject

1.2.1 Birth Stories and the Hebrew Bible: Previous Studies Centering on Motifs, Themes, Patterns, and Type-Scenes

Biblical scholarship on the subject of birth has developed primarily in association with a particular motif, structure, pattern, and theme, or with comparative studies on heroes in myth and folklore. This trend is largely due to Herman Gunkel, the pioneer of the form-critical approach to biblical narrative, who was interested in the development of a narrative unit in relation to its original social and religious setting, or "Sitz im Leben." His emphasis on oral tradition and folkloric motifs found in Genesis ultimately brought comparative and cross-

cultural studies into the biblical research field.[12] Influenced by his work, many scholars since then have continued to compare HB stories and Ancient Near East (ANE) literature.[13]

Claus Westermann gives attention to the literary prototype and the integrity of the patriarchal promise theme. In light of Ugaritic parallels like the Krt and Aqht texts, he claims that the promise of a son is the oldest form of divine promise.[14] He also considers the patriarchal narrative as a multi-generational family saga manifesting various conflicts.

Comparing similar Ancient Near Eastern and Greek literature, Albert B. Lord suggested two patterns: "miraculous birth" and "calling."[15] The former pattern appears in the succession from Isaac to Jacob and then to Joseph. The latter shapes the stories of Moses and Gideon. The miraculous birth pattern then returns with Samson and Samuel. Lord pays much attention to the continuity of the narrative.

The importance of the continuity of the larger narrative was in particular emphasized by Vladimir Propp's typology of narrative surface structure, which had a major influence on the field of biblical studies.[16] Propp, a Russian formalist, postulated the sequential linear structure — the logic of action sequence — in his *Morphology of the Folktale*. He lists the thirty-one functions on the characters' sphere of action[17] and argued that function and sequence are

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[12] Herman Gunkel*, Genesis übersetzt und erklärt,* 8th ed., HKAT 1/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969 [1901]) = *Genesis: Translated and Interpreted*, trans. M. E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997). See also idem, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament*, RV II/23, 26 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1917) =*The Folktale in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond, 1987).

[13] Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 32 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[14] Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[15] Albert Lord B, "Patterns of Lives of the Patriarchs from Abraham to Samson and Samuel," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed., S. Niditch, SBLSemeiaSt 20 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 7–18.

[16] Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, also contributed to the biblical studies in terms of the structural analysis. Whereas Propp's structure is syntagmatic, Lévi-Strauss' is paradigmatic, known as deep structures and binary oppositions.

[17] Propp designates seven main *dramatis personae*: the hero (victim hero or seeker hero), the villain, the donor (provider), the helper, the princess (the sought-for person) and her father, the dispatcher, the false hero. For Propp's thirty one functions in detail, see Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale, Morphology of the Folktale,* 2nd rev., American Folklore Society, BSS 9; IUPAL-M 10 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 25–65.

essential morphological elements of the Russian fairy tale.[18] Propp's research method has great significance in that it investigated homogeneous tales first, then induced functions of *dramatis personae*, whereas previous researchers focused on classifying heterogeneous stories primarily based on motifs.

Inspired by Propp, biblical scholars working both on the NT and the HB have proposed various ways to apply his model to biblical texts.[19] However, one cannot adapt Propp's functions automatically to the biblical narratives. One must bear in mind that Propp's sequence of thirty-one generic functions was deduced from a genre-specific corpus — one hundred Russian fairy tales. Therefore, it is questionable whether his method is applicable to all genres of biblical texts. In Propp's system, the child whose birth is recounted in a tale always becomes a hero in the narrative sequence; the plot structure ends with hero's marriage and not with his death. This is not always the rule in the genre of the HB. Particularly in the birth narratives, the father may remain a central character even after the child is born; in some cases, both the father and the son assume simultaneous leading roles (Abraham; Isaac; Jacob); some end with the birth of a child who simply disappears from the narrative (Moab and Benammi; Perez and Zerah). In addition, it should be also taken into consideration that Propp's structure does not explain the social and cultural context of or relationship to the tale, not to mention the absence of female heroes.

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[18] Although the English title is "Morphology of the Folktale," Propp actually deals with Russian "fairy tales" classified by Aarne-Thompson under tale types 300–749.

According to Propp, "function is as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" and "functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale" (V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* 19, 21). For this issue, see Pamela J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative*, BLS 13 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).

[19] See Jack M. Sasson*, Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979; repr., BibSem 10, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); idem, "Literary Criticism, Folklore Scholarship, and Ugaritic Literature," *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic,* ed., Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 81–98; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Structure and Style in Judges 13–16," *JBL* 82 (1963): 65–9; idem, "Biographical Patterns in Biblical Narrative"; Heda Jason, "Biblical Literature and Epic Folk Tradition: Some Folkloristic Thoughts," *OTE* 8 (1995): 280–90.

Influenced by Propp's structuralism, Robert C. Culley allows the HB prose narratives their own unique patterns. He identifies recurrent patterns of action sequences, then demonstrates how they are varied.[20] Although Culley receives credit for his research tool that emphasizes both similarities (pattern repetition) and differences (pattern variation), his analysis has limitations because he examines only a few selected examples of sequences that he refers to as "smaller movement of action,"[21] such as Punishment, Rescue, Achievement, Reward, Announcement, and Prohibition.

To some extent, both Propp and Culley have had an impact on this project. Like Propp, I investigate a specific genre — in my case, the HB birth narratives — while emphasizing the continuity of the larger narrative. When comparing individual narratives intertextually, I, like Culley, pay attention not only to recurring but also to varying features. My analysis, on the other hand, is not limited to structural sequence but also includes plot, language, characters, as well as social and cultural context, eventually eliciting an ideological hermeneutic.

Robert Alter's magisterial work *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) is possibly one of the most valuable contributions to the coherent reading of the HB as literature. Alter calls recurrent patterns or specific motifs in the Hebrew Bible 'biblical type-scenes.' According to Alter, these are understood as a biblical literary convention[22] that reflects a poetic or rhetoric device.[23] Based on his earlier work on the betrothal type scene in Genesis 24,[24] Alter examines the

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[20] Robert Culley, "Themes and Variations in Three Group of Old Testament Narratives," in idem (ed), *Classical Hebrew Narrative*, Semeia 3 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 3–11; idem, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1976); *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narrative*, SBLSemeiaSt 23 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992] 47–76; 77–168. According to Culley, "repeated patterns encourage a sense of coherence and closure. Varied patterns favor a sense of multiformity and openness" (ibid, 170).

[21] R. Culley, *Themes and Variation*, 11.

[22] Alter argues that such biblical "convention" gives the listeners, "intricate clues as to where the tale was going, how it differed delightfully or ingeniously or profoundly from other similar tales." Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read," 128.

[23] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47–62.

[24] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 52–62. He enumerates several type-scenes identifiable in the Hebrew Bible: the annunciation of the birth of the hero to his barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial, danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; the testament of the dying hero (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical narrative,* 51).

annunciation type-scene (Sarah; Rebecca; Rachel; Manoah's wife; Hannah; the Shunammite woman) which follows a recurring pattern: initial barrenness, divine promise, and the birth of a son.[25] Although Alter's type-scene — betrothal or annunciation — ultimately sparked much discussion about female/mother characters, it does not fully encompass all of the women in HB birth narratives. Most of all, Alter does not include Hagar in his annunciation type-scene since he regards the motif of barrenness as essential for this type-scene. Hagar is not barren, despite the fact that she clearly receives the birth annunciation.[26] Hence his type-scene is an arbitrary selection of texts that fits his patterns rather than an inductive conclusion from a thorough analysis of texts using standard rules, as I attempt to do in this project.

Yair Zakovitch's approach, like Alter's, is intertextual, but his interest goes deeper. In his investigation of the Samson narrative,[27] he looks for the residual polytheistic myth behind motifs such as the birth of a son to a god by a mortal female.[28] In his view, the final text form reflects the demythologization of those motifs. However, his classification of the birth narrative is also motif-centered — barrenness of the mother in his case. Accordingly, Moses' mother, Hagar, and Leah have no place in this scheme.

In "Reading Prophetic Narratives" (1997), Uriel Simon examines seven miraculous birth tales in scripture focusing on the parents (Abraham; Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Rachel; Manoah's wife, Hannah; Woman of Shunem) along with the Ugaritic epic of Danel,

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For his discussion about "The Techniques of Repetition" (Leitwort, Motif, Theme, Sequence of actions, Type-scene), see R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88–113.

[25] R. Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Proof* 3 (1983): 115–30.

[26] See further, Timothy Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible*, FAT 12 (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 85–96.

[27] Y. Zakovitch, *The Life of Samson (Judges 13-16): A Critical-Literary Analysis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1982).

[28] Due to the nature of its monotheism, the miraculous birth born by unions between women and gods frequently appeared in Greek mythology and also in other legends of the ANE is not found in the Hebrew Bible, unless the vestiges of it. For this issue, see Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies,* Vol 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973–1975, 2vols; first publ. in Hebrew, 1942–1943), 17–28; Y. Zakovitch, *The Life of Samson*, 14–84; Yairah Amit, ""Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife" (Judges 13.11): On the Place of the Woman in Birth Narratives" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed., Athalya Brenner, FCB 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 146–56.

father of Aqhat. He then compared them to the stories of miraculous survival (Hagar, Moses' mother, the Shunammite, the Widow of Zarephath).[29] Simon explains that "what is common to all of these stories can define a literary genre with distinct lineaments and a specific theme– the birth (or rescue in youth) of an important person whose unique destiny is closely linked with the fact that without the intervention of the Lord he would not have lived."[30] His comprehensive analysis based on close reading in relation to the whole narrative and a multi-dimensional approach — including affliction, miracle, and destiny — is an important contribution to this field. Nevertheless the question remains as to his definition of an "important person." If he regards Shunammite's son and the widow of Zarephath's son as important characters, what about Leah's sons? They merit no miraculous birth, according to Simon's classification, yet they are important enough in a sense that they become the first tribe members. Moreover, given Simon's notion, Lot's daughters and Tamar who are not categorized as mothers in the stories of miraculous birth or miraculous survival, are consequently underestimated as not *important* women.

The introduction of various interdisciplinary fields is a prevailing trend in biblical studies. For example, Ester Fuchs approaches the subject of birth from a feminist point of view in her book *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narratives* (2000).[31] Her analysis provides two themes which are based on a mother-character: the annunciation theme in which a barren woman becomes fertile (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, Hannah, the Shunammite); and the temptation theme (nameless daughters of Lot, Tamar, Ruth). Though Fuchs pays attention

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[29] Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 36–40.

[30] U. Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, 34.

[31] Ester Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*, JSOTSup 310 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000). See also idem, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 151–66 (also appeared in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed., Alice Bach [New York: Routledge, 1999], 127–39; in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed., Adela Yarbro Collins. SBLCP10 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985], 117–36).

to Lot's daughters and Tamar who have often been neglected, her categorization still fails to include key figures like Leah and Hagar.

Robin H. Jarrell launched a feminist investigation into the 'birth narrative.'[32] She singles out nine narratives from the OT and the NT which have a specific format: 1) Description of woman's mother status; 2) Protest; 3) Offer (of contractual terms); 4) Son's future forecast; 5) YHWH naming; 6) Acceptance of the contract and poem/song (in three instances). Jarrell asserts that the concretization of YHWH's contractual relationship with women is established in the literary form of the birth narrative. In Genesis 16, YHWH's relationship with Hagar serves as a paradigmatic foundation for all future associations between Yahweh and potential child-bearing women. Unfortunately, she maintains the previous method of arbitrary organization based on a certain motif or pattern: birth narratives that do not fit her format are not discussed at all, though they (e.g. Lot's two daughters, Leah and Rachel, Tamar and Moses' mother) play an important role in the context.

Rachel Havrelock is noteworthy in that she pursued *female* heroes while employing the theory of the heroic pattern in regard to birth. In her article "The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," Havrelock studies Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Hannah, the mother of Samson, and the Great Woman of Shunem as "all biblical women who overcome barrenness,"[33] and points out "the journey from barrenness to fertility"[34] involves several steps: Barrenness, Statement of protest, Direct action, Encounter with God, Conception, Birth, Naming.[35] Her main argument is that this female hero pattern functions as the counterpart of the male covenant: "the repetition and variation of this pattern suggests that, like

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[32] Robin H. Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant," *JSOT* 97 (2002): 3–18.
[33] Rachel Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," *BibInt* 16 (2008): 154–78 (here 159).
[34] R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero," 157.
[35] R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero," 159.

the male covenant, the female struggle and reconciliation with God is transmitted through generations and becomes part of Israel's national character."[36]

Haverlock's idea is somehow analogous to Jarrell's aforementioned argument.[37] Whereas Jarrell concentrates on Hagar's case where covenantal language and behavior appear distinctly, Haverlock thoroughly excludes her on the ground that Hagar is not barren. Instead, she includes the Great Woman of Shunem who is never labeled as a barren woman but simply as a woman who has no son (2 Kings 4:14) while her husband is old. Despite fully recognizing this point, Haverlock examines the Shunamite for her paradigm because other aspects satisfy her pattern.[38] This attempt, however, rather detracts from her main point: the story of the Shunamite is hardly in the covenantal context. But even more problematic is the fact that she does not specify what theory of hero pattern is employed, although she states that she combines "folklore and feministic methodologies."[39] The motif-based analysis is more correctly attributed to Propp's structural research. Nevertheless, Havrelock refers only to Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* from which her title came. She misses the point that Rank's pattern basically deals with the "biography" of a hero in a way that follows the Oedipus plot[40] and this is why only Moses among the heroes of the Hebrew Bible is discussed in his work. Ironically, the mother of Moses is one of the rare mothers who are *not barren* in the OT birth stories, which makes Havrelock's argument weak.

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[36] R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero," 178.

[37] Jarrell's article was published a few years earlier yet was not mentioned in Haverlock's work. See Robin H. Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant."

[38] R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero," 161.

[39] Written in her abstract.

[40] Aarne-Thompson tale type 931. For his heroes, see FN 8. Raglan explains the plot outline as following: "The standard saga itself may be formulated according to the following outline: The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative). As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by an humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion. He takes his revenge on his father, on one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other. Finally he achieves rank and honors." See Raglan, Fitzroy R. S. et al., *In Quest of the Hero*, 58.

What should not be overlooked is that hero studies are typically focused on men rather than women. The patriarchal narratives in Genesis, for example, develop over three generations, and the larger narrative framework is built on the mutual interdependence of the father and his child (Abraham–Isaac–Jacob). Accordingly, a *male* child becomes the central character of the subsequent stories. Thus, within research on heroic biographical patterns, the mother characters who are prominent in the HB birth narratives have no place in the discussion.[41] An associated problem connected with this issue is that, most unfortunately, female heroes have largely been ignored in the folklore studies devoted to the heroic pattern.[42]

When it comes to the motif-centered research, that focuses primarily on the motifs of the barrenness, the messenger, and the annunciation, scholarly concerns have weighed more heavily on categorizing biblical texts and presenting a particular classification. However, none of these approaches, in my opinion, succeed in providing a satisfying investigation or a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the entire HB birth narratives since it presumes certain paradigms before encountering the individual text itself. Only afterwards does it select suitable examples which are then arranged for convenience.

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[41] Cf. Brenner categorizes the patterns of the biblical heroic birth stories under two paradigms: two mothers vs. a single mother. (A. Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive patterns within the "Birth of the Hero" Paradigm," *VT* 36/3 [1986]: 257–73.)

[42] For heroes and biographical patterns in folklore studies as well as in biblical studies, see Johan G. von Hahn, "Arische Aussetzungs- und Rückkehr-Formel" in *Sagwissenschaftliche Studien* (Jena: F. Mauke, 1876). Fitzroy Richard Somerset Baron Raglan. See R. S. Fitzroy Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (London: Methuen & Co., 1936); Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1949); Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, and Other Writings*, ed., P. Freund (NY: Vintage Books,1959); Jan de Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Archer Taylor, "The Biographical Pattern in Traditional Narrative," *JFI* 1, 1/2 (1964): 114–29; Alan Dundes, "The hero pattern and the life of Jesus" in *Protocol of the Twenty-fifth Colloquy, The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 12 December 1976*, ed., W. Wuellner (Berkeley, CA: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultu*r*e, 1977); Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Biographical Patterns in Biblical Narrative," *JSOT* 20 (1981): 27–46; Dieter Zeller, "Die Ankündigung der Geburt—Wandlungen einer Gattung," in *Zur Theologie der Kindheitsgeschichten: der heutige Stand der Exegese*, ed., Rudolf Pesch, SRKAE (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1981); Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel*, HSM 42 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Roberrt A. Segal, "Introduction: In Quest of the Hero," in Raglan, Fitzroy R. S. et al., *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: a Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, ABRL, 2nd ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1993; S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*; Corinne Ondine Pache, *Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

It should be noted that the extensive research effort on the structural studies centering around motif has disregarded Propp's significant point that any given motif can be substituted or assimilated by or to other motifs.[43] In terms of functions that lead to plot sequence, for example, the motif of a mother's barrenness can be substituted by other motifs such as a childless woman due to lack of spouse and any other social circumstance (Tamar, Lot's daughters), or by a mother of an endangered child (Hagar, Moses' mother).[44] In the case of Abraham and Sarah, not only the barrenness motif but also the motif of parents who are childless due to advanced age and of a father without an heir appear as initial problems. Therefore to set a single specific motif as a criteria for the classification of the birth narratives is not adequate. Moreover, such a method fails to encompass all the birth narratives in the Hebrew Bible.

There are three remarkable investigations recently made in an attempt to make up for the aforementioned methodological shortcomings. Firstly, Timothy Finlay's monograph *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (2005),[45] deals with a specific genre — the birth report. He examines comprehensively all the birth reports that occur in the Hebrew Bible, even the genealogies. It seems, however, that his research scope is too extensive to be organized systematically: his 'genre' crosses from genealogies to annunciation type-scenes and to

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[43] Propp gives an example of the motif "a dragon kidnaps the tsar's daughter." He argues: "The dragon may be replaced by Koščéj, a whirlwind, a devil, a falcon, or a sorcerer. Abduction can be replaced by vampirism or various other acts by which disappearance is effected in tales. The daughter may be replaced by a sister, a bride, a wife, or a mother. The tsar can be replaced by a tsar's son, a peasant, or a priest." (Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 12–3). Propp also points out that "different functions may be fulfilled in exactly the same way," which leads to the phenomenon of *assimilations*. His criteria for defining a function is its consequences. For example, "if the receiving of a magical agent follows the solution of a task, then it is a case of the donor testing the hero (D^1). If the receipt of a bride and a marriage follow, then we have an example of the difficult task (M)." See further Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 66–70 (Chapter IV Assimilations: Cases of the Double Morphological Meaning of a Single Function).

[44] This might be replaced by a virgin birth in NT stories and in Greek birth myths. In a similar vein, childless parents, either mother or father, due to advanced age or a father without an heir are viewed as an initial problem that leads to the next action sequence.

[45] Timothy Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible*.

narrative. Above all, his research does not focus on gender relationships or female characters as I do in this project.

Secondly, Scott A. Ashmon investigates *Birth Annunciations in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (2012). Using both synchronic and diachronic methods, Ashmon explains there is "no single fixed form for the annunciation itself in the HB and ANE." His stress on the differences in function between them is appreciated.[46] However, his interest is in the forms of the annunciation scenes, so he deals with a limited number of characters within the Hebrew Bible: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Samson, Solomon, Josiah (1 Kings 13), Shunammite son (2 Kings 4), and Immanuel (Isaiah 7). He does not delve into narrative context or character analysis and his studies show no special interest in the mother/female figure.

Thirdly, Edward L. Greenstein examines in his recent article, "all stories of flight or forced exile stemming from the ancient Near East":[47] Jacob, Moses, and David were studied along with Sinuhe, Idrimi, Hattushili, and Esarhaddon. Greenstein's focus is "the original provenance of the pattern" and the presumable period when "the pattern became a part of the ancient Hebrew narrator's conceptual and rhetorical repertoires."[48] Though his research is not about birth, and I take a synchronic approach,[49] his study is significant and should be respected, especially in terms of methodology, which differs from previous research tools centered on heroic pattern and motif-centered classification in the following ways: 1) it is not an arbitrary but a logical selection of heroes from the same literary category and culture milieu; 2) he first

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[46] Ashmon states "The HB annunciations focus on God's covenants, people's faith/doubt, annunciations focus on kings, the king's divinity (in Egypt), and the supremacy of a god in a pantheon and (in Egypt) the supremacy of that god's priests." Scott A. Ashmon, *Birth Annunciations in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East: A Literary Analysis of the Forms and Functions of the Heavenly Foretelling of the Destiny of a Special Child* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2012), 366.

[47] Edward L. Greenstein, "The Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern in Mesopotamia," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. John J. Collins, Tracy M. Lemos, and Saul M. Olyan, BJS 357 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 17–35 (20).

[48] E. L. Greenstein, "The Fugitive Hero Narrative Pattern in Mesopotamia,"26.

[49] My concern is not with hero pattern; for Greenstein 'birth' is not his particular interest.

does a detailed analysis of these stories, then inductively draws a common pattern they share –
– a fugitive hero narrative pattern; 3) he places emphasis on the variations in the pattern.

With these considerations in mind, I confine this project to the literary category of 'narrative,' i.e. the HB birth narratives. I begin by analyzing individual texts, then draw common conclusions while focusing on both similarities and differences found in these narratives. There is still a significant difference between my work and that of Greenstein. Whereas his fugitive hero is always a *male*, and women frequently play a role of helper or of objects to obtain in order to illuminate their success, I focus, in the HB birth narratives, on the female hero: my analysis demonstrates their particular prominence in gender relationships.

1.2.2 Trickster and Female Hero

In biblical studies on the subject of tricksters, female heroes shine through clearly. Comparing the Esther story to the Joseph narrative, in her monograph *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, Niditch regards Esther as an "independent wisdom heroine."[50] She interprets the story in light of "underdog tale and social ethics":

> The response of the Book of Esther to injustice has implications not only for Jews' relations with an often hostile world but also for women's relationship to Judaism. The Book of Esther encourages attempts to work from within the system, to become an indispensable part of it. This model personified by Esther is strongly contrasted with that of Vashti. Direct resistance fails.[51]

Niditch explains that trickster characters appear so frequently in the tale of the ancestral heroes because "Israel has had a peculiar self-image as the underdog and the trickster."[52] Although

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[50] S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, 138.
[51] S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, 140.
[52] S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, Introduction, xv.

Esther is included in her analysis of the tales of Israelite heroes in terms of underdogs and tricksters, the characters she primarily deals with are *male* patriarchs in Genesis.

In fact, previous and prevalent studies on trickster figures have been centered on male figures in both biblical studies and classical folklore studies.[53] John E. Anderson, for example, examines Jacob's character with a focus on his deception and suggests that his success as a trickster is made possible by the support of the divine trickster.[54] On the other hand, "trickster literature is littered with stereotypical witches, temptresses, sexual predators, and whores: women who use evil cunning and subtle wiles to manipulate and control men," as David Williams puts it.[55] Williams, as one who contributed trickster studies to the field of neuroscience, makes a significant point that "even in stories where dominant men control women there is often the hint of inherent feminine power at the core of these tales" thus "when told by men, this power is seen as ominous, but looked at in another light such stories not only reveal the hysterical fear men can have regarding powerful women, but the very fact that women are not the 'weaker sex.'"[56] He presents Tamar, the biblical figure, and Scheherazade as counter evidence to the stories of negative female tricksters, while introducing an example of "reinterpretation of Eve as culture hero."[57] Williams' further observation on female trickster is worth citing:

> There are women tricksters who rise above oppression and enduring stereotypes, showing that women can be just as wily as men, just as smart, just as clever, and just as much in control—even when the world surrounding them is brutal and constantly against them. As

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[53] Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, with Commentaries by Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung (New York: Philosophical Library),1956; Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief Myth and Art* (Edinburgh: Canongate. 2008).

[54] John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle,* Siph 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

[55] David Williams, *The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Narrative* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 2012,162

[56] D. Williams, *The Trickster Brain*, 162.

[57] D. Williams, *The Trickster Brain*, 165–6.

a matter of fact, living in a world that has historically been dominated by men, one aspect of Trickster—antithesis of the status-quo—would seem most naturally to belong to women. For Trickster is notorious for challenging hierarchy… To the female, the dangers she must confront include being pregnant without a mate, being locked in a loveless marriage, and/or forced into servitude. Since she often has the force of tradition downgrading her because she is a woman, the female Trickster must utilize alternative ways to achieve her own desires for freedom, when any kind of overt action is impossible.[58]

The observation above suggests that the underdog[59] status is a distinguishing feature of the trickster. Naomi Steinberg, applying a cross-cultural comparison of trickster figures, puts an emphasis on the role reversal between the underdog and the one in authority: "Through trickery by both women and men, the underdog plays the part of power broker and the one expected to wield authority is under the thumb of the weak."[60] If this is the case, the use of any exploitative means for trickster to overturn the hierarchy is free from moral judgement. As Paul Radin notes, the trickster "possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being."[61]

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[58] D. Williams, *The Trickster Brain*, 170. The similar idea is given by Claudia Camp: "the exclusion of women (as of any disenfranchised group) from the established hierarchies of authority and power in a society must lead them to utilize less direct means to achieve their goals" (C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 124).

Williams offers a plausible explanation for the prevalence of male characters in trickster tales (idem, 168):

> the testosterone-driven male, consumed with thoughts of sexual adventure and hierarchical dominance, who is willing to take great risks to satisfy his urges, creates a far more comical, outlandish character. Trickster tales most often revolve around desire and frustration. It is the male's more pronounced reaching out (with his penis, his hands, or his inflated ego, or his drive to be top banana) that allows for the foil. His big ambitions make for a much greater fall. The male trickster is the fool because of his cravings for status, power, sex, food, and hedonistic pleasure; and trickster tales often infer the absurdity and shortsightedness of these desires—the senselessness of self-aggrandizement and the constant struggle for hierarchical dominance—which the Trickster often both symbolizes and mocks.

[59] Niditch sees that "the trickster is a subtype of the underdog" (S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, Introduction, xv).

[60] N. Steinberg, "Israelite Tricksters, Their Analogues and Cross-cultural Study," *Semeia* 42 (1988):1–13 (here 10).

[61] P. Radin, *The Trickster*, ix. See further, Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narrotology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 45–70.

In her monograph *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Camp illustrates various biblical female underdogs who take initiative such as Rebekah, Tamar, Shiphrah and Puah, Moses' mother and sister, Ruth and Naomi, Michal, the wise woman of Tekoa, and Esther as examples of the key to understanding "the extent to which this social pattern has imprinted itself on the biblical literature."[62] It is remarkable that Camp argues that the "aggressive and manipulative use" of Tamar's and Ruth's sexuality should not be viewed negatively due to their social context, namely, "their lack of authority or position."[63] According to her, the society members who are less privileged and less protected are allowed to use "any means available to claim what is rightfully theirs."[64] Alice Ogden Bellis also rightly suggests that "the lack of feminine authority and structural power made many of the women resort to trickery."[65]

In a similar vein, Melisa Jackson compares Tamar with Lot's two daughters, and in her later book does the same with Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, calling all six women "trickster matriarchs."

Tamar's payment from Judah is a kid. Goat stew and goat skins placed on Jacob's arms are the tools of trickery used by Rebekah to secure Isaac's blessing for her son (Gen 27:5–17). Jacob tricks Laban into giving Jacob his speckled and spotted goats (30:25–43). The disguise of Tamar that fooled Judah reminds one of Leah concealing her identity from Jacob on their wedding day and night (29:21–25). The rare usage of 'to lie with' as a reference to intercourse uttered by Lot's daughter (19:32) is also used as Rachel and Leah trade a night with Jacob for mandrakes (30:15–16). Laban's attendance at another sheep-

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[62] C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 124.
[63] C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 124. For the issue of the relationship between woman and institutional wisdom, see Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 150–4; idem, *Rediscovering Eve*, 80.
[64] C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 127.
[65] In discussing the general depiction of the women of Genesis. Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 81.

shearing (31:19) provided Rachel the opportunity to steal the teraphim before fleeing her father's land with Jacob.[66]

My analysis also sheds light on female characters as underdogs who employ a variety of strategies to alter their situation. Given that I am investigating all of the HB birth narratives, not only the ancestral mothers in Genesis but also more women will be thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, in line with Camp's observation, I try to avoid using binary thinking to judge whether their trickeries, manipulations, or deceptions are morally good or bad; rather, I will interpret them in terms of the survival strategies of socially less-privileged members.

The overall presence of female tricksters may invite us to uncover the text's presumed world, which will be presented at the conclusion of this project. In this regard, Arthur W. Frank, a socio-narratologist, points out: "tricksters help to understand the fundamental question, why do people need stories and companions?"[67] He suggests that the function of story is to provide people with a "selection/evaluation guidance system"[68] and "that selecting and evaluating requires that the stories also be boundary creators."[69] Franks continues,

> To be human is to confront a sequence of questioning throughout a life of which boundaries to respect, which to cross, and how to know the rules of crossing. Stories create the boundaries, yet they also are humans' companions in living with—though not necessarily within—these boundaries.[70]

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[66] M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 29–44 (here 44). See also idem, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*. See further a collection of essays on trickster, Exum and Johanna W. H. Bos (eds), *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power* (Atlanta: SBL Press), 1988.

[67] A. W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, 45.

[68] A. W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, 46.

[69] A. W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, 70.

[70] A. W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, 70.

Such socio-narratological observations[71] may help us grasp the idea of the presumed social context of the texts, where dynamics of boundary crossing may exist or be desired, as well as the alleged target audience, whom the biblical narrator may have aimed to reach by presenting certain types of (female) trickster figures.

1.3 Methods of the Study

This project examines all the birth narratives in the HB which, thus far, has not been attempted comprehensively. The individual analysis will be centered around female characters in light of their own narrative context, then common themes across the stories will be looked for. In this study, literary criticism, feminist criticism, and narrative criticism will be employed in a synchronic approach.

Literary Criticism: Synchronic and Text-centered reading

Inspired by Martin Buber's early attempt at a literary method, Meir Weiss's so-called "total interpretation," and Meir Sternberg's *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*,[72] scholars have attempted

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[71] It was David Herman who used the term socionarratology for the first time in his 1999 article. He takes a "'socionarratological' approach that situates stories in a constellation of linguistic, cognitive, and contextual factors" (David Herman, "Toward a Socionarratology: New Ways of Analyzing Natural-Language Narratives" in idem [ed], *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* [Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999], 218–46 [here 219]). The "narrative-hood," as he puts it, "cannot be ascribed to narrative form alone, but rather arises from the interplay between the semantic content of narrative; the formal features of the discourse through which such narrated content manifests itself; and the kind of inferences promoted via this interplay of form and content in particular discourse context" (idem, 229). See further, idem, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). Fewell offers an easier way to access the theoretical concept of socio-narratology: "Socio-narratology explores the sociality of narrative, in terms of both how stories are socially embedded and constructed and how stories function socially to reflect upon and to attempt to improve social life through both retrospective and prospective narration" (Fewell, "The Narrative Work of Biblical Children: Soundings from Genesis" in *Children and Methods: Listening To and Learning From Children in the Biblical World*, eds., Kristine Henriksen Garroway and John W. Martens, BSJS [Leiden: Brill, 2020], 127–142 [here 128 FN 4]). According to Frank, "socio-narratology attends to stories as actors, studying what the story does, rather than understanding the story as a portal into the mind of a storyteller" and "Stories and humans work together, in symbiotic dependency, *creating the social* that comprises all human relationship, collectivities, mutual dependencies, and exclusions"(italics original) (A. W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe* 13, 15).

[72] Martin Buber, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. by N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1968; originally in Hebrew, 1962); Meir Sternberg , *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). See further Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,

to read the Bible from the perspective of various literary approaches.[73] Distinguished from the dominant historical-critical method that atomizes text and reconstructs history, such critics put strong emphasis on the literary work of the text and explore style and narrative structure.

Since literary analysis has many variations, I will draw on the definition addressed by Cheryl Exum and David Clines for new literary criticism: "a strictly literary one, foregrounding the textuality of the biblical literature." [74] In addition, I take up Meir Weiss' "total interpretation" technique,[75] which is considered to be a "close reading" or a text-centered approach. Weiss' criticism puts stress on the existing final form of the text as a whole and on the close reading of the biblical texts; each individual literary work has its own importance within the larger literary unit. Taking this approach, this research presumes that birth narratives should not be viewed in isolation from the larger narrative.[76]

1994), Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, BLS 17/JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989 [first published in Hebrew, 1979]; Jean-Louis Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us the Story: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1990); Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, OBS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Y. Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans., Yael Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

[73] From the middle of the twentieth century, such a trend developed undergoing various influences from the comparative studies of ANE texts, Propp's plot development and function of characters as explained earlier in this chapter, and the various literary theories such as the literary critic of Northrop Frye and of Erich Auerbach who compared the Homeric narrative style with biblical narrative. See Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in idem, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991[1946]); Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

[74] David J. A. Clines and J. C. Exum, "The New Literary Criticism," Pages 11–25 in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, eds., Exum and Clines, JSOTSup143 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 16. For the concise information related to this issue, see Adele Berlin, "Literary Approach to the Hebrew Bible," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, eds., Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016),163–83.

[75] Meir Weiss, *The Bible From Within*: *The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magness, 1984; orig. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1962 [in Hebrew]).

[76] The importance of the continuity of the larger narrative has been emphasized by various scholars. Taking Gunkel's single narrative as the point of departure, von Rad continues along the same line but focuses on the larger framework. In his view, the developed "election tradition" ties together a number of early independent traditions. These traditions are arranged so as to support and connect the greater narrative from the call of Abraham to the death of Joseph (Gerhard von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 167). Rolf Rendtorff highlights, "the process by which the single narratives came to form the larger units," in Pentateuchal narrative (Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup 89 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990; orig. in German: *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch*, BZAW 147, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976], 191). Van Seters' reading of the Biblical text as a single literary unit brings deserved attention to its compositional design, movement and structural analysis. Identifying the Yahwist as a historian whose work is comparable to the works of Greek and Mesopotamian antiquity in form and subject, he regards Genesis as the Yahwist's ancient archaeologia or prologue to the national history. These debates are

Feminist Criticism

Feminist biblical criticism has been gathering momentum since Phyllis Trible's attempt to depatriarchalize the biblical text.[77] Since then, various theories of feminist criticism have developed, bringing spirited discussions of various women characters to the surface. These theories have brought to the fore the female characters who have received the least attention and they have shed new light on them: Trible, for example, calls attention to Hagar as "the first person in scripture whom a divine messenger visits and the only person who dares to name the deity."[78]

Giving attention to gender subordination and exploitation, the main intentions of early feminist analysis are either to uncover the male-centered texts in which women appear as passive and instrumental, or to reconstruct female images and roles from gender-biased patriarchal texts or androcentric hermeneutic, putting emphasis on their dominant, active character. Others try to provide counter-readings against the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible.

The development of feminist biblical interpretation also includes the questions: How have certain texts been utilized by women or men through history for their own interest: and How have authoritative traditions of interpretation or mainstream scholarship from both secular and

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largely derived from various interpretations of the "promise themes," i. e., land, progeny, blessing etc., which are dominant in the patriarchal narratives. It is of particular interest that the promise theme plays an important role in both theological and literary-historical analysis (John van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992]). A significant and comprehensive approach is proposed by Deborah Steinmetz. On the basis of Rank's Freudian analysis of 'family romance,' she views kinship "as a symbolic structure which represents the ability of the society to survive and to continue to transmit its cultural heritage." (Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis*, LCBI [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991],148). It is worth noting her attention to the continuity of the patriarchal narrative. The family faces either the threat of extinction or a serious internal conflict, e.g., fraternal or father-son conflict. In each generation, the family attempts to resolve this. Its destiny is to retain a unique identity and to pass on that identity to the future generations.

[77] Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *JAAR* [1973]: 30–48; idem, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives,* OBT 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[78] P. Trible, "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection," in idem, *Texts of Terror*, 9–35 (here 28).

theological critics excluded feminist biblical scholarship? Hence, each interpreters' particular context becomes a key feature of a later stage of feminist criticism. The awareness of the wider sociopolitical and cultural contexts leads to a new and more complex mode of analysis, represented by "intersectionality"[79] The intersectional framework focuses on "Kyriarchy"[80] which encompasses all the variables of race, class, sexuality, colonialism, disability, heteronormativity, etc. in response to the limited dichotomous gender dualism of masculine and feminine, which often ignores "wo/men of color/Two-Thirds World wo/men."[81] This issue has been addressed especially by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. My approach will not always seek to take into account all of the intersectional issues that may arise. In order to ensure a sufficient focus on my feminist perspective, other factors like ethnicity and class will have to be considered for specific examples (chs 2 and 7). However, this will be an exception rather than the rule.

Among these debates I would like to refer to some notable examples of existing scholarship focused on female characters that are relevant to my subject. Ester Fuchs asserts that the appearance of biblical mothers is limited to occasions when sexuality or reproductive ability is needed; their roles are in support of male interests. Fuchs explains,

…woman has no control over her reproductive potential. YHWH has control and he is often anthropomorphized in the biblical narrative…The literary constellation of male characters

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[79] A term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989).

[80] A term coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies,* eds., Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 1–23. "Kyriarchy" is derived from Greek κύριος ("lord, master") and ἄρχω ("to lead, govern").

[81] E. S. Fiorenza (ed.), *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, 10.

surrounding and determining the fate of the potential mother dramatizes the idea that woman's reproductive potential should be and can be controlled only by men.[82]

J. Cheryl Exum takes the view that the recurrent theme of the sterile matriarch works as a patriarchal strategy, thereby ascribing their procreative power to the deity. Exum focuses on how maternal instincts and patriarchal texts interact: whereas there is female action to protect their son(s) and to ensure their interest(s), there is male reaction, a patriarchal strategy to establish control ascribing female procreative power to the deity.[83]

In relation to their points, my reading will demonstrate how women in HB birth narratives act in pursuit of their own ambitions and desires rather than male interests. In addition, I will argue that men often impede procreation. For example, Chapter 2 discusses how Abraham's reproductive ability is tested, whereas women are central to fertility power.

The salutary aspect of feminist studies is that they give rise to diverse interpretations that challenge dominant readings which are by and large male-centered. Despite their meaningful contributions, the feminist perspective is mainly limited to gender relationships, power, and control.[84] On the other hand, the continuity of the larger narrative, narrative intention, coherent theme and plot, style, and structure based on in-depth analysis of the Hebrew text, etc., are often overlooked. In her attempt to identify an overarching theme from the overall HB birth

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[82] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 135. See also, idem, "Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative," *MQ* 23/2 (1982): 149–60; repr., in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, 77–84.

[83] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOT Sup 163 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 94–147.

[84] For further studies in this field, see Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*; Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*; Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Adele Reinhartz, "Feminist Criticism and Biblical Studies on the Verge of the Twenty-First Century," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine, FCB 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*; Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Janice P. De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an: A Cultural-Narrative Reading of the Hebrew Bible Barrenness Narratives,* BibInt 162 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

narratives, Yairah Amit's perspective deserves special attention.[85] Starting from analyzing the birth of Samson, and then comparing it with other birth narratives, Amit points out that the particular tendency of HB birth narratives is "minimalizing the importance of the figure of the father" and "the place of the father is filled by God."[86] Further, she notes that woman is set at the center of the action, whereas a secondary role is assigned to the father. In this way, the creative power of woman is recognized while the father's natural role as a progenitor is not entirely disregarded. Taking Amit's deep understanding of the overall characteristics of the HB birth narratives into account, my research goes a step further to conduct a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the birth narrative genre. In my reading, emphasis is placed not only on women's roles as key characters, but also on their resourcefulness.

Narrative Criticism: Reading Strategies Ranging from Reader-Response, Deconstruction, to Bakhtinian Theories and Bal's Counter-Coherence

Whereas close reading has more to do with analyzing text-based information, my reading does not overlook that it is readers who interpret text and determine its meaning.[87] Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn explains the importance of the role of the reader who interacts with the text in the reading process:

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[85] Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife."

[86] Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife," 154–6.

[87] "Reader-response critics study the dynamics of the reading process in order to discover how readers perceive literature and on what bases they produce or create a meaning for any given work" (Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism: A New Approach to the Bible* [SPCK, London, 1993], 16). The variety of theories associated with reader-response criticism, ranging from psychological/subjective, interactive/phenomenological, social/structural, to cultural and feminist model, makes it hard to be precisely definable (Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading; Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), idem, *The Art of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Jane P. Tompkins (ed), *Reader-Response Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Wane Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1983); Robert Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984); George Aichele et al (eds), *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 20–69.

As readers, we are not mere recipients of a given meaning. The text only comes alive when we engage it…. Since meaning is a product of the interaction between reader and text, what counts as 'in' the text is always significantly determined by reading conventions and readerly values."[88]

According to Erich Auerbach, "the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent" in the biblical storytelling.[89] Sternberg suggests that biblical narrative is often fraught with gaps and ambiguities, which is considered by Alter as "the art of reticence."[90] Similarly Amit points out that "the narrator achieves a level of ambiguities that he may have wished for in depicting this complex characters."[91] It is then the responsibility of competent or critical readers to fill in textual gaps or silences with subjectivity, in order to uncover rich meaning and implication beneath the surface narrative. Such reading practice presupposes that 1) the text is indeterminate and unreliable;[92] thus, 2) the text does not provide a univocity of meaning. In that irony, ambiguity, multivalence and multivocality are recognized as the nature of textuality, deconstruction and Bakhtinian theory which form the basis for my reading strategies.

First of all, deconstructive criticism dismantles any hierarchical structure including self/other and subject/object dichotomies,[93] thus inviting readers to rethink "the secondary,

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[88] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 1993, 50.

[89] E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 11–12.

[90] M. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 186–229; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114–31.

[91] Y. Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 81–2.

[92] "We experience biblical characters as mediated through a narrator who selects and shapes what we experience." They consider the narrator to be unreliable: the "narrator is not the author but a fictional construct" (Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 1993, 52), see also ibid, 201; Y. Amit, Reading Biblical Narrative, 97.

[93] According to Mark Allan Powell, "texts "deconstruct" themselves into endless labyrinths of possible meaning. Deconstruction, then invites readers to approach texts creatively and to appreciate their ability to generate an unlimited plurality of meaningful effects" (Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 17). David Jobling argues that "the text's system of meaning fails to achieve the coherence" (David Jobling, *1 Samuel: Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998], 13). See also David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BIS 21, Leiden: Brill, 1996; G. Aichele et al. (eds), *The Postmodern Bible*, esp. 118–25.

eccentric, lateral, marginal, parasitic, borderline."[94] I concur with Gunn and Fewell's opinion on this issue.

> …we understand the texts to be inherently unstable, since they contain within themselves the threads of their own unravelling. Language is always slipping. In order to make a point, the narrator must always imply the counterpoint. To construct the narrative world the narrator must suppress something—something that a suspicious reader may choose to dig up. 'Deconstructive' criticism seeks to expound the gaps, the silences, the contradictions, which inhabit all texts, like loose threads in a sweater, waiting to be pulled.[95]

Feminist critics have close affinity with deconstruction in that they challenge and resist[96] traditional dominant readings or authoritative interpretations implanted in the male-centered world, thereby subverting the predominantly androcentric hermeneutic. So it is with this study that attempts to restore marginalized female power: chapter two, for example, suggests an alternative reading of how the idea of male infertility and female fertility is embedded; chapters three and four underline female control over the patriarch(s).

It is also true, however, that our stories, as they are male-centered stories generated by men, reflect both patriarchal values and worldviews. On the one hand, the narrator criticizes or even mocks patriarchs, explicitly or implicitly, but on the other hand, the narrator's intervening voice defends them.[97] The presence of plurality of perspectives in the text can be explained by

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[94] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 44. On deconstructive interpretation, *The Postmodern Bible* edited by George Aichele et al (1995, 130) explains, "These readings have been highly unorthodox as they have rejected certain well-established and central values: the univocity of meaning, the privileging of the author's intention (or any other point of origin), the location of meaning "in" the text, the separability of the text's "inside" from tis "outside" (text from reader, text from context), the objective reality of history, and so forth….As a practice of reading, deconstruction makes explicit what is hidden, repressed, or denied in any ordinary reading."

[95] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 1993, 10.

[96] Judith Fetterley argues that "The first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male that has been implanted in us." The consequence of this exorcism is the capacity for what Adrienne Rich describes as revision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1978, xxii [with reference to George Aichele et al. (eds), *Postmodern Bible The Bible and Culture Collective*, 37).

[97] Each case, such as Abraham, Lot, Judah, and others, will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical model on dialogism in the novel which was applied to the Bible by his followers.[98]

> Novelistic dialogue is pregnant with an endless multitude of dialogic confrontations, which do not and cannot resolve it, and which, as it were, only locally (as one out of many possible dialogues) illustrate this endless, deep-lying dialogue of languages; novel dialogue is determined by the very socio-ideological evolution of languages and society. A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born: co-existence and becoming are here fused into an indissoluble concrete unity that is contradictory, multi-speeched and heterogeneous.[99]

Bakhtin introduces the term heteroglossia for indicating multiple conflicting voices or polyphony.[100] I posit that there are multiple voices rather than a single dominant voice in the stories examined in this study, which are dialogic narratives.[101] Bakhtins' double-voiced

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[98] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980 [orig.1969]); Stephen Prickett, *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For biblical scholarship that applied Bakhtinean theories, see Robert M. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History; Part Two—I Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Hugh White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993); Hugh Pyper, *David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1–15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood*, BibInt 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1996). See further *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed., Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007); Geoff R. Webb, *Mark at the Threshold: Applying Bakhtinian Categories to Markan Characterisation*, BIS 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[99] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*: *Four Essays*, eds., Michael Holquist, trans., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), 365.

[100] Bakhtin developed the concepts of 'polyphony' borrowed from music in his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, and later extended dialogism through the concept of 'heteroglossia,' literally "other tongues," in *The Dialogical Imagination*.

[101] At least the corpus of Genesis–2 Kings, called the "primary story" according to Gunn and Fewell, and "most of the shorter stories such as Ruth, Jonah, Daniel 1–6" are considered dialogic narrative (Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible,* 6–7). Each character, not subordinated to the author's voice, interacts with others in a particular context; they represent their own object, ideology, perspective, and values; any character's voice is "unfinalizable." Bakthin writes, "Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story; he is the one who tells us how the narrator tells stories, and also tells us about the narrator himself. We acutely sense two levels at each moment in the story…The narrator himself, with his own discourse, enters into this authorial belief system along with what is actually being told" (M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 314).

discourse, which is central to the concept of heteroglossia, is also a significant point to which my reading pays attention. Bakhtin explains,

> Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the form for its incorporation), is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they — as it were — know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized."[102]

Bakhtin's analysis provides this research with a way of reading that emphasizes diversity and plurality within the biblical text. The principle of the double-voicedness is that a single utterance of a narratorial voice or characters' speech/behaviour can convey (more than) two distinct messages through communication intersecting between narrator and narrate (reader), and between characters, which is used constantly in this study. This principle will be applied on several occasions, for example, in analyzing: the communication between divine visitor(s) (God), Abraham, and Sarah (Genesis 18:13–15), in Chapter 2; Rebekah's understanding of the divine oracle, in Chapter 3; Jacob's speech to Rachel in response to her asking to give her son (Genesis 30:1–2), in Chapter 4; the dual meaning of Judah's saying "(Tamar) is more righteous than I" (Gen 38:26), in Chapter 6; the midwives' speech to Pharaoh, as well as the behaviour

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[102] M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in *Dialogic Imagination*, 324. As an easier way to account for, I borrow Hugh Pyper's saying that "the speech of a character within a text always represents the overlay of (at least) two different dialogic situations in the one form of words — the dialogue between characters and the dialogue between author and reader. In Bakhtin's terminology, these word are 'double-voiced'" (H. Pyper, *David as Reader*, 69). See also White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis*, 59–60.

of Moses' mother in reaction to the Pharaoh's decree, in Chapter 7; the speech act of Samson's mother in delivering the divine message to Manoah and adding "until his death" in terms of the Nazirite period, in Chapter 8; Eli's (putative) consoling speech to Hannah on the issue of her childlessness, and her vow to dedicate her son to Shiloh for "all his life," in Chapter 9.

Further, the crucial point drawn from Bakhtin's multiple conflicting voices are the importance of social context. Bakhtin claims that Heteroglossia "represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the past and the present, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form." [103] So too reflect our stories — the HB birth narratives — "multileveled and multivoiced"[104] ideologies, with their particular depictions of gender, class, and ethnicity. Such "a dialogue of social forces"[105] represents an "intricate social and intellectual position within a society,"[106] which exposes social issues of that period, thereby allowing us to consider the contexts of the stories' production with questions such as why women feature so prominently, what these stories are attempting to achieve, and to whom are they speaking.

Mieke Bal's counter-coherence has influenced my reading too, which is not significantly different from the fundamental concepts of deconstructive criticism and Bakhtinian theories in terms of multiplicity and breaking hierarchical values, [107] as I present possible counter-readings that may challenge the prior dominant readings.[108] Bal points out in her book *Lethal Love*, that "the dominant reading" continued in western culture denies the importance of

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[103] M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination,* 291.

[104] M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publications, 1973), 33

[105] M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 365.

[106] H. Pyper, *David as Reader,* 69.

[107] See Mieke Bal, "Introduction" in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, BLS 22 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

[108] Partly also by Ilana Pardes' work, *Countertraditions in the Bible* inspired by Bal, where she tries to reconstruct an "antipatriarchal perspective" from "an examination of the marks of patriarchal mode of censorship" (Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, 2).

women in the Bible and puts emphasis on male interests. Against such popular gender ideologies, she has intended to provide alternative readings as "deconstructing the dominance of male-centeredness."[109] In *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, Bal provides a concept of counter-coherence against textual coherence:

> Inherent to my project is to tease out of the book what has hitherto been underexamined. In order to change the perspective, the established priorities are reversed. What is seen to be central will be marginalized, and what has been treated as marginal will become central.[110]

> A countercoherence relates the "official" reading to what it leaves out; it relates the texts to the needs of the reader; it relates everything that is denied importance to the motivations for such denials. The countercoherence will start precisely where repression is the most flagrant. Since men are said to lead the game, I will start with the women; since conquest is said to be the issue, I will start will loss; since strength is said to be the major asset of the characters, I will start with the victims.[111]

In this project, I also start with the women since the interpretation of the HB birth narratives which has prevailed hitherto has been male-centered: the female is male-dependent or subordinated to her husband, passive, and at fault for childlessness, whereas the male is dominant, potent, faithful, and authoritative over the female. Above all, the HB birth narratives are generally identified with male names: The Birth of Abraham's Two Sons, Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis); The Births of Lot's Two Sons, Moab and Ben Ammi (Genesis); The Births of Isaac's Twin Sons, Esau and Jacob (Genesis); The Births of Jacob's Twelve Sons(Genesis); The Birth of Judah's Twin Sons, Perez and Zerah (Genesis); The Birth of Moses (Exodus);

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[109] Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1–8.

[110] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.

[111] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 17.

The Birth of Samson (Judges); The Birth of Samuel (1Samuel). In my reading, however, the main characters who lead the stories are women. My first step in keeping with Bal's antithetical approach is to name these narratives after women: The birth narrative of Sarah and Hagar; The narrative of Rebekah; The narrative of Leah and Rachel; The narrative of Lot's two daughters; The narrative of Tamar; The narrative of daughters (Moses' mother and other women); The narrative of the unnamed mother of Samson; The narrative of Hannah.[112]

Following Bal's insight, I am going to establish its own counter-coherence reading against the grain of the univocal patriarchal reading. I hope to show the reversal throughout the entire set of HB birth narratives: how these women, as key figures, move the stories forward; how they take the lead and act at decisive or critical moments. In this way, the result will open up a new agenda for women's participation in the formation of ancient Israel's national identity, which has previously been focused on patrilineal inheritance and male-oriented heroes.

To summarize, this project examines each HB birth narrative through close reading with a synchronic approach, paying attention to its continuity within a larger narrative complex, and thus providing its own overarching theme. I will foreground the female characters, their initiative and prominence, as well as character motivations, and attempt to illuminate how women, rather than men, serve as main protagonists, moving the plot forward. In this way, I read them in the context of gender relationships from a feminist perspective, while deconstructing the gender-biased view. Furthermore, I suggest alternative- or counter-readings to androcentric dominant readings, in favor of multiple voices of text and diversity of interpretation guided by Bakhtin's and Bal's thoughts. Through this study, some helpful

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[112] In an attempt to recover marginalized characters, Hagar, Lot's two daughters, and Tamar who have received the least attention will be treated equally with other women characters in my analysis of the female characterization of the HB birth narratives.

insights are expected to be offered: 1) These are the stories of women; 2) Women take on the role of the social underdog, while men take on the role of the powerful, frequently exercising oppressive authority, which results in 3) The ultimate subversion of established gender ideologies: it is female agency and male ineffectiveness that the HB birth narratives demonstrate.

1.4 Source Material

I set boundaries that limit the scope of my investigation to a specified genre: the birth narrative in the Hebrew Bible. How do we define "narrative"? I follow Westermann's definition: "a narrative gives literary form to a sequence of events leading from tension to its resolution."[113] Hence, the story, to a considerable extent, stands as a self-contained unit, even though a large number of the HB narratives are part of a continuing storytelling within a larger narrative complex. Therefore simple genealogical lists or birth reports or annunciations[114] that do not belong to the *narrative* genre are left out in my investigation. In addition, to satisfy the criteria for *birth* narrative, the topic of 'birth' should be at the very core of the narrative. For this reason, the account of Ruth's giving birth to Obed (Ruth 4:13–17) is excluded from this project for it serves as a concluding episode following the long sequence of the stories of migrants' return as well as the survival and success of widowed women, Naomi and Ruth. In a similar vein, the story of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4), in which birth appears as a secondary event or as an anecdote among Elisha's legendary miracle stories, falls outside the scope of this present

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[113] C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 36.

[114] For example, the birth and death of the first son of David and Bathsheba, and the birth of their second son, Solomon (2 Sam11:2-12:25), will be not counted in this research since the key subject matter of these stories is crime, punishment, and repentance rather than birth. I also will not count the annunciation of the birth of Josiah (1 Kings 13:2) and the Immanuel prophecy (Isaiah 7:14–17).

discussion. This is not to say that these stories are not important or interesting; there is no room here to discuss the additional set of issues, but they will be included in my future research.

We have eight individual birth narratives in the Hebrew Bible: 1) Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16:1–16, 17:15–22, 18:1–15, 21:1–21), 2) Rebekah (Gen 25:19–34), 3) Leah and Rachel (Gen 29:21–30:24, 35:16–20), 4) Lot's two daughters (Gen 19: 30–38), 5) Tamar (Gen 38:12–30), 6) Moses' mother (and other women) (Exod 2:1–2:10), 7) Mother of Samson (Judg 13:1–25), 8) Hannah (1 Sam 1:1–28).

As enumerated above, all but three of them are in Genesis. The boundaries of the above narrative unit is determined by the plot sequence criteria — exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. The division of chapters and verses, however, are not always definite due to its interwoven arrangement within the larger narrative: it is often difficult to identify precisely where the narrative begins and ends. Accordingly, when necessary, the actual discussion will extend beyond this scope: for example, Exod 1 is also discussed as a prologue to Exod 2. Furthermore, some of these narratives deal with more than one birth and more than one woman.

The analysis will appear in the order of the biblical passages. The exception to this rule is the birth narrative of Lot's two daughters; I arranged it, for convenience, after the narratives of Sarah–Hagar, Rebekah, and Leah and Rachel since they all give birth to children belonging to Abraham's line. In addition, to make it easier to approach and understand, I divide them into three parts based on the related theme. The first part is about women (Sarah and Hagar, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel) who take the initiative which results in fulfilling the covenant made with Abraham — the blessing of procreation for his lineage. The issue is raised of family competition centered on reproduction and childbirth, as well as inheritance. The second part deals with socially vulnerable women–a virgin daughter and a childless widow (Lot's two daughters, Tamar) who are denied the right to be mothers by their own father (in-law); they fix

the problem on their own through an illicit sexual relationship.[115] While the first and second part are from the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, the third part is from other books in the Hebrew Bible: at the beginning of Exodus, nearly at the end of Judges, at the beginning of 1 Samuel. The third part is about ambitious mothers (Moses' mother, Samson's mother, Samuel's mother) who influence the future of the child.

A brief outline of the subsequent chapters and how this progresses the argument is as follows:

Chapter 2 offers not just an analysis of the story of Sarah and Hagar but provides a wider critique of the way that the issues of fertility and infertility as well as the motif of barrenness are dealt with in the literature. This chapter breaks gender stereotypes about the blessed fertile patriarch and his infertile wife. This chapter will discuss how Sarah tests Abraham's procreative power while highlighting her fertility power gained through divine intervention, and will shed light on Hagar's equal importance to Sarah. In addition, the issue of marginalization, victimization, and oppression will be addressed.

Chapter 3 focuses on Rebekah's control over the issue of family inheritance. The ambiguous meaning of the oracle she received will be examined in the first section of this chapter. In line with this interpretation, the second part will explain the motif of her actions, and how maternal partiality prevails over paternal partiality. Rebekah's competence in using the information to her advantage, as well as her renunciation of her favorite son for his sake will be discussed in greater depth.

Chapter 4 examines not only Leah's and Rachel's sororal competition for fertility, but also their cooperation and negotiation when their interests are aligned: I will also explain how these women calculate their benefits practically and make a daring decision for a fresh start while

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[115] Ultimately they contribute to prosper Terahite and Judah's line.

persuading their husband to take an action. In addition, I will lay special emphasis on Rachel's self-vindication in regard to her honor on the childbirth issue as well as her defiance and trickery against the patriarch's authority.

Chapter 5 examines another example of sororal cooperation — Lot's two daughters. I will demonstrate the proactive daughters in contrast to their father who is irresponsible in the face of a crisis. This chapter provides the socioeconomic reason for their illicit sexual intercourse. It is highly appreciated in this chapter that women are playing an active role in ensuring the continuation of the family line and ongoing generations.

Chapter 6 presents a case similar to Lot's daughters: Tamar, the childless widow, deprived of her right to remarry under levirate marriage by Judah, her father-in-law. Tamar's long-term strategies are thought to be aimed at winning her case: she makes herself a defendant and her judge an accomplice. I will emphasize her scholarly and active character in manipulating customary laws to protect her right to motherhood.

Chapter 7 examines a number of daughters' cooperative resistance to Pharaoh's oppression in light of an imbalance of power in the relationship between dominant and subordinates. In applying James Scott's model of subordinates' resistance strategies, I demonstrate women's wisdom in manipulating the decree's loopholes while maintaining conforming behaviours. I will discuss how women cautiously and wisely save Moses and provide him with the best environment possible through the adoption.

Chapter 8 looks into a woman who is chosen to be the mother of a charismatic hero, Samson. This chapter focuses on her manipulation of divine messages to her advantage when she delivers them to Manoah, her husband. Another ideological interpretation is proposed in regard to her speech act that makes her son to be a lifelong Nazirite, which implies her ambition to wield her influence. In the larger narrative complex, I will compare her character to the other warrior female heroes introduced at the beginning of the book of Judges; I will propose an

alternative reading of her as a countermodel of Deborah, who is regarded as the ideal Israelite mother.

Chapter 9 discusses Hannah's initiative and involvement in the destiny of her child Samuel by dedicating him to the Shiloh sanctuary, the religious center of that society, for all his life. I will demonstrate her autonomous and independent personality as well as her persuasive communicative skill, while dealing with the issue of her religious vow as a way for her to make an early investment in her child's success. In light of thematic continuity, the latter part of this chapter will compare Hannah to other women characters in the HB birth narratives.

Chapter 10 will gather the results of each narrative analysis and demonstrate the coherent theme that runs through these narratives. The social context as well as the theological implication underlying the literary representation of these female characters will be explained in greater depth.

Part I Fertility and Inheritance: Women's Participation in Fulfilling the Promises to the Patriarchs

Chapter 2   Male Infertility and Female Fertility in the Stories of Sarah and Hagar (the Births of Isaac and Ishmael)

When considering that the book of Genesis begins its first chapter with the divine command and blessing "be fruitful and multiply" (פרו ורבו),[116] it seems clear that fertility is not only God's command but also God's blessing and promise.[117] Indeed after the primeval stories, the following stories present how Abraham, the forefather, whom YHWH called, successfully leaves great descendants in line with his covenant across three generations.[118] Without doubt, women are deeply involved in the stories of procreation and inheritance by which the patriarchal promises move forward: throughout the birth narratives these women appear as dominant and active characters.

It is ironic, however, that most of the women who will feature as mothers in these narratives are first presented as barren women[119] who bring the divine promise of the numerous progeny into crisis. Given the above-mentioned theological idea, it is obvious that infertility is viewed negatively even as a divine curse or punishment.[120] For example, Gen 20:18 describes YHWH's closing up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech as a punishment for his taking

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[116] Claus Westermann points out that the pair "be fruitful/multiply" in Genesis Ch.1 is associated with the divine promise of increase (Gen 16:10; 22:17; 26:4, 24). C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*.

[117] See further Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis,* JSOTSup 96 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), esp. 22–32. Cf. The pain accompanied with childbirth is understood as a curse in Gen 3:16.

[118] C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*; Joel Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

[119] And also Manoah's wife and Hannah outside of Genesis. For Leah, see Chapter 4.

[120] Candida R. Moss, and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 12–4.

Sarah. Despite the males' missteps, it is not male bodies but the women's bodies that become barren. There are other related passages outside Genesis: Exodus 23:26 describes the *absence* of miscarriage and barrenness (לא תהיה משכלה ועקרה) as a divine *blessing*; Hosea Ch. 9 presents childlessness as the result of a divine curse, enumerating as the outcomes: no conception, no pregnancy, no birth (v. 11), a womb that miscarries, and dry breasts (v. 14).

Interestingly but regrettably, the imagery reflected in the above passages associates the infertility with the female not the male body.[121] Moreover, the biblical narrator invariably affirms that it is the woman/wife who is "barren" (עקרה), but never applies this term to a man in Genesis. In fact, the terminology "barren man" (עקר) appears only in Deut 7:14.[122] The underlying deep structure that shapes the cultural and religious mindset is that it is a woman who is responsible for infertility.[123]

Ascribing the problem of a childless household solely to the wife is very peculiar in light of other ANE texts.[124] The Ugaritic epic of Kirta (Keret) and Aqhat, the Mesopotamian Etana, and the Hittite Appu tale deal with how a childless male succeeds in having his descendants with the assistance of a deity. These stories have been compared to the Abraham narrative in

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[121] In regard to Exod 23:26, though there are quite a number of commentators who translate the phrase as "No one will miscarry or be barren in your land…," the language clearly uses a feminine form, which may be thus translated as "There will be no miscarrying woman or barren woman (עקרה) in your land."

[122] Observe the Israelite language and idea of anatomy that male seed (זרע, offspring) is implanted in a female womb. See M. Stol, "Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible." 142; Gafney contends that "nowhere in the Bible is a man accused of having 'bad' seed. The farmers who provided the language for the metaphor certainly knew that poor ground conditions were not the only cause for a failed crop" (W. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 30–31).

[123] Moss and Baden point out how the texts of the both OT and NT Scriptures formed the idea that "the vindication of women is explicitly tied to their ability to bear children." That "fertility is a sign of divine blessing, procreation an obligation, and infertility a sign of divine judgment and moral failure" is considered by Moss and Baden as "a master narrative running throughout the Bible." Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 14.

[124] There are several goddesses who bring fertility, namely Sumerian Inanna, Akkadian Ishtar, Ugaritic Anat, Canaanite Astarte, Egyptian Tawar, Tefnut, Heqet, and Greek Demeter. See further also the myth hierogamy that ensures fertility. See Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987 [1957]); Karel van Der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and the Babylonian Woman*, trans., Sara J. Denning-Bolle, BibSem 23 (Sheffield: JSOT Press.1994), 79–80.

terms of their similar patterns and themes: a childless family, divine instruction, lament of a childless father, and promise of offspring and the like.[125]

Despite the close affinity in terms of the common familial context and divine intervention within the Abraham narrative, these above-mentioned texts do not locate the problem in female infertility. By contrast, Gen 11: 30 states that Sarah is barren. Note that the wife of Appu makes a mockery of his failed attempts to get her pregnant; Sarah, in opposition, is faulted for Abraham's childlessness. Furthermore, these stories show that the matter of childlessness is the husband's concern and he is the prominent character, whereas in Genesis it is Sarah who takes the initiative to resolve it.[126] Hence we should inquire further about why our story goes in a direction opposite to that in the ancient parallels, thus challenging us to read it differently in terms of gender relations and reproductive power. Maybe Abraham is responsible for the childlessness; maybe he is infertile.

By and large, the stereotypical gender ideologies which have formed a male-centered or male-dominated concept for a long time are reflected in the words "the blessed fertile patriarchs and their infertile wives." It is worth mentioning Candida Moss and Joel Baden's recent work that attempts to demonstrate various biblical views on procreation and infertility.

> When it comes to infertility, the standard "religious model" is grounded in the assumption — derived from Genesis — that pregnancy, childbearing, and procreation are unequivocal goods, that childlessness that is chosen is intrinsically different from childlessness that results from biological impairment, and that women are responsible for infertility and childlessness. While these assumptions might appear reasonable, and might even be

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[125] For the stories in detail, see C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers,* 165–86; Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat,* SBLRBS 24 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Vol 1 of COS (1997); Gordon D. Young (ed.), *Ugarit in Retrospect and Prospect: 50 Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981); Baruch Margalit, *The Ugaritic Poem of AQHT: Text, Translation, Commentary,* BZAW 182 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011). In Greek mythology, virgin birth is frequently told in regard of the birth of heroes, which entitles them to be a son of god. However, this virginity is different from the female barrenness of the Hebrew Bible, although both result in miraculous birth. The former is mainly a situation before marriage with potential fertility, while the latter is after marriage with potential infertility.

[126] And also other women characters in the following birth narratives this project explores.

generally true, they are in need of reassessment.[127]

One author who tries to break out of the fixed idea that the female is at fault for childlessness in the Hebrew Bible is Mieke Bal. She reads the barrenness motif in the framework of a powerful deity (potent father) and powerless husbands (impotent men),[128] which reverses the predominant view that "men are presupposed to be both potent and fertile."[129] Breaking from such gender bias is a point of departure for our exploration of the birth narratives of the Hebrew Bible. In support of Bal's subversive reading, I would go one step further. This chapter will attempt to elucidate how the first HB birth narrative, the story of Abraham–Sarah–Hagar, can be reread from a different perspective: the infertile patriarch and his fertile wives.

My reading challenges one additional point: In regard to the issue of childbirth and reproduction of the ancestral mothers,[130] scholarly attention has mostly focused on their barrenness:[131] how they overcome physical barrenness thanks to the intervention of God who is conceptualized as masculine.[132] This approach often dismisses Hagar who was fertile from the beginning. Otherwise Hagar used to be discussed separately from the ancestral mothers but in a different context such as a reversed Exodus tradition,[133] thus reevaluating Hagar as a prototype for Moses (Dozeman) or a female Moses (Römer).[134] I read Hagar, however, as a

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[127] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 15–6.

[128] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, esp. 73–4.

[129] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry,* 266 (n.10).

[130] To avoid an unnecessary debate, in this project, I will use a term "ancestral mothers" rather than "matriarchs" which is defined as "an old and powerful woman in a family, or the female leader of a society in which power passes from mother to daughter" according to the Cambridge dictionary. I believe that there couldn't have been such a "matriarch" in ancient Israel. The term "patriarch" is used here in a wider sense despite the question recently raised by Carol Meyers ("Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *JBL* 133/1 [2014]:8–27).

[131] Mary Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Janice P. De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an.*

[132] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible"; J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women.*

[133] P. Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 28–9.

[134] Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *JBL* 117/1 (1998): 23–43 (here 29–30); Römer states "Hagar functions as a female Moses. Like him, she bears a double identity: she is an Egyptian slave who becomes the second wife of Abram, while Moses is a son of an Egyptian slave who gains admittance into Pharaoh's family" (T. Römer, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis," *SEA* 75 [2010]: 1–20 [here

female Abraham who receives a covenant, and as a significant character on a par with the barren ancestral mothers who experience transition from barrenness to fertility.[135] If barrenness denotes endangering procreation while divine intervention serves as its resolution as well as a divine blessing, the experience of near-death suffered by the expelled Hagar and Ishmael, followed by divine salvation serves a significantly similar function.[136]

It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest a different way of reading through a close literary analysis, without depending on conventional views of fertility/infertility and gender relations. My analysis in the following narrative raises several principal questions that are intended to challenge prior readings:

1) Is infertility is a female problem? In other words, is Sarah alone responsible for Abraham's childlessness?

2) Should Hagar be marginalized because she is not barren?

3) Do Sarah and Hagar just act as foils for Abraham?

4) Did Abraham indeed believe YHWH's promise?

5) Who actually contributes to fulfill the promise of many descendants given to Abraham?

The first section of this chapter starts from an inquiry as to whether Sarah is sure of her infertility (Gen 16: 1–6). The childless situation of Sarah and Abraham will be reconsidered in its ancient context, especially from Sarah's point of view. Analyzing the text through this lens, my reading suggests that Sarah tests Abraham's generative power by giving him Hagar. In support of this idea, the second section will examine the story of the three visitors' annunciation of Isaac's birth (Gen 18:1–15) in connection with the preceding divine announcement (Gen 17:15–22), calling attention to Abraham's sexual dysfunction or lack of sexual intercourse with

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14–5]). In addition, Römer argues that Hagar story is against Deuteronomistic exclusionist ideology (idem, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis").

[135] R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero," 157.

[136] Same idea goes for Lot's daughters and Tamar who are fertile but fall into the situation of being infertile due to the social circumstance–the lack of spouse, and also to Moses' mother who is in danger of losing her son (her community, in a broader sense, is in danger of losing all male infants).

Sarah, and consequently to his liability for Sarah's childlessness. Sarah's self-admiration for *her* procreative power, after giving birth to Isaac (Gen 21:1–7), will be read in this light. Considering a coherent thread of fertility–infertility running through the narratives, the third section (16:7–16; 21:8–21) focuses on Hagar's vital power as well as her experience of the peril of motherhood, which attributes to her a covenant with God as a female Abraham and divine intervention on par with Sarah. In addition, while marking out the resourcefulness of both Sarah and Hagar in preserving the safety of their child, the relationship between them will be examined in light of intersectionality. Last but not least, the ambiguity of all characters, including God, will be highlighted throughout this chapter.

2.1 The Question of Infertility: Sarah's Putting Abraham to the Test

Genesis 16:1–6 is framed by God's promise that Abraham[137] will have progeny. Sarah takes the initiative to propose a solution to their childlessness. She suggests that Abraham, her husband, take Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant,[138] as a wife. Abraham accepts Sarah's proposal, and Hagar becomes pregnant. Once she is pregnant, Hagar looks down on her mistress. With Abraham's permission, Sarah treats Hagar harshly; and as a result, Hagar flees.

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[137] Abraham and Sarah undergo name changes in Gen 17, from Abram to Abraham and from Sarai to Sarah. For convenience, this study will employ their changed names.

[138] Probably acquired from a Pharaoh in Egypt as a gift on Sarah's account (Gen 12:16). Wilda C. Gafney introduces a Midrash on Genesis in which Hagar is explained as a Pharaoh's daughter who was given to Sarah as a compensation for her trouble (Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017], 33, 40). Savina Teubal speculates that Hagar may have been an Egyptian princess adopted by Sarah (Savina J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Traditions of the Matriarchs* [New York: HarperSanFransisco, 1990], 46, 133). See also John W. Waters, "Who was Hagar?" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African-American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 187–205; Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, OTR (London: Routledge, 2000), 58.

The opening verse of Gen 16 simply states Sarah did not bear Abraham [children] (ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו). We cannot infer Sarah's infertility from this verse, but just her childless situation. It is important to distinguish between childlessness and infertility. Childlessness covers a wide range of circumstances: one can be childless by choice; it does not necessarily mean biological impairment. Infertility is more complex. WHO divides it into two types: "Primary infertility is the inability to have any pregnancy, while secondary infertility is the inability to have a pregnancy after previously successful conception."[139] What WHO clearly says is that "Infertility may occur due to male factors, female factors, a combination of male and female factors or may be unexplained."[140] And little wonder, in the world of ancient Israel — to a greater or lesser degree — they might have known it is not always woman who is unilaterally responsible for childlessness, as we have seen earlier from the Appu tale.

Sarah's infertility is known to first-time readers who have read the story in sequential order due to the earlier given information in Gen 11:30, "and Sarai was barren; she had no child" (ותהי שרי עקרה אין לה ולד). In fact, it is the one and only reference to Sarah using the term עקרה which is translated as "barren" in English. At this juncture, a question arises: What does "barrenness" denote? Is there a general consensus among biblical scholars about this term? English "barren" carries an agricultural connotation as the Oxford dictionary defines: a land too poor to produce much or any vegetation; a tree or plant not producing fruit or seed etc. In line with this agricultural or vegetal image, it is plausible that the Hebrew word עקרה is the equivalent of "barren" since it is derived from ʿqr "tear out by roots."[141] Though there is no

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[139] The World Health Organization website on the topic of "infertility." https://www.who.int/health-topics/infertility#tab=tab_1

[140] The World Health Organization website on the topic of "infertility."

[141] HALOT, TDOT. See also the term "zera" (זרע) of which the primary meaning is "seed" but which can mean also "semen" and "offspring." For the ancient concept of male seed implanted in a female womb, see further Marten Stol, "Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible," in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, eds., J. M. Law and V. R. Sasson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137–55.

clear-cut definition of עקרה, the "secondary infertility" defined by WHO does not seem appropriate for its meaning when considering its image of uprootedness. [142] It is also questionable whether the word 'barren' is referring to a permanent state or a more or less temporary one.

Thanks to the advance of modern medical science, various clinical interventions are used to diagnose infertility or subfertility not only of the female but also of the male partner by a laboratory evaluation of sperm or semen. However, in ancient Israel, it would have been impossible to know whether a couple's childlessness reflected a female inability to become pregnant or male deficiencies in the semen, except for the recurrent absence of live birth such as abortiveness or miscarriage, which may indicate female reproductive failure. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that barrenness in the biblical world perhaps signifies subfertility[143] rather than a permanent biological impairment as in the cases of eunuchs, castrated men, or males and females who show an absence of secondary sexual characteristics. Hence our understanding of the concept of infertility when reading these stories should be multidimensional,[144] taking into account subfertility — including miscarriage and stillbirth, biological impairment by nature, biological impairment by human intervention or by accident or disease, impotence, climacterium, e.g. menopause, andropause and so forth — apart from its state that is permanent or temporary.[145]

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[142] Exodus 23: 6 implies that a barren woman is distinguished from a miscarrying woman.

[143] If it is not a permanent biological impairment but subfertility, the divine intervention which is often regarded as a miracle, should be reconsidered.

[144] For the diverse perspective on the issue of procreation and infertility of the Biblical tradition, particularly in association with blessing and a curse, and social experiences, see Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*.

[145] In Mishnah and Talmud, four categories of people are assumed to have reproductive problems: androgyne, Aylonit (איילונית), a female who does not develop at puberty and is infertile, Saris (סריס), a male as a direct parallel to Aylonit. Saris is subdivided into two: Saris Hammah (סריס חמה) one who shows no symptoms of maturity until twenty years old, and is considered as a legal saris; Saris Adam (סריס אדם), one who has their sexual organs removed through human intervention. (Mishnah Yebamot 8.4; 8.5; 8.6, Niddah 5:9, Babylonian Talmud Yebamot 80a; Hagith Sivan, *Jewish Childhood in the Roman World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 170–208; Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* [New York: Judaica Treasury, 2004; 2d ed. 1903; repr.]. Yebamot 6.6 shows the rabbinic view that the responsibility of reproductive failure does not rest entirely on the female: "if a man married a woman and lived

With these intricate features in mind, let us place ourselves into the cultural context of Sarah and Abraham. The bottom line is that neither Sarah nor Abraham hears the narrator's voice informing readers that Sarah is barren. First-time readers are not informed of Sarah's age by Gen 17:17 that reports Abraham is ten years older than she,[146] but obviously Sarah herself knows their age.[147] Hagar bore Ishmael when Abraham was eighty-six years old (Gen 16:16); retrospectively, Sarah was seventy-five or seventy-six years old when she gave Hagar to Abraham.[148] Since they are equally advanced in age, she might harbor a suspicion in regard to their childlessness: was the problem with her or with Abraham? In sum, in the ancient world, such a question would remain unresolved unless a husband has sexual intercourse with another woman.[149]

In this sense, ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו (Gen 16:1) is understood as reflecting Sarah's perspective: she simply did not bear Abraham children, without knowing why. Further, the following verse demonstrates that Sarah is not recognizing herself as the source of the problem. Instead, she clarifies that it is *YHWH* who has kept her from bearing children.[150]

ותאמר שרי אל־אברם הנה־נא עצרני יהוה מלדת

and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, YHWH has kept me from bearing [children]. (16:2a)

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with her for ten years and she bore no child, he is not permitted to abstain [from his obligation to propagate]. If he divorced her she is permitted to marry somebody else, and the second [husband] may live with her for ten years. If she miscarries, he counts [the period of ten years] from the moment she miscarried. In addition, Nedarim 11. 12 states a wife as saying, "Heaven is between me and you," by which she claims that her husband is impotent, yet cannot be proven but only by God.

[146] "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child? (RSV)

[147] Whereas Abraham's advanced age is referred to implicitly in v. 3 ("ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan") and explicitly in v. 16 ("Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram."), Sarah's age is not mentioned. The promise of many descendants was made for the first time when Abraham was seventy-five years old (12:4); later, the promise of progeny of his own is given in Ch. 15 (vv. 3–4) but it was still unfulfilled until Abraham was eighty-six years old (16:16). Sarah was seventy-six years old at that time, judging from 16:16 and 17:17.

[148] Considering Hagar's pregnancy period.

[149] However, the wife, at least in ancient Israel, should keep her sexual purity since it practiced polygamous marriage, but not polyandrous marriage.

[150] Cf. Gen 30:2.

Commonly, the role of YHWH in fertility is linked to the Hebrew verbs עצר and פתח (to open) often followed by רחם (womb), thereby connoting an act of closing or opening the woman's womb, as attested in Gen. 20:18; 29:31; 30:22. However, in this verse Sarah uses לדת (to bear, beget) rather than רחם (הנה־נא עצרני יהוה מלדת). Accordingly, this passage may not be construed as an explicit way of indicating her perception that she is infertile; it is likely to be an expression blaming God since Sarah cannot figure out why she does not succeed in becoming pregnant.[151] On this issue, Trible also states that Sarah "attributes her barren plight to Yhwh and thus seeks to counter divine action with human initiative."[152]

There is a further possibility, however: YHWH's preventing her from bearing could be through Abraham's impotence or infertility.[153] Considering her doubt as to who is responsible for their childlessness, Sarah suggests to Abraham the practice of surrogate motherhood[154] through Hagar, her maidservant (שפחה).[155] This raises an intriguing possibility: is Sarah framing a plan to test Abraham's generative power?

Sarah's suspicion is embodied in אולי ("perhaps"), an adverb which conveys the speaker's skeptical or unconvinced attitude.[156]

בא־נא אל־שפחתי אולי אבנה ממנה

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[151] A different opinion is given by Teubal. She suggests that Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel remained childless as Mesopotamian priestesses (Naditu), based on 146 of the Hammurapi code, but later chose to have offspring by means of surrogacy and adoption through their handmaids, which I disagree with (S. J. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," in *Feminist Companion to Genesis,* eds., Athalya Brenner and Luise Schottroff, FCB [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 235–50 [here 235–40]).

[152] P. Trible, "The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honour of Bernhard W. Anderson*, eds., James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 221–46 (here 222).

[153] See also Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 57–8.

[154] Similar practices are associated with ancient Near East parallels such as the laws of Hammurabi (code 146), a Nuzi text, Old Assyrian marriage contract and a Neo-Assyrian text and more. See Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 119–21; John van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *JBL* 87 (1968): 401–8; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970; HB 1, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 128; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 444.

[155] The issue of sexual exploitation or trading will be addressed later in section 2.3.

[156] See further the uses of אולי in Genesis: 18:24, 28-32; 27:12; 24:5; 32:21.

Go then to my maidservant. Perhaps I shall be built through her.[157] (16:2b)

Hence, the expected outcomes are two. (1) If Hagar also fails to become pregnant, it is highly probable that Abraham is responsible. Then Sarah can avoid the social stigma of her reproductive failure.[158] (2) If Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarah has only to adopt the child. The expression אִבָּנֶה מִמֶּנָּה ("I shall be built through her") allows this inference: the stratagem is designed to enhance her own status rather than for the sake of Abraham.[159]

However, Sarah did not seem to be very concerned about the second option, or did not really wish for it to happen. That is why, later in the expulsion scene, she calls Ishmael the "son of this servant woman" rather than her "(adopted) son": "Cast out this servant woman with her son; for the son of this servant woman shall not inherit with my son Isaac" (גרש האמה הזאת ואת־בנה כי לא יירש בן־האמה הזאת עם־בני עם־יצחק 21:10b). In a pejorative sense, Sarah avoids calling Hagar and her son by their proper names,[160] but puts emphasis on their low rank by using "this servant woman" twice,[161] in contrast to calling her son "My son, Isaac."

Sarah's plan brought about the least desirable of all results from her point of view: a *quick* impregnation of Hagar. The references to Abrahams's age and the period of the events attested to in 12:4; 16:3, 16 imply that Hagar fell pregnant at once. It must be admitted that Hagar's becoming pregnant verifies Abraham's reproductive ability but does not prove Sarah's

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[157] Lit. "I shall be built" but possibly "I shall have sons" with either niph. of בנה or a denominative verb from בֵּן (GK, Sym). It is likely to be a play on words. Cf. Gen. 30: 3.

[158] On the issue of social expectation for motherhood, see further Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, esp. introduction.

[159] Fewell and Gunn. "Keeping the Promise (Genesis 11–22)," in *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 39–55 (here 45); R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah*, Semeia 39 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2001), 86.

[160] It is worth noticing that Yahweh's messenger (מלאך יהוה) calls her by her proper name 'Hagar' first, then 'maid' שפחה (16:8) as opposed to Sarah and Abraham who never use her proper name. Before then, her name has been mentioned only in the course of narration (16:1, 3, 4, 6b).

[161] I do not mean that אמה here is more pejorative than שפחה (Gen 16:1–3), which shall be discussed more in detail in 2.3.

barrenness. She may be merely subfertile. Nevertheless, the situation must have made Sarah feel a sense of inferiority and of defeat in comparison with Hagar who, as a mere maid, ranked low in the social scale.

ויבא אל־הגר ותהר ותרא כי הרתה ותקל גברתה בעיניה

And he went into Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress was lessened in her eyes. (16:4)

This verse is open to various interpretations, depending on how to determine the subject of תרא (she saw), תקל (she was lessened) and the possessive suffix בעיניה (in her eyes). Most English translators and commentators interpret that passage to mean that when she (Hagar) saw that she (Hagar) was pregnant, she (Sarah) was lessened in her (Hagar) eyes.[162] Some translations take a step further: Hagar despised her mistress (NEB); Hagar looked with contempt on her mistress (RSV); When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress (NIV). Such renderings give the reader a negative impression of Hagar, which is not explicitly stated in the current text. Phyllis Trible also points out the ambiguous nature of this verse. In accordance with NJV ("Her mistress was lowered in her esteem"), she interprets that to mean,

> Seeing, that is, perceiving her own conception, Hagar acquires a different vision of Sarai. Hierarchical blinders disappear. The exalted mistress decrease while the lowly maid increases. Not hatred but a reordering of the relationship is the point."[163]

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[162] Cf. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress (NIV); and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes (KJV); and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress (RSV); When she knew she was with child, she despised her mistress (NEB). These readings are, in all probability, influenced by Sarah's own speech in the immediately following verse 5 (כי ותרא הרתה ואקל בעיניה), which must be distinguished from the narrator's voice.

[163] P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 224. Similarly, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan proposes that Hagar's new attitude addresses her active voice as a sign of *defiance* in her pursuit of *equality* with Sarah ("Neither Here Nor There: Boundary and Identity in the Hagar Story," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading*: *Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds., Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey K. Kuan [Saint Louis: Chalice, 2006], 70–83 [here 80, 82]).

The relationship between the two women is not only hierarchical, but also competitive, as encapsulated by the term גברה (mistress) derived from גבר (to be strong, to prevail, to be superior). Ironically, it is Sarah, by giving Hagar to Abraham as a *wife*,[164] who provides an opportunity for her to advance her status: from maid to a (secondary) wife of the patriarch, and to be a biological mother of his potential heir. With this in mind, the passive voice used in the last clause (תקל גברתה בעיניה 16:4b) makes Sarah the focal point of the sentence, consequently drawing attention to her psychological state, a kind of comparative deprivation.[165] From this perspective, reading this verse as "Her mistress (Sarah) was lessened in her own eyes" is also plausible.[166] This means that the center of the interest is Sarah's loss of self-esteem and self-confidence rather than Hagar's act of looking down on Sarah, which arose from a sense of superiority caused by her *immediate* pregnancy.[167]

Although Sarah's test of Abraham produced unwanted — from her point of view — results, her initiative is significant in the sense that at least she made an effort to resolve the problem of their childlessness. Prior criticism was made toward Sarah, pointing out her lack of patience: instead of waiting for God's intervention, she dares try to resolve the problem on her own, thus interrupting the divine plan.[168] However, if we see the situation from a different angle, it is

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[164] Not as a concubine (פילגש). For this issue, see V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 442. David Tuesday Adamo and Erivwierho Francis Eghwubare, "The African Wife Of Abraham: An African Reading Of Genesis 16:1-16 And 21:8–21," in *Genesis*. Edited by Athalya Brenner, Archie Chi Chung Lee and Gale Yee, Texts@ Contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 275–92 (here 286–7); W. C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash,* 34.

[165] Pamela T. Reis suggests that Abraham continued a sexual relationship with Hagar even after her impregnation, thus robbing Sarah of an opportunity to conceive (Pamela T. Reis, "Hagar Requited," *JSOT* 87 [2000]: 75–109).

[166] R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 65–6.

[167] There are various renderings of the second part of this verse: "When she learned that she had conceived, her mistress lost status in her estimation." (Hamilton); "When she became aware that she was pregnant, her mistress lost cast in her eyes." (Westermann); "Seeing that she was pregnant, she looked down on her mistress" (Wenham).

[168] Renita J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," in *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 1–19 (here 12).

rather Abraham who should be criticized for his passivity. As explained so far, Sarah's conduct is a quite reasonable effort when considering the fact that she did not know she was barren. Yet isn't it surprising that Abraham took no action until then, though God did *not* specify who would give birth to him? Prior to Sarah's initiative, God made his promise of many descendants twice to Abraham, but both times in an indefinite manner (Gen 12: 2; 15: 4–5). It is only later — nine years after the birth of Ishmael (17:1) — that God specified that *Sarah* would have a son (Gen 17:15–19; 18: 10–14). The promise was given for the first time when Abraham was seventy-five years old and was still unfulfilled until he became eighty-six years old. Most people, ordinary people, would have done just about anything to have offspring instead of sitting and waiting, at least to fulfill God's promise. Does this — doing nothing throughout all the years — mean his over-credulity or incredulity?

There are some substantial reasons that, in the ancient world, a failure of issue was considered a dishonor which damaged the family's reputation:[169] in one's lifetime, progeny is needed for the family economy and support for elderly parents; after one's death, it is the heir who laments and buries the parents, performing proper funerary rites as well as remembering them in prayers and rituals.[170] Probably for this reason, Abraham laments his lack of an heir (Gen 15:2), and Sarah, Abraham's primary wife, loses her self-esteem, possibly fearful of Hagar, the pregnant secondary wife of Abraham, being elevated to an equal footing with her and thereby breaking the power structure between them.[171] Outside of the book of Genesis, Naomi makes an effort to have Boaz marry Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law who has

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[169] Aside from theological explanation — divine command or blessing or punishment — explained earlier in this chapter.

[170] Marten Stol and Sven P. Vleeming, eds., *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East*, SHCANE 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Jonas C. Greenfield, "Adi Baltu: Care for the Elderly and Its Rewards," in *Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology*, vol 2, eds., Shalom M. Paul, Michael E. Stone, Avital Pinnick (Jerusalem: Magnes; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 912–9.

[171] See also Rachel, Lot's daughters, and Tamar in the following chapters. For the tension and power struggle between Sarah and Hagar, see Ina Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance: A Constructive Comparison Of Genesis 16 And Genesis 21," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, eds., Katherine J. Dell, Graham I. Davies, and Y. V. Koh (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 33–43 (here 37–9).

remained childless, through the custom of levirate marriage (Ruth 4:13–17) so that she may be "nourished in her old age"(v. 15 RSV). In the first book of Samuel, Peninnah, the co-wife (צרה) of Hannah looks down on her due to her childlessness (1 Sam 1:5).

Nevertheless, it looks like Abraham did nothing until reaching age seventy-five[172] then for another eleven years after the promise. He could have taken another wife at least to try; otherwise he might have been avoiding it because of his fear that he would be stigmatized as a sterile man if the second wife also failed to bear him children. Abraham's cowardice can also be seen in his deception of Pharaoh, handing over Sarah to him (Gen 12:10–20).[173] His selfish actions in the past, in which he sacrificed Sarah for his own gain,[174] and doing nothing in the present may have triggered her wrath over her current predicament: Hagar's pregnancy, which Sarah did not want to happen. Furthermore, from Sarah's point of view, Abraham is a bystander: the fact that he accepted her proposal to take Hagar for his wife without resistance (וישמע אברם לקול שרי, 16:2) may be due to his apathy toward this matter. This explains why her rage is directed at Abraham rather than Hagar in Genesis 16:5.

ותאמר שרי אל־אברם חמסי עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניה ישפט יהוה ביני וביניך

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[172] The situation seems to be different from the case of Appu who has also one wife. We are able to presume that Appu probably tried to sleep with other women too considering his wife's attitude to blame him as a cause of childlessness. In recently published monograph, Gil Rosenberg regarded the relationship between Abraham and Sarah as queer (Gil Rosenberg, *Ancestral Queerness: The Normal and the Deviant in the Abraham and Sarah Narratives*, HBM 80 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019]).

[173] Later also in Gen 20, to Abimelech in Gerar. Trible argues that Abraham manipulated Sarah with flattery (P. Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds., P. Trible and Letty M. Russell [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 33–69 [here36].)

[174] Fewell and Gunn, "Keeping the Promise (Genesis 11–22)," 52–3. Fewell and Gunn criticize Abraham for being a liar and panderer who has amassed wealth, but continues to endanger his family by failing to trust God's protection; Abraham regards himself as "a sole subject" of divine call and promise, whereas Sarah, his wife, is "expendable." (ibid, 43).

Then Sarai said to Abram, "My injustice[175] be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she was pregnant, I was lessened in her eyes. Let YHWH judge between you and me."[176]

Sarah makes a strong appeal to him in the form of legal process, inviting YHWH to be a judge in her case.[177] שפט בין ...ובין is an idiomatic expression for calling upon YHWH's arbitration in a dispute, when one is treated unfairly.[178] In using such courtroom language, Sarah persuades Abraham to take on the role of the household head, as only a husband has judicial authority.[179] Abraham avoids suggesting a solution yet again, instead shifts responsibility to Sarah; or she already expected it, in which case she took advantage of his irresponsible and indecisive personality.

הנה שפחתך בידך עשי־לה הטוב בעיניך

"Behold, your maidservant is in your hand; do to her what is good in your eyes."(16:6)

The formula, לעשות .... בעיניים, which appears frequently in Judges, can be used for both positive and negative cases.[180] Here Abraham's expression (עשי־לה הטוב בעיניך) is almost identical to Lot's (ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם), which carries strong negative connotations in the context of the depravity of Sodom (Gen 19:8). Accordingly, Abraham's speech can also be

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[175] The term חמס must be read as 'wrong' or 'injustice' rather than 'violence' or 'outrage' due to its legal context. See further Speiser, *Genesis*, 117; cf. Exod 23:1; Deut19:16; Psa 35:11.

[176] Rashi (רש"י) suggested that בֵּינֶיךָ should be vocalized 'beinaik' as indicating Hagar. Reis goes a step further: the last part of v. 5, "Let YHWH judge between you and me" (ישפט יהוה ביני וביניך), is indeed directed towards Hagar, with which I do not agree. Reis suggests that this speech reflects Abraham's continual sexual relationship with Hagar even after her impregnation, thus robbing Sarah of a chance to conceive. This assumption suggests that Sarah still does not believe she is infertile (P. T. Reis. "Hagar Requited," 84-6).

[177] Gafney opines that "God's silence" towards Sarah is a response to her charge of Abraham "who has not wronged Sarah" (*Womanist Midrash*, 41–2), which is less convincing given that YHWH blesses Sarah, changes her name, and specifies her as the mother of the son with whom God will establish his covenant in the very next chapter (Gen 17)

[178] According to Westermann, "Sarah accuses Abraham of allowing their marriage to be attacked" (C. Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 241). See further examples of שפט בין .....ובין: Judg 11:28; 1 Sam. 24:16 (24:15 in LXX and most English translations).

[179] C. Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 240.

[180] Cf. 'לעשות הרע בעיניים' (to do what is bad in one's eyes) (Judg. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1); 'בעיניים לעשות הישר' (to do what is right in one's eyes) (Judg. 17:6, 21:25)

interpreted negatively: "do whatever you want no matter how bad it is." This means Abraham in complicit in Sarah's cruel treatment of pregnant Hagar, despite knowing she would do something bad. Abraham repeats a similar act in the expulsion scene: he cannot make up his mind to the last; Yet he should permit something "bad in his eyes," this time (Gen 21:11), which is back-shadowing of Gen 16:6.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, we reach the conclusion that Sarah eventually earns an implicit victory over Abraham, despite the fact that her aforementioned test produced unfavorable results for her. Her enterprising and proactive character is, on the one hand, very significant in that she challenges the patriarchal norms. On the other hand, it is Sarah who victimizes and mistreats (ענה)[181] Hagar for her own security. As Trible has stated, "what is good for the one is suffering for the other."[182]

When it comes to Abraham, thanks to Sarah's test, he begot Ishmael through whom he had a multitude of descendants. In this regard, Sarah was the one who actually carried on Abraham's family line, though she did so for her own sake. It sounds plausible that Sarah's active and enthusiastic attitude influenced God's decision to bless her in granting her a son with whom God will continue his covenant (Gen 17:15–22).[183] Did Abraham believe it? Did he share the news with Sarah? Did he sleep with her in order to get her pregnant? Then why did God send Abraham his messengers to announce the same thing again? The next section

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[181] Much scholarly attention has been paid to the use of ענה both in Gen 16 and Exodus stories describing Pharaoh's mistreating Israelites. See T. B. Dozman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story" ; T. Römer, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis,"15; M. G. Brett, *Genesis procreation and the politics of Identity*, 58. For scholarly arguments that ענה is a strong word connoting a very harsh affliction, see P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 225; W. C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 35.

[182] P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 224.

[183] Juliana Claassens offers a similar viewpoint, but based on her interpretation of Sarah's laughter in a later story. According to Claassen, Sarah's laughter, as an act of revealing her "internal resistance," causes God to finally notice her: God's "renewed attention" to her causes her situation to be revised, resulting in the birth of Isaac (L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Laughter and Tears: Carnivalistic Overtones in the Stories of Sarah and Hagar," *PRS* 32, no. 3 [September 1, 2005]: 295–308 [here 300–1]). For opposing viewpoints, see W. C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 42; P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 230.

will examine these issues in detail and will demonstrate how Sarah comes to the fore despite Abraham's attempt to marginalize her.

2.2 Is Abraham Impotent?: The Purpose of the Visitors and Sarah's Laugh

Gen. 18:1–15 announces the birth of Isaac through the mouth of YHWH's messengers: three men appear to Abraham in the plains of Mamre; Abraham entreats them to rest in his tent and courteously offers them a meal. YHWH pronounces that Sarah shall have a son.

It is thirteen years after Abraham begot Ishmael, and at the same year when God foretold Sarah would have a son, Isaac (Gen 17:1–22).[184] In course of time, Sarah's impregnation became a virtual impossibility due to her menopause reported in 18:11.[185]

ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים חדל להיות לשרה ארח כנשים

And Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in days; the manner of women ceased to be with Sarah. (18:11)

The "manner of women"[186] implies menstruation, a sign that the female reproductive system is functioning. Accordingly, Sarah must have been aware of her biological impairment due to menopause aside from her advanced age. However, we should not dismiss the idea of Abraham's potential sterility: the text clearly mentions both of them were old. Indeed the narrator repeatedly mentions his old age (17:1, 17, 24; 18:11–12; 21:2, 5, 7). Abraham's

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[184] According to information given in Gen 17:24–25; 21:5.

[185] Theoretically, menopause means cessation of ovulation. However, the ovulation and menstrual cycles can reoccur unless a menopausal woman experiences no menstruation for more than a year. However, the description of v.11 does not clearly inform whether it ceased temporarily or permanently. Nevertheless the latter is convincing considering her age. Additionally, her menopause is reported by narration so it is unknown whether Abraham is aware of it or not.

[186] Or "the way of women." See דרך נשים in Gen 31:35.

response to YHWH's promise of Isaac in 17:17 is a significant example that shows his awareness of *their* subfertility due to their advanced age.

ויפל אברהם על־פניו ויצחק ויאמר בלבו הלבן מאה־שנה יולד ואם־שרה הבת־תשעים שנה תלד

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Gen 17:17 RSV)

Abraham's laugh has received scholarly attention as foreshadowing Sarah's similar response in our episode when she hears the messenger's annunciation (18:1–15).

ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה־לי עדנה ואדני זקן

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" (18:12 RSV)

Sarah's skeptical response is almost the same as that of Abraham. In the juxtaposition of Abraham and Sarah, however, dominant readings have celebrated Abraham's belief but branded Sarah with disbelief, skirting around the issue of Abraham's fertility and potency.[187] Furthermore, Sarah was thought to be rebuked by YHWH for her laugh and denial of it based on 18:13–15, though the text does not convey a clear notion of reprimand.[188] The narrative context is just as follows. While at the door of the tent, Sarah hears the divine promise about having a son. Sarah laughs within herself; God hears it and asks Abraham why she laughs, saying he will return to him at the appointed time next year and Sarah shall have a son; though

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[187] For Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theology and interpretation about Abraham, see Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). For this issue, see further Nina Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, eds., Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 257 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 60–89 (70–1).

[188] As opposed to Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 43; idem, "The Other Woman," 231.

out of fear Sarah denies her laugh. What God actually does is reaffirm that she did laugh, with no further rebuke; then God declares a son will be born to her.[189]

Sarah's act of overhearing also adds its weight to the negative view of her as passive and deceptive.[190] Let us reconsider the act of Sarah's overhearing.[191]

<div dir="rtl">

ויאמרו אליו איה שרה אשתך ויאמר הנה באהל

...ושרה שמעת פתח האהל והוא אחריו

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Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent."…
Now Sarah was listening at the tent door and it [the tent] was behind him. (18:9, 10b)

The above verse explains the visitors became aware of Sarah's location in the tent, as Abraham answered so. Additionally, the narrator underlines where the tent is through supplementary information "והוא אחריו" (and it [the tent] was behind him [Abraham]), which implies the tent is situated within listening range and that it is not in Abraham's line of sight. If so, Sarah's overhearing could conceivably be intended by the visitors; they could well be aware that she is within earshot. If the messengers are aware of Sarah's presence, in ostensibly speaking to Abraham they are at the same time communicating a different message to Sarah. That is, they are consciously communicating with her indirectly, which is understood as "double-voiced discourse."[192] Significantly the first thing the visitors ask Abraham is the whereabouts of Sarah.

This suggests a reversed reading: at first glance, the story seems to center on Abraham, yet

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[189] Claassens sheds a positive light on Sarah's laughter, believing it drew divine attention to change her situation. (Claassens, "Laughter and Tears," 300).

[190] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics," 154 [*Semeia* 46]; cf. Peter exalts Sarah as one who was enabled to bear a child by faith (Hebrew 11:11); Rebekah's manipulative act associated with the similar act shall be discussed in the next chapter.

[191] The Hebrew verb שמע has no distinction of 'to listen' and 'to hear,' unlike English. Hamilton translates this phrase "Sarah had been eavesdropping..." (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 4); According to Alter, "Sarah is "vouchsafed" the annunciation only by overhearing it" (R. Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read," 120). See also E. Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 50; T. J. Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nation*, 79.

[192] According to Bakhtin's theory. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in idem, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–422.

Sarah is the focal point for this visit. YHWH makes Sarah know the annunciation in front of Abraham. The work by Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn has offered refreshing new insights into this issue:

> Even after hearing directly from God of Sarah's importance to the promise, even after her name been changed to symbolize that importance, even after being informed that her pregnancy is imminent (17:21), Abraham says nothing to her of her role in God's plan. Consequently, God returns with two messengers to reiterate Sarah's part in the promise. Taking no chances on Abraham's mediation, the three ask for Sarah. Assured of her presence God goes on to speak to Abraham: "I will surely return to you in the time of life and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.[193]

Such a view accords well with the visitors' concern about Sarah's whereabouts. Tammi J. Schneider develops this argument further: the visitors' announcement has been intentionally designed for Sarah to overhear,[194] as Abraham was incredulous about YHWH's promise of a son or so did not tell the news to Sarah;[195] this incredulity explains why God tests Abraham's faith later in the Aqedah (Ch. 22). Sharon P. Jeansonne also points out that Sarah's response, laughing when hearing the birth announcement, shows that it is the first time she has heard it (v. 12).[196] Here I add further support to theses interpretations.

   Sarah's speech in response to the announcement is the key phrase to understanding this issue.

ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה־לי עדנה ואדני זקן

> So Sarah laughed to herself saying "After I am worn out and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" (18:12)

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[193] Fewell and Gunn, "Keeping the Promise (Genesis 11–22)," 48.
[194] T. J. Schneider, *Sarah*, 71–2.
[195] T. J. Schneider, *Sarah*, 71. See also Christianne Méroz, *Five Women: Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 13.
[196] S. P. Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis*, 25.

Biblical scholars have often suggested that the term עֶדְנָה [197] ('edna, "pleasure") in 18:12 has

sexual connotations.[198] Laurence A. Turner reads it as reflecting the lack of sex in their

relationship, which he interprets as indicating that neither of them believe the promise of God

given in Ch. 17.[199] Turner's argument, however, is grounded on the assumption that Abraham

shared the promise with Sarah. In support of Turner, yet assuming Abraham has not notified

of Sarah the divine announcement, Schneider proposes that the purpose of the messengers'

visit is to encourage Abraham and Sarah to have a sexual relationship in order to produce a

son.[200] Another stimulating suggestion has been made by Nina Rulon-Miller: Sarah's laugh

can be interpreted as revealing her thought that "it would be 'too awesome' even for Yahweh

to cure Abraham's impotence or his life-long lack of desire for her."[201]

Given that 'edna, עֶדְנָה comes with וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן ("my husband is old"), it seems plausible that

the sexual problem is related to Abraham's old age — either sexual dysfunction or lack of

sexual desire. Whether Abraham has sexual disinterest or impotence such as erectile

dysfunction or ejaculative failure, or simply his sexual desire does not arise from Sarah, or they

no longer have a sexual relationship, we are alerted to the fact that Sarah includes Abraham as

a possible cause of her infertility. In using a rhetorical question (18:12), she put a special

emphasis on this.

However, in the immediately following verse, the divine voice quotes her response and

alters it.

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[197] It is a *hapax legomenon*.

[198] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 73; Lawrence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 79; T. J. Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nation*, 69; Nina Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: a Woman with an Attitude," 69–72.

[199] L. A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 79.

[200] T. J. Schneider, *Sarah*, 73.

[201] N. Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude." In addition, she points out further that Abraham may have been sexually aroused by Hagar (Rulon-Miller, ibid, 73–4). Abraham's lack of sexual desire for Sarah was proposed also by Jeansonne (*The Women of Genesis*, 23–5).

ויאמר יהוה אל-אברהם למה זה צחקה שרה לאמר האף אמנם אלד ואני זקנתי

Then YHWH said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I really bear a child, when I am become old?'" (18:13)

Her statement ("shall I have pleasure?") that alludes to Abraham's sexual problems is omitted, so the mention of Abraham's age as a possible obstacle is omitted as well. Instead, it simply delivers Sarah's advanced age: ואני זקנתי ("I am become old") instead of ואדני זקן ("my husband is old").

Considering that the messenger's speech is presented as a quotation in such close proximity to the original speech, such a modification seems to be unnatural and therefore potentially significant. This apparent censorship takes on an ambiguous aspect. This would imply that the invisible, male-centered narrator might have tried to conceal the founding father's potential impotence so as to defend his masculine pride since procreation and fertility are divine blessings and obligations. However, it is the narrator who discloses the question of Abraham's virility in the first place by conveying Sarah's original speech as it is (v. 12). In this speech, it is YHWH who is relaying her soliloquy to *Abraham* which he does not hear directly from her (v. 13).

My reading explores these possibilities. Abraham is rebuked indirectly for having marginalized Sarah by not informing her of divine plan. YHWH is ironically teasing him who must already be aware of his age,[202] and highlighting his sexual dysfunction as possible contributors to the reason that Sarah has no children. The implication then would be that YHWH and Abraham know quite well why Sarah laughed. In fact, such an interpretation accords well with YHWH's mischievous character:[203] YHWH does not reveal his full plan all

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[202] Indeed, he has admitted as much in 17:17.
[203] Throughout Genesis, YHWH holds a consistent attitude as the main culprit causing human conflicts: his putting a strange prohibition not to eat a certain fruit brings about the first-ever conflict between husband and wife; his accepting only Abel's offering arouses Cain's jealousy and the consequential first-ever murder of

at once: it took 25 years until Sarah gave birth to Isaac after the promise of progeny was made for the first time to Abraham.[204]

The above interpretation is supported by the fact that the narrator twice specifies that YHWH would return to *Abraham*, rather than to Sarah, (18:10a, 14)[205] in using the second person masculine singular (אליך).

ויאמר <u>שוב אשוב אליך</u> כעת חיה והנה־בן לשרה אשתך

And he said, "<u>I will surely return to you</u> about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." (18:10a)

היפלא מיהוה דבר למועד <u>אשוב אליך</u> כעת חיה ולשרה בן

Is anything too hard for YHWH? At the appointed time next year <u>I will return to you</u>, and Sarah shall have a son. (18:14)

This could also be the reason why verses 13 and 14 are directed towards Abraham, although God does communicate directly not only with Abraham but also with Sarah as seen in v. 15. Viewed in this light, it should be noted that the recipient of היפלא מיהוה דבר ("Is anything too hard[206] for YHWH?," 18:14) is Abraham. Then the wondrous thing — God's control over reproductive power — might signify that YHWH is capable of curing Abraham's impotence, in addition to his ability to make Sarah pregnant despite her menopause. Additionally, this speech is formulated as a rhetorical question just as in Sarah's speech (v. 12), thus carrying a special emphasis: to transform impotent or subfertile Abraham into a potent man is an

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mankind. This aspect shows a close affinity with the assembly of the Olympian gods who are involved playfully in human lives presiding over human destiny.

[204] Jack Miles reads the following conversation (18:16–33) as God's mocking Abraham's righteousness and his trust in God. The long delay of the divine promise of offspring is because Abraham was not righteous enough to deserve it. See, Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011[repr.]; orig. 1995), 54–5.

[205] Probably through the mouth of the messenger(s).

[206] The verb פָּלָא denotes an extra ordinary thing. Cf. Exod 3:20; 34:10.

additional purpose of the messengers' visit.[207] His regained virility is proved in the later story: Abraham begets six more sons through Keturah (Gen 25: 1–2).

All this suggests that God intervenes to remind Abraham of the importance of Sarah in the divine promise by sending his messengers. The concluding remark of Sarah makes this interpretation more compelling.

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ותאמר שרה צחק לי אלהים כל השמע יצחק לי

ותאמר מי מלל לאברהם היניקה בנים שרה כי ילדתי בן לזקניו

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And Sarah Said "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me. And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age. (21:6–7 RSV)

The leitmotif "laughing" is used here for signifying God's bestowing a son upon her, the incredible joy as the result of her procreation, and the approval and reevaluation from surrounding people who once probably had scoffed at her infertility.[208] It is remarkable that Sarah herself alone receives glory. She does not say "Who would have said to *me* that I would suckle children?" but says "Who would have said to *Abraham* that Sarah would suckle children?" In this way she indirectly criticizes Abraham who marginalized her. Yet in the following speech Sarah bluntly declares her ultimate success while mocking Abraham: it is she who bore a son to this man in *his* old age (כי ילדתי בן לזקניו).[209] She regards Abraham as a major problem but highlights her procreative power. Is infertility a female problem? Well, at least not from Sarah's point of view: the patriarch must bear the brunt of the blame.

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[207] The story is told in the style of a folktale in association with the motif of the reward of virtue. In this view, Abraham may gain rejuvenation or recover procreative power in reward for his hospitality.

[208] Trible suggests that Sarah's words, כל השמע יצחק לי, have ambiguity — either positive or negative — depending on how the Hebrew preposition *le* is read: laugh "with" or laugh "to": the former implies that everyone who hears will "join in rejoicing in the birth of her child" whereas the latter connotes that "they make fun of her giving birth in her old age" (P. Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 43–4).

[209] Even the narrator put an emphasis on Abraham's old age rather than Sarah's (ותהר ותלד שרה לאברהם בן לזקניו, 21:2a).

I presented the possibility that Abraham did not share the divine annunciation of the birth of Isaac with Sarah due to his incredulity. Additionally, he became a contributor to the reason that Sarah has no children due to his age and sexual dysfunction, which is evidenced by Sarah's laugh and her language. Based on the double-voiced discourse, I suggested that the divine messengers spoke, on the one hand, to Sarah for the purpose of letting her know the annunciation, and on the other hand to Abraham for the purpose of rebuking his distrust and of urging him to sleep with her. Given that the divine response to Sarah's inner speech is directed to *Abraham*, the messengers' visit was aimed to give him a lesson as well as to cure his impotence. But more importantly, it is aimed to promote Sarah: she is included in God's plan. This context helps us to understand Sarah's self-praise that spotlights her procreative power while mocking Abraham.

Woman's contribution in God's covenant — according to the narrator's agenda — interwoven with the issue of fertility and infertility constantly appears through the Hagar narrative (16:7–16; 21:8–21). The following section delves deeper into two Hagar narratives, focusing on her active, strong, and daring pioneer character, similar to Sarah's, and her overturned fortune from marginalization to self-determination. In addition, the relationship between them will be examined in light of intersectionality.

2.3 Hagar's Fertility: Survival and Wilderness Pioneer

In Genesis, the ancestral mothers (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) are described as barren women who subsequently give birth, thus making barrenness a sure warrant of potential fertility.[210]

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[210] Leah is not explicitly presented as a barren woman, but God still intervenes in her pregnancy: "God opened her womb"(29:31); "God listened to Leah" (30:17) which reminds us of "Ishmael" that means "God listens" (16:11). Cf. Gen 21:17.

Hagar, however, another ancestral mother — though not of the Israelites — seems to be an apparent exception. Hagar gets pregnant almost immediately, and not by divine intervention but by human actions. Such a difference led scholars often to dismiss Hagar or distinguish her from other ancestral mothers. However, given that Hagar is promised great descendants and received an annunciation of the birth of a son by God, a more thorough analysis should be undertaken.

Feminist critics have emphasized the significance of the Hagar stories: focusing on her being privileged to experience theophany and divine support, while others underline her sufferings as a victim of oppression, thus serving as a forerunner of "all sorts of rejected women,"[211] or oppressed or underprivileged people in contemporary society. In particular, in regard to Sarah–Hagar stories, the critics of intersectionality have illustrated various contemporary issues, raising ethical questions such as prejudice over race, sexual orientation, gender, poverty, ethnicity, as well as abuse, slavery, stratification, and sexual, social, and economic exploitation.[212] A wide range of interpretations has grown significantly with feminist and postcolonial engagement and womanism — "black women's feminism,"[213] reading the texts from the reader's own social location or specific context.[214] Furthermore, for

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[211] P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 238.

[212] S. Rogers, "Sarah: Villain or Patriarchal Pawn?" 73–4; R. J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," 7–9; Classsens, "Laughter and Tears," 305–6; P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 238; Kari Latvus, "Reading Hagar in Contexts: From Exegesis To Inter-Contextual Analysis," in *Genesis* (Texts@ Contexts, 2010), 247–74 (here 259, 269–72).

[213] Defined by W. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 6)

[214] For dynamics of gendered political power and context especially related to the context of New Zealand, see J. E. Mckinlay, "Sarah and Hagar: What Have I to Do With Them?" in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed., Stichele C. Vander and Todd C. Penner (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 159–77; For the context of poor and immigrant women in Finland, see Latvus, "Reading Hagar in Contexts," 248–51. Latvus proposes intercontextual analysis, which is a tool to connect the text with both ancient and contemporary contexts; Beyond Judeo-Christian faith, Adamo and Eghwubare emphasizes God's presence and salvation towards other people or all of humanity, while praising Hagar as "genuine matriarch" and an ancestor of black African woman ("The African Wife Of Abraham," 283). In addition, they introduce related Urhobo customary laws in the polygynous system in Africa (ibid, 288–90); For a more comprehensive discussion of the "Africanness of the ancient Egyptian people," see ibid, 275–83; For contextualizing Hagar–Sarah stories into the culture of Abaluhya of Kenya, see Constance Shisanya, "A Reflection on the Hagar Narratives in Genesis through the Eyes of a Kenyan Woman," in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, eds., Mary N. Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkuratire (New York: Lang, 2001), 147–51.

biblical scholarship addressing contemporary contextualization of women from the margins such as African-American, Asian-American and Latina immigrant, among others,[215] Hagar serves as a reminder of the ongoing situation of injustice, discrimination, and oppression,[216] whereas Sarah is more associated with the privileged first-world woman or Jewish woman.[217] Others observe a woman-to-woman relationship reflected in the Sarah–Hagar cycle, primarily in terms of the victim-offender relationship.[218] For example, Renita J. Weems, as an African-American woman scholar, reads the stories in view of "ethnic prejudice exacerbated by economic and social exploitation," criticizing Sarah's domestic attitude that humiliates and dehumanizes Hagar.[219] Will (Wilda) Gafney, another prominent African-American woman scholar of multiple heritages, contends that "Sarah orchestrates Hagar's sexual abuse."[220]

On the other hand, there have been attempts to see Sarah and Hagar both as either companions in a fight for survival in patriarchal world, or as interconnected,[221] which my reading supports by highlighting the marginalization of these women yet their dominant and

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[215] For an ethnic minority's view especially Asian, Asian-American, see L. L. E. Ngan, "Neither Here Nor There: Boundary and Identity in the Hagar Story"; For the various perspectives by Caucasian, Latina, and Black South African women, see Nicole M. Simopoulos, "Who was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker: An Analysis of Contemporary Grassroots Readings of Genesis 16 by Caucasian, Latina, and Black South African Women," in *Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities,* ed., Gerald West (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 63–72.

[216] For the discussion of sexual violence and rape culture, see Rhiannon Graybill, "Rape and Other Ways of Reading," in idem, *Texts after Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 85–112.

[217] For the white, Euro-North American woman perspective, see Beth LaNeel Tanner, "My Sister Sarah: On Being a Woman in the First World," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld,* eds., Linda Day and Carol Pressler (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 60–72; For various discussions of African-American and Jewish women scholars, see Wilma Ann Bailey, "Black and Jewish Women consider Hagar," *Encounter* 63, no. 1–2 (December 1, 2002): 37–44.

[218] For reading according to the context of African-South African women, see Maseynya ; see also Mmadipoane Ngwana Mphahlele Masenya, "A Bosadi (Womanhood) Reading of Genesis 16," *OTE* 11 (1998): 271–87; Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "Childlessness and Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Genesis and in African Patriarc[h]al Society: Sarah and Hagar from a Zimbabwean Woman's Perspective (Gen 16:1–16; 21:8–21)." *Semeia* no. 78 (January 1, 1997): 27–36.

[219] R. J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," 2, 10.

[220] W. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash, 35.*

[221] S. J. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," 245–7; Claassens, "Laughter and Tears," 239, 245–97; Sara Rogers, "Sarah: Villain or Patriarchal Pawn?" in *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains,* ed., Lisa Isherwood (London: Equinox), 2007, 69–84; Rosalyn F T. Murphy, "Sista-Hoods: Revealing the Meaning In Hagar's Narrative," *BT* 10.1 (2012): 77–92; R. Graybill, "Rape and Other Ways of Reading," 99.

outstanding achievements.[222] Hagar may be Sarah's companion in the sense of a woman who suffers in patriarchal institutions in order for man to have male descendants; both are sojourners and strangers displaced in a foreign land, one from Mesopotamia and the other from Egypt, in conformity with the patrilocality custom.[223] However, they are a contrasting pair given that Hagar is young, fertile, and ethnically different, as well as a bond servant with a lower social status than her mistress Sarah.

Let us briefly summarize the Hagar stories centering around two births — Ishmael and Isaac.

Whereas the first part of Gen 16 centers on Sarah and Abraham (16:1–6), the second part fully centers on Hagar who fled after Sarah's harsh treatment of her (16:7–16). The runaway Hagar meets the messenger of God near a spring of water in the wilderness. God gives Hagar instructions to go back and to submit to Sarah and the annunciation — the prediction of the birth of a son, the naming of the son, and his future life — is given. After calling the place Beer Lahai-roi (באר לחי ראי, 16:14), Hagar gives birth to a son, and Abraham names him Ishmael which means 'God has listened,'[224] as the messenger of God ordained (16:11, 15).

In contrast to Hagar's voluntary flight in Ch. 16, chapter 21 (vv. 8–21) presents her forced banishment together with her son. On the day of feasting in celebration of Isaac's weaning, Sarah sees Hagar's son "isaacing"(מצחק).[225] Outraged, Sarah asks Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael to prevent them from sharing in the inheritance with her son Isaac. Though the

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[222] This does not mean that I disregard the ethical values underlying the texts, which will be discussed at the end of this section.

[223] Given this, Willi-Plein correctly observes that referring to Hagar as a "foreigner" is inappropriate since "in Gen. 16 Abraham would be a foreigner himself" (I. Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance," 35; cf. W. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 32.

[224] More likely, 'El has listened.' From Ishmael's name (Gen. 16:11), Römer infers the identification of El and Yahweh based on Isa 43:12. See T. Römer, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis," 14.

[225] R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 98. The root צָחַק reminds us of Abraham's laugh (17:17), Sarah's laugh (18:13), and etymology of Isaac, יצחק (21:6), serving as a keyword.

matter distresses Abraham, God instructs him to follow Sarah's wishes. Wandering in the wilderness, Hagar and Ishmael experience near-death in the wilderness due to water shortage but God supplies them with water and assures them with glimpses of the future of Ishmael.

First of all, I reassess Hagar, who is often underestimated in favour of other ancestral mothers, by emphasizing divine compassion and blessing towards her. Surprisingly enough, Hagar meets God twice: at escape (Gen 16:6–14) and at expulsion (Gen 21:8–21). It is God who makes the first move before she seeks help: "A messenger of YHWH found her (וימצאה) by a spring of water in the wilderness, near the spring (במדבר על־העין) on the way to Shur" (Gen 16:7). The verb מצא which has a nuance "to find by search"[226] is used in company with על־ עין (by a spring). This usage of language is meant to be suggestive of YHWH's searching for someone with careful eye, since עין is a homonym of "eye."[227]

The special grace Hagar received is far beyond that, as Trible points out that Hagar is "the first person in scripture whom a divine messenger visits and the only person who dares to name the deity."[228] Hagar appears even greater than that: she is a beneficiary of YHWH's covenant.[229] Significantly, Hagar bears comparison with Abraham,[230] the progenitor of many

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[226] Booji also put an emphasis on its idea of searching someone reflected in this verb, reading it in connection with Gen 16:13b (Thijs Booij, "Hagar's Words in Genesis XVI 13b," *VT* 30/1 (1980): 1–7).

[227] V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, 1-17*, 451. See also Sean E. McEvenue, "A Comparison of Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories," *Semeia* 3 (1975): 64–80; C. Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 243.

[228] Thus serving as "the prototype" of "all mothers in Israel." P. Trible, "Hagar: The Desolation of Rejection," in idem, *Texts of Terror*, 9–35 (here 28). Adamo and Eghwubare see Hagar as "the only non-Israelite female to receive a blessing a visit from God," ("The African Wife Of Abraham," 285).

[229] Robin Jarrell suggests YHWH's contractual connection with Hagar. She regard Hagar's naming or calling YHWH is a formal acceptance of the birth contract (R. Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant").

[230] Biblical scholars have presented various models in regard to Hagar's figure: Dozeman regards Hagar as a prototype for Moses, while Römer pays attention to Hagar's functions as a female Moses, too, considering the story of Hagar and Ishmael as a reversed Exodus tradition (T. B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History"; T. Römer, "The Exodus in the Book of Genesis," 14–5; see also P. T. Reis, "Hagar Requited.") As for Hagar in comparison to Abraham, see Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1992); Scott Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study," *VT* 51(2001): 219–42.

nations. Both are attached to the tradition of the well at Beersheba; just as Abraham becomes the forefather of the twelve tribes of Israel, Hagar becomes the foremother of twelve tribal leaders through her son, Ishmael (17: 20; 24: 12–18).[231]

Of particular interest is that the divine promise of many descendants given to Hagar is almost identical to that of Abraham.

To Hagar	To Abraham
הרבה ארבה את־זרעך ולא יספר מרב "I will so greatly multiply your seed that it shall not be numbered for multitude." (16:10b)	הבט־נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים אם־תוכל לספר אתם ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך "Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your seed be."(15:5b)
	וארבה אותך במאד מאד "and I will multiply you." (17:2b)
	והפרתי אתך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים ומלכים ממך יצאו "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and make you into nations, and kings shall come out from you." (17:6)

Both promises of an exceeding number of descendants are formulated in the expression "multiply"(רבה) and "seed" (זרע) or "to bear fruit"(פרה). On this issue, James C. Okoye argues that Hagar's case lacks the covenantal context and the promise of possession of the land of Canaan.[232] In my opinion, however, the covenantal notion is found in the context: the reiterating opening formula ויאמר לה מלאך יהוה ("And the *messenger of YHWH* said to her") of the messenger's speech (16:9–11) conveys divine authority and is closely linked to YHWH's self-introduction of the covenant (17:9, 15); her son Ishmael practices circumcision (17:24–26), a sign of the covenant (17:9–14). As for the possession of the land of Canaan, I would say

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[231] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* WB 2 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 163.
[232] James Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *JSOT* 32/2 (2007): 163–75 (here 170). Robin Jarrell suggests YHWH's contractual connection with Hagar. She regards Hagar's naming or calling YHWH as a formal acceptance of the birth contract (R. Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant").

it is meaningful only to the Israelite; Hagar and her descendants have no reason to possess it since they dwell in a different land, the desert area. It would be preferable to say Hagar's procreative power can cultivate even the barren land.

All these taken together, Hagar is the recipient of a covenant, too. In a broad sense, she is given the promises of the same covenant as Abraham: the fecund promise is fulfilled not only through the descendants of Sarah's son, Isaac, but also through the descendants of her son, Ishmael. At the same time, God renews his covenant with Isaac (17:19–21; 21:12), not with Ishmael. Instead, he gives covenant-like promise to Hagar that he will make of Ishmael a great nation: whereas Abraham becomes the forefather of the Israelites, Hagar becomes the foremother of the Ishmaelite.[233]

In addition to Hagar's covenantal relationship with God, her experiences in desert are interpreted as signifying a transition related to procreation and fertility. Sarah's initial barrenness turns out to be a prelude to a sign of blessing, a consequent impregnation after all, thus marking a blessing and sure warrant of potential fertility. The same goes to other ancestral mothers but not Hagar, who is clearly not barren but fertile, as observed already by her quick impregnation. This is resolved by her experience with double theophany — divine providence for her safe delivery and survival of the born child.[234] Both her escape and expulsion are associated with wilderness and well/water, which rhetorically signify life threatening crisis and

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[233] Ishmael is worth special mention: he enjoys the long life which is one of the trademarks of the divine blessing (Gen 25:17) (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50,* 170). His death scene is even concluded by the typical remark used in relation to the patriarchs: "These are the years of Ishmael's life, a hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last, died, and was gathered to his kindred." See Gen 25:7–8 (Abraham); 35:28–29 (Isaac); 49:33 (Jacob).

Cf. Trible argues that "having at first promised her innumerable descendants (16.10), God later transferred that promise to Abraham." According to her, by choosing an Egyptian wife for Ishmael, "Hagar guarantees that these descendants will be Egyptians. Thus the mother suggests for herself a future that God has diminished" (P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 237).

[234] W. A. Bailey, "Black and Jewish Women consider Hagar," 40.

life force, respectively, and thus serve similarly as transition[235] — acquired by divine intervention — that Sarah underwent.

The place Hagar meets God is the wilderness: at first, near a well (Ch. 16), and secondly, in search of a well (Ch. 18). Needless to say, water is directly connected to "life" especially in the middle of a wilderness.[236] In biblical narratives, the well is perhaps best-known for its place in the betrothal type scene.[237] On the other hand, "well" in our narrative has greater significance far beyond such an intimate relationship between man and woman; it is purposefully incorporated into the procreative act.[238] Waterlessness is in sharp contrast to the well in a figurative or metaphorical sense. The former symbolizes sterility/infertility, whereas the latter relates to procreation/fertility. It is worth noting that Hagar demonstrates close affinity to wells (Beer Lahai-roi and Beersheba),[239] and overcomes water crisis while wandering in a waterless barren region. This becomes another indication of her rich fertility, just as her

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[235] Teubal also points out that Hagar experiences "symbolic rebirth": she reads the story of Hagar as an originally "separate narrative of the Desert Matriarch" which is about "the miraculous appearance of a well and the mysterious birth of her son, Ishmael" (S. J. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," 241, 243).

[236] Dozeman claims that the central role of the wilderness setting repeated in Gen. 16 and 21 creates parallels between the lives of Hagar and Moses and between the Ishmaelites and Israelites. See T. B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story"; Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed., Alexander Altmann, Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies, Brandeis University, ST 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31–64; Ekaterina E. Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible*, OTRM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 68–9. For the concept and symbol of water, see Philippe Reymond, *L'eau, sa vie et sa signification dans l'Ancien Testament*, VTSup 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1958); William Henry Propp, *Water in the Wilderness: A Biblical Motif and Its Mythological Background*, HSM 40 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

[237] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 52–62; Esther Fuchs, "Structure and Patriarchal Functions in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene: Some Preliminary Notes," *JFSR* 4 (Spring 1988): 7–13; appeared also: pages 45–52 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed., Alice Bach. New York: Routledge, 1999.

[238] Seth Daniel Kunin suggests that the well is symbolically connected to natural fruitfulness since it is a place of marriage. See Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology*, JSOTSup 185 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 87–9. In a subsequent story, the narrator presents Rebekah, who was once barren, associating her with water/well at the very outset of her cycle, thus alluding to her procreative power. Her first appearance on the stage is at the well of water (עין המים 24:13; באר המים 24:11), and she is marked with a water jar on her shoulder (כדּהּ על-שׁכמה 24:15) — the same phraseology used for Hagar's carrying bread and a skin of water on her shoulder (לחם וחמת מים...על-שׁכמה 21:14). Furthermore, the scene of Rebekah continuously drawing water from the well is described in great detail in the text. The fact that Rebekah gives birth to twin sons at once attests to her fecundity. Cf. Tamar gives birth to twin sons, too. For Tamar's fertility, see Chapter 6.

[239] C. Méroz, *Five Women*, 34; Robin H. Jarrell, "The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant."

homeland Egypt is highlighted as a fertile land (13:10) by the benefit of the abundant waters of the River Nile.[240]

In terms of Hagar's near-death experience and subsequent salvation as a sign of divine intervention, it is remarkable that God let Hagar undertake physical action for herself. God who opens (פתח) closed wombs, opens (פקח) her eyes (ויפקח אלהים את־עיניה v. 19a), which were previously blinded to the existence of the well within easy reach. Figuratively speaking, Hagar requires this new perspective in order to survive in a new environment. Through divine intervention, Hagar sees a well of water, rises, lifts up her child, holds him in her hand, goes to the well, fills the bottle with water, and gives him a drink (vv. 18–19).[241] Such physical action is foreshadowed by her earlier carrying bread and a skin of water on her shoulder (על־שכמה...לחם וחמת מים 21:14):[242] she must take the whole responsibility upon her shoulder.

The divine announcement of a positive future (21:18) encourages her to build mental and physical strength, whereupon she succeeds in being self-reliant. With her new status as a free-person and matriarch with full authority and responsibility, Hagar is even able to choose her daughter-in-law in person, one from her own native land, Egypt.[243] In this way, Hagar receives

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[240] For the possible association of the Hagar account with Egyptian mythology in terms of the relationship between mother-goddess and son, see S. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," 247–8.

The recurring mention of Hagar's Egyptian origin may be interpreted as a device in order to emphasize more fully her returning home or being near home (Gen 21:21). It was not until the expulsion that Hagar achieves her freedom, not subordinated to any one any more. Marking the end of her long wandering life and settling down in the nearest region from her homeland could be real liberty in the truest sense; The wilderness of *Paran* in which Hagar and Ishmael dwelled is believed to be the main desert in the eastern Sinai peninsula (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters, 18–50,* 85). Accordingly, it is probably the most proximate territory between Beersheba and the mainland of Egypt. Cf. Num 10:12 and 12:16, for the Wilderness of Paran, see Angela Roskop, *The Wilderness Itineraries: Genre, Geography, and the Growth of Torah,* HACL3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Roy E. Garton, *Mirages in the Desert: The Tradition-historical Developments of the Story of Massah-Meriba,* BZAW 492 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017).

[241] The series of actions that mother undertakes is comparable to that of Moses' mother in Exod 2:3. See further Chapter 7.

[242] There is assonance between שכם ("shoulder") and וַיַּשְׁכֵּם (hiph. of שָׁכַם "to rise early").

[243] Given Hagar's ethnicity, Ishmael's marriage is a matrilineal endogamy, implying Hagar's empowerment in the face of patriarchal standards. In doing so, however, Ishmael's line goes far from the Israelites in terms of the patrilineal blood ties. In this sense, the social status conflict (Sarah–Hagar or Isaac–Ishmael) is resolved not only by the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, but also by this marriage. This is an issue that requires our careful attention. Although neither the narrator nor Sarah specifically mention Hagar's ethnic otherness as a factor for her expulsion, the underlying implication is consistent with the coherent notion that patrilineal in-group (and patrilocal)

a sign of divine approval for being a foremother of the Ishmaelites. At the same time, the promise of many descendants given to Abraham (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4–6) is brought to fruition through Hagar's strong procreative power and as well as her vital and survival power.

Now we will go over Hagar's character as it appears in the texts in greater depth, especially in relation to Sara's. Broadly speaking, there are two different assessments of Hagar: she is either a helpless victim or a brave survivor. According to Weems, Hagar is a poor and powerless slave, as well as a passive victim who "participated in her own exploitation."[244] Weems argues that Hagar was once brave, with a strong desire to be free, when she fled the abusive situation, but she "continued to see herself as a slave" and thus returned to her mistress.[245] On the contrary, Bailey refers to Hagar's return as "a matter of survival": her escape was "bold," yet she chose to "play the role of the humble servant" for a future for her and her unborn child rather than die in the wilderness. I agree with Bailey's evaluation of Hagar as having "power, skills, strength and drive."[246]

Hagar shows her defiant and stout-hearted personality, like Sarah whom we have investigated in earlier discussions. Hagar's life is full of ups and downs. She experiences not only frequent geographical movement such as migration, flight, return, and expulsion, but also up-and-down changes in social position: maidservant, secondary wife, and free-person. Hagar's character seems to be not docile or submissive given that she does not tolerate unjust

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marriage is a recommended practice for Israelites. The narrator then clarifies that it was Hagar's decision to marry off her son to an Egyptian, thereby justifying their separation. Cf. Teubal suggests that "Hagar's god leads her away to establish her own community" (S. Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," 249). For this matter, see Fewell, "Imagination, Method and Murder: Unframing the Face of Post-exilic Israel," *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: God, Identity, and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London: Routledge, 1996), 132–52; R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection;* Mckinlay; J. E. Mckinlay, "Sarah and Hagar: What Have I to Do With Them?" 171, 176.

[244] R. J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," 12.

[245] R. J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," 12–3. See also J. W. Waters, "Who was Hagar?" ; P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 234–6

[246] W. A. Bailey, "Black and Jewish Women consider Hagar," 41. This could be interpreted as the conforming behaviour of subalterns, which will be discussed in Ch 7.

situations yet escapes *proprio motu*. Although she returns and submits to Sarah's authority, she does so on the strength of divine comfort and command,[247] which can be interpreted as an effort to protect her unborn child.[248] Going through life with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow, her personality may continue to grow stronger. Since Hagar's changing circumstances are inextricably linked to her struggle for position with her mistress, Sarah,[249] an examination of her social standing and relationship with Sarah (and with Abraham) may be required.

Scholars have often criticized Sarah and Abraham claiming that Hagar was forced into surrogacy due to her slave status. However, the absence of Hagar's voice in this matter in the text should not be confused with the practice being made nonconsensual. One could argue that Hagar had no way of refusing it because she was a lower-ranking person, but it opens to the possibility that she did it voluntarily. On the ground that Hagar was given to Abraham as a *wife* as explained earlier, it is also plausible that Sarah gave her the opportunity to be socially and economically enhanced. If this is the case, it could also apply to Bilhah and Zilpah, the

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[247] Here YHWH's intervention may reflect the necessity of maintaining the stability of the social structure without threatening the power structure. Divine promise is very encouraging, saying that though Hagar is under Sarah's dominion for the present, her son will be free and be a very powerful person:

וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פֶּרֶא אָדָם יָדוֹ בַכֹּל וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ וְעַל-פְּנֵי כָל-אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן

He will be like a wild ass of a men. His <u>hand</u> will be against every man, and every man's <u>hand</u> against him; and he shall dwell in the face of all his brethren. (Gen 16:12)

The twice-repeated use of 'hand' יד (16:12) recalls Sarah's hand which connotes 'power' or 'authority': "your maidservant is in your hand," הנה שפחתך בידך (16:6), "Go back to your mistress and submit to her hand," שובי אל-גברתך והתעני תחת ידיה (16:9). This may foreshadow the 'strength' Hagar needs for survival (והחזיקי את-ידך 21:18), while serving as a preview of the future portrayal of her son (21:20): the word 'hand' alludes to Ishmael's becoming an *archer* who needs a strong 'hand' (arm) for drawing a bow.

Simopulous points out that for the black south African women who identify with Hagar, he is the God of oppression, of the powerful, of the rich rather than of the poor: "The return-and-submit-to-your-mistress God is absolutely counter to the God of equality, dignity and freedom" (N. M. Simopoulos, "Who was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker," 70–1). Cf. Herd draws attention to the ambiguous syntax of 16:12, which can be interpreted as either adversarial or cooperative (R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 70).

[248] Returning makes Hagar's childbirth safe, since to dwell in the abode of Abraham is better than a hazardous wandering. See W. A. Bailey, "Black and Jewish Women consider Hagar," 41

[249] Bellis reads Sarah and Hagar as a story of two women of different ethnic identity and of struggle for status between servant and her mistress, or an employer and employee in our modern sense. (A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes,* 63–4). The structure of rivalrous or two paired off women transfers in Rebekah cycle. Since Isaac has only one wife, the conflict between twin brothers comes to the fore from the outset rather struggle between wives. Brenner categorizes the patterns of the biblical heroic birth stories under two paradigms: two mothers vs. a single mother. See A. Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the "Birth of the Hero" Paradigm," *VT* 36/3 (1986): 257–73.

maidservants of Leah and Rachel. The point is that we do not know what kind of bond or tie existed between these women, whether intimate or completely submissive, and it is difficult to say whether the surrogacy was a matter of exploitation or benefit.

The same issue arises when applying the English term "slave" to Hagar. There are numerous scholarly debates about the meaning and translation of the Hebrew words שפחה šipḫâ (Gen 16) and אמה ʾāmâ (Gen 21:10–13), which refer to Hagar. It is worth noting that both terms are used interchangeably not only for Hagar (Gen 16:2–5; 21:10–13), but also for Bilhah and Zilpah (Gen 30:3–4; 31:33; 33:1, 6). Furthermore, they are employed in the same speech or dialogue, even by the same speaker (Gen 30:3–4; 1 Sam 1: 16, 18; 21:10–13; 25:27–28).[250] Nonetheless, a significant number of translations and commentaries consistently refer to Bilhah and Zilpah as female servants or maidservants, whereas Hagar is referred to as a female *slave* in both Genesis 16 and 21, or at least in chapter 21.[251] Calling Hagar a "slave" alone among others, then in relation to her ethnicity, thus consequently producing her image

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[250] These terms are used also for "(self)-abasement by or concerning women for the purpose of politeness and/or humility"(Edward Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave: אמה and שפחה in the Hebrew Bible." *JHS* 12 [2012]: 1–21(here 3). In an attempt to distinguish between two terms, BDB asserts that שפחה is more subservient than אמה; Avigad Nahman argues that אמה had higher status than שפחה (A. Nahman, "A Seal of a Slave-Wife [AMAH]," *PEQ* 78 [1946] 125–32). According to Alfred Jepsen, שפחה is used for an unmarried woman, as opposed to גבירה, her mistress to whom she is particularly subordinated at her disposal, whereas אמה is an unfree woman under the dominion of a housefather, either free or slave (A. Jepsen, "Amah und Schiphchah," *VT* 8 [1958]: 293–97). On the assumption that שפחה and משפחה have an etymological connection, Ina Willi-Plein argues that "שפחה is an unspecific term for a female person of kin who is living without a position of her own in the family, and under the power of her and the whole house's mistress" (I. Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance," 36). Both Cohen and Edward Bridge present opposing but more compelling arguments. Based on an examination of various biblical and extra biblical cases, Cohen claims that there is "no difference of meaning or social rank between" these two terms (Ch. Cohen, "Studies in Extra-biblical Hebrew Inscriptions I: The Semantic Range and Usage of the Terms אמה and שפחה," *Shnaton* 5–6 [1979], 25–53 [here 33]); the only distinction appears to be stylistic: "אמה is generally used as the legal technical term for 'female slave, slave-wife' while שפחה is preferred in more colloquial contexts" (ibid, 37). With fuller, extensive, and systematic analysis of the usages of these two terms in the Hebrew Bible, Edward Bridge reaches s conclusion similar to Cohen's. Bridge asserts that "no general distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה can be made. אמה and שפחה are synonyms, both when they designate women and when used by a speaker for deference" (Edward Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave: אמה and שפחה in the Hebrew Bible." *JHS* 12 [2012]: 1–21 [here 21]).

[251] See commentaries of Speiser, Hamilton, Wenham, and Sarna; Quite exceptionally, Westermann translates אמה in Gen 21 as a "maidservant."

as an "Egyptian slave" is another bias.[252] John Waters correctly identifies this issue as "the racial bias of the translators and commentators," explaining, "in Western biblical scholarship, the real culprit is the King James Version of the Bible. Given the negative view of Africa at the time this translation came into existence, a person in the Bible who had an African heritage was described usually as a slave."[253]

We do not have access to the actual social and economic status of אמה and שפחה in the ANE world. They are generic terms that can refer to "any female who is not considered legally free,"[254] either temporarily or permanently,[255] and thus the status vary from case to case. Since the enslavement in the ancient context is complex and there is insufficient data, the original status of Hagar in Abraham's household remains unknown. Therefore, assimilating the contemporary notion of sexual trading, rape, exploitation, or slavery to an ancient context should not be taken for granted.

At the same time, we must not overlook the unfair treatment of the weak through misuse of the power — Sarah's affliction of Hagar and her expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, as well as Abraham's complicity. In relation to that, the skewed interpretations that Hagar (Gen 16:4) and Ishmael (Gen 21:9) provided major causes of the affliction and expulsion (Gen 21:9) should be reconsidered due to the gaps and ambiguities in the texts, as elucidated already in 2.1. In regard to Ishmael's 'isaacing' (21:9), the Hebrew word מְצַחֵק (meṣaḥeq) is ambiguous and

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[252] Many contextual readings of Hagar associate her with African, African-American women, and feminist readings often describe her as a female slave, bond woman, Egyptian slave, or slave woman. Cf. Gafney contends that both אמה and שפחה have the "sexual nature of servitude" (*Womanist Midrash*, 75): she chooses the translation "slave," rather than "servant," for both terms, applying them not only to Hagar but also to Bilhah and Zilpah (idem, 58). According to Gafney, these are slave-surrogate stories in terms of sexual subordination (see especially, "Special Section: The Torah of Enslave Women," in ibid, 72–85).

[253] John W. Waters, "Who was Hagar?" 203; see also W. A. Bailey, "Black and Jewish Women consider Hagar."

[254] Ch. Cohen, "Studies in Extra-biblical Hebrew Inscriptions I ," 47 (Though he uses the translation "female slave").

[255] Though warfare produced enslavement, there were also cases that people sold themselves or their children into servitude (John W. Waters, "Who was Hagar?", 202–3); Slaves could be free with payment or manumitted upon master's death (Cohen, 199).

Isaac is not the direct object of it (וַתֵּרֶא שָׂרָה אֶת־בֶּן־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מְצַחֵק).[256]

Despite the elusiveness of this verse, exegesis frequently claimed that Ishmael did something negative to his half-brother Isaac.[257] Sarah might have felt something unpleasant out of Ishmael's action, which is her own interpretation.[258] The narrator implies that these were mistreatment and wrongdoings by clearly demonstrating divine compassion for Hagar's suffering.

In terms of being marginalization and victimization, Hagar and Sarah share something in common in that both oppose dominant socio-economic or patriarchal institutional structures.[259] Nevertheless, Sarah, who is in a relatively privileged position, chooses to separate from the other woman rather than cooperate with her,[260] sparking academic debates among feminist critics. However, from a different perspective, she is an underdog in terms of age and fertility. Sarah cannot help but see Ishmael and Hagar as a potential threat to her precious son, especially given the circumstance that Abraham and Sarah, both in their advanced years, will die sooner or later. As a mother, it is understandable that she felt compelled to take precautions to protect her child. Thus her motivation is at least understandable although the action cannot be justified. Further, The text is open to an alternative reading: Sarah just suggested to Abraham to cast

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[256] LXX adds "with her son Isaac," while translating מְצַחֵק into παίζοντα (παίζω, paizō), 'playing,' which can be rendered either positively or negatively. For an detailed analysis of this verse as well as text-critical issues, see R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection,* 83–6.

[257] By translating it either "playing with Isaac," or "mocking Isaac," or "making fun of Isaac." This can be traced back to a long history of (primarily rabbinic) interpretation eager to justify Sarah's expulsion of Hagar and Ismael.

[258] See further Joshua Schwartz, "Ishmael at Play: On Exegesis and Jewish Society," HUCA 66 (1995): 203–21; J. E. Mckinlay, "Sarah and Hagar: What Have I to Do With Them?" 161; P. Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 44.

[259] Claassens, "Laughter and Tears," 296.

[260] Rather than "solidarity and sisterhood," thereby "extending and transforming privilege." (Gafney, *Womanist Midrash,* 38). See also R. J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy"; Claassens, "Laughter and Tears," 305–8.

Sarah's attitudes are opposed to Pharaoh's daughter who shows compassion and cooperation with ethnic female others (Exod 2). For a fuller discussion, see chapter 6.

them out (גרש)[261] without specifying a way; it would not have been her intention to make them wander in the desert with no water and die. Abraham, as a man of authority, was the one who carried it into effect. As a result, it is necessary to reconsider viewing Sarah as a completely callous woman, as has been done throughout the long history of biblical reception.

The counter-reading also applies to Hagar, who is often regarded as poor and powerless according to the prior interpretation. Similar to Sarah, Hagar also does her best to ensure the safety of her child, who is facing death as they are forced to wander in a desert. Gen 21:15b–16 depict the actions Hagar takes as follows:

And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed [וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ] the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down by herself opposite at about the distance of a bowshot, because she said, "Let me not see the death of the child." So she sat down opposite, raised her voice and wept.

Cogan interprets וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ as "abandoning" her son to die,[262] thus indicating Hagar in despair and hopelessness.[263] Trible interprets Hagar's placing her child under the shrub as "lowering a body into a grave," thereby preparing his "deathbed."[264] Wenham has a similar but slightly different opinion: "In reality she sits at a distance, so that she cannot hear the crying of her child which tears her heart, and to allow herself to weep freely."[265] Yet Hagar's movement opposite from her child may have an implicit purpose: she does not want to let her child hear

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[261] In fact, the Neo-Assyrian parallel (of the second millennium B.C.E.) confirms that Sarah's mistreatment of Hagar (Gen. 16) and expelling her (Gen. 21) are not totally unacceptable conduct in their cultural milieu: if the wife proves to be barren she may use a maidservant as a substitute yet it is not her obligation for the sake of her husband; the resulting children are regarded as her (principal wife's) own benefit allowing her complete control over the maidservant; in addition, depending on what the principal wife wants, the maidservant may either be protected or sold. See van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel."

[262] Morton Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure," *JNES* 27 (1969), 133–5 (133); see also Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "The Story of Moses's Birth," in *From Babylon to Canaan: Studies in the Bible and its Oriental Background*, PPFBR (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 201–21 (206, footnote 14); Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, vol.1, HCOT (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 274; E. E. Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible*, 55–61.

[263] See Wenham's commentary.

[264] P. Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," 48.

[265] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 85.

her wail in order not to frighten him.[266] Recently Ekaterina Kozlova has interpreted Hagar's carrying her adult child on the shoulder and sitting on the ground as a mourning scene: it is "a mother's ritual identification with her dying son."[267] Though it is a very interesting argument, I place more emphasis on her will to survive rather than see it as a death–funeral.

First of all, שלך does not necessarily mean a negative action of abandoning or throwing; it might be interpreted in a broad sense as 'dispose,' 'expose,' or 'place.'[268] Remarkably, she places Ishmael "under one of the shrubs" (תחת אחד השיחם), which is reminiscent of the "burning bush (סנה)" in Exod 3:2. This leads us to guess she placed Ishmael on a spot where she would typically expect divine help, rather than abandoning him to die. Second of all, Hagar expresses "Let me not see the death of the child" (אל־אראה במות הילד, 21:16b) in negative cohortative form, which thus can be understood as a request–entreaty to help. Raising one's voice or crying out as an expression of appealing to God appears in many biblical accounts (1Sam 1:10; Ps 69:3; 107:13, 19; Jon 3:7–8 etc.). This interpretation makes the immediate following divine response more understandable. God's hearing the voice of the lad (וישמע אלהים את־קול הנער, 21:17 x2) is indeed in response to Hagar's weeping, her plea (21:16). In sum, Hagar placing the child, sitting on ground, and weeping do not mean her resignation and acceptance of death but the reverse is true. She seeks divine intervention to rescue her child.

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[266] God's hearing the voice of the lad is indeed in response to her plea (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 85). Trible, on the other hand, argues that it is the lad's voice that evokes divine speech whereas "the mother's weeping elicits divine silence" (P. Trible, "The Other Woman," 236). Skinner and Westermann alter it as "the child raised his voice and cried" in favor of LXX which substitutes the masculine pronoun for the feminine pronoun (John Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1910; 2nd ed., 1930]; Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 337). This emendation is certainly owing to v. 17 וישמע אלהים את קול הנער(and God heard the voice of the lad). However, as Hamilton pointed out, there is no such compelling reason to connect the voice of the lad (קול הנער) to weeping. See also Chapter 7 in comparison to Moses' mother.

[267] "In light of West- and East- Semitic liturgical materials as well as comparable biblical representation of mourners" (E. E. Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible*, 49–86 [73]). She examines also Rizpah, the woman of Tekoa, and Rachel's mourning in Jer. 31: 15–22 in her book.

[268] This issue shall be discussed more in detail in Chapter 7 dealing with Moses' mother.

The observation so far suggests a new interpretation of the patriarchal narratives on the issue of procreation, suggesting possible, different, or even subversive reading. I showed how the images of male infertility and female fertility are retained throughout the stories. Sarah not only tests Abraham's generative power but utters her conviction that it is Abraham who has caused her childlessness, thus breaking our conventional idea, namely infallibility of male fertility when it comes to the patriarchs. As for Hagar, I argued that she experiences also divine intervention akin to the ancestral mothers' transition from barrenness to fertility, which operates ultimately as a sign of divine blessing. God's provision of life-saving water in the barren land for Hagar and Ishmael parallels God's life-giving intervention for the barren Sarah. Just as God opens (פתח) closed wombs, God opens (פקח) her eyes in the wilderness to find the vital water. As a rich fertile woman, Hagar takes root successfully and freely even in the barren land.

Esther Fuchs claimed that Sarah is given full credit for giving birth to Isaac, the text continues to stress that she is mostly instrumental, and that the miracle is performed for Abraham.[269] Cheryl Exum pointed out that the wives rather than their husbands pass the divine promises on to the rightful son yet the ancestral mothers are secondary characters; their stories are incomplete and fragmented, which stand in sharp opposition to the stories of their husband and sons to whom much greater attention is given.[270] However, the analysis so far proves that neither Sarah nor Hagar serve as a foil to Abraham. Whereas Abraham is depicted as a passive, cowardly, incredulous bystander, who has not shown any willingness to resolve a problem, his wives are the linchpins of the covenant: it is Sarah and Hagar who are concerned in obtaining the safety of children.

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[269] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics."
[270] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 123.

Both Sarah and Hagar are presented as challenging women. Sarah takes the initiative, makes Abraham to beget, criticizes him, while asserting her rights and making herself stand out. She manipulates Abraham into expelling Hagar and Ishmael, thereby selecting her son as his heir. Hagar challenges the institutionalized power hierarchy as she attempts to restructure their mistress-maidservant relationship and flees injustice. She makes the utmost efforts to save her child as she cries out to God, and becomes her own mistress.

However, the narrative ambiguities are present and address implicitly social issues implied by the particular depiction of the characters, including God. As the male-oriented narrator tries to defend patriarchal values, Israel-oriented narrator set a limit to Hagar and Ishmael. Although God protects them, he also separates them from his chosen line. Hence, his compassion is only effective as long as these 'others' do not threaten his people. The ambivalence may have stemmed from the unique nature of the founding myth: the narrator maintains a favourable attitude towards the Israelites' once kinsmen,[271] while drawing boundaries with them in order to define their own identity, which should be distinguished from theirs.[272] Fewell pointedly notes the double-edged nature of the ending of this story: "On the one hand, we are told of God's presence with and protection of Ishmael and, by extension, his mother. And on the other hand that very notice of divine presence and protection permits the reader to give no more thought to their welfare."[273] The conflicting multivalent voices may resonate with the social

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[271] See further M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 64–71.

[272] Fewell, "Imagination, Method and Murder, 136–8; Herd, 4, 20–2, 63–96; 174–77. According to Ngan, Egypt is a "multivalent metaphor" in the "postexilic Judahite community": Egypt is Israel's "object of envy" for its power and wealth, but it is also the object of hatred in Israel's historical memory for its affliction and slavery. Ngan argues that "Hagar represents not only herself but also her people. As the representative of the significant Other, she is the focus of envy and hate in the story." (L. L. E. Ngan, "Neither Here Nor There: Boundary and Identity in the Hagar Story," 74, 79). Fewell notes that the living area of Ishmael was "the buffer zone between Persia and Egypt" in the time of Persian Yehud, and there may have been people whose "political allegiances and hopes" shifted from Persia to Egypt (Fewell, "The Narrative Work of Biblical Children", 133).

[273] See Fewell, "Changing the Subject: Retelling the Story of Hagar the Egyptian" in *Genesis,* ed., A. Brenner, FCB 2/1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 182–94 (here 194 [FN 23]).

context of postexilic Yehud, where the complex political, religious, and social dynamics centered on the group identity existed.[274]

The key point is that the narrator portrays women as having an unbreakable will to overcome and resolve adversity and as protectors of their children, thus presenting them as active agents who eventually contribute to fulfilling the promise of procreation. This is clearly demonstrated by God's inclusion of Sarah in his divine plan as well as his approval of her will and conduct. Hagar is even depicted as the beneficiary of a covenant: thanks to her strong will and efforts, Ishmael was able to survive and leave his own multitude of descendants. Therefore, the women, who are marginalized in a male-centered world, dominate the stories and are fully spotlighted.

Presenting the decisive, proactive, and pioneering personalities of women who especially rise to the occasion at a time of crisis is a coherent characteristic of the HB birth narratives. The next chapter will continue to explore such characterization.

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[274] R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 16–22; 182–4; Fewell, "The Narrative Work of Biblical Children," 133.

Chapter 3 Rebekah's Control over Family Inheritance (the Births of Esau and Jacob)

Rebekah, the mother of twin sons Jacob and Esau, emerges as a dominant woman character following Sarah and Hagar. The succession of Abraham's genealogy as well as the covenant made with him continues as an important issue in this narrative, and Rebekah, like Sarah, plays a crucial role in this line of succession. Christianne Méroz rightly points out that Rebekah replaces Sarah's presence:[275] her birth is announced just before Sarah's death (Gen 22:23); her marriage to Isaac fills the void caused by Sarah's death (24:67).[276] Indeed there are several similarities between Sarah and Rebekah. Both leave their original homeland for patrilocality; they become pregnant by divine intervention despite initial barrenness; their excessive affection for the favored son acts as a catalyst to cause domestic conflict; the motif of overhearing is involved in the course of their action; both have the story embedding wife-sister motif;[277] they take part actively in deciding the heir either by manipulating a husband or

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[275] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women (Genesis 24–Exodus 2)," in *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 73.

[276] C. Méroz, *Five Women*, 16.

While the patrilineal inheritance from father to son by consanguinity stands out in the narrative complex, the status of the heir's mother passes from one to another, yet with no encounter between mother-in-law and daughter(s)-in-law of a chosen heir. Sarah passes away before her son's marriage. Rebekah disappears from the scene after sending Jacob to Haran, whereupon she may never meet Jacob's wives; she most likely sees only Esau's Hittite wives (Gen 25:34–35; 27:46) and Mahalat, the daughter of Ishmael (Gen 28:8–9), who are not the Israelites' ancestral mothers. Furthermore, Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin (Gen 35:16–20), so she never gets to meet her daughters-in-law, Joseph's and Benjamin's wives. Leah is also an ancestral mother, yet the narrator seems to grant Rachel more of a position of a chosen mother given that her son Joseph is the most prominent son among his brothers, and Jacob gives him extra portions by adopting his sons (Gen 48:1–21) and giving him more territory (Gen 48:22), as well as a more favored blessing (Gen 49:25–26), thereby ranking him as an implicit heir. In terms of a chosen mother, James G. Williams believes that "beauty is a code that the mother is blessed and a cue that her progeny will be favored (James G. Williams, "The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes," *JSOT* 17 [1980]:107–19 [here 115]).

[277] On this thrice-told tale, see further R. Polzin, "'The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger," *Semeia* 3 (1975): 81–98; Mark E. Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessing for the Nations," *JBL* 109 (1990): 599–611; T. Desmond Alexander, "Are the Wife/Sister Incidents of Genesis Literary Compositional Variants?" *VT* 42 (1992): 145–53; J. C. Exum, "Who's Afraid of 'the Endangered Ancestress'?" in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible,* eds., Exum and Clines, JSOTSup 143 (Sheffied: JSOT Press, 1993), 91–113; appeared also: in *Fragmented Women,* 148–69; and in *Women in the Hebrew Bible,* 141–56. Cf. For the structural anthropological approach, See E. Leach, "Why Did Moses Have a Sister?" in: E. Leach and D. Alan Aycoc, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth.* RAIGBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 33–67.

deceiving him; the rivalry paradigm between family members is presented; both send one of two sons away from the home.

Despite the commonality between them, scholarly attention has emphasized Rebekah's positive character: Rebekah is "dynamic bustling, energetic and enthusiastic,"[278] whereas Sarah is "confined, passive, cowardly, deceptive, and unfaithful."[279] C. G. Allen reads Rebekah as a model of courage, the mother of the faith, and even a saint-like figure who responded to God.[280] Drawing a comparison between Sarah and Rebekah, Fuchs underlines "Rebekah's greater involvement in the future of her children" and points out that Rebekah is different from Sarah in the way that she takes part in naming her twin sons and "appears at center stage, alongside Isaac."[281] It is worth noting that the book of Jubilees, which is generally dated to the 2nd century BCE, elevates Rebekah's role: her affection for Jacob is "authorized"[282] by Abraham: Abraham commands Rebekah to watch over Jacob whom she loves more than Esau; he explains that God will choose Jacob "to be a people for possession unto Himself" and that his name as well as the name of his fathers shall be blessed in Jacob's seed; he even calls Jacob before the eye of Rebekah and blesses him.[283] The author of Jubilees tends to portray Isaac negatively while offering Rebekah as a prophetic figure: the spirit of righteousness descends upon her (25:14); Esau's heart is told to Rebekah in her dream (27:1).

Reading Rebekah in a positive light might be based on reading back from her ultimate success in making Jacob the inheritor and her victory over the alliance between Isaac and

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[278] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 179

[279] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," 154 [*Semeia* 46]; The negative reading of Sarah is rooted in YHWH's blaming her (Gen 18) as much as her harsh treatment of Hagar and Ishmael as discussed in the previous chapter.

[280] Christine G. Allen, "Who was Rebekah?: 'On Me Be the Curse, My Son,'" in *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*, ed., Rita M. Gross (Missoula, Mount.: Scholars Press, 1977): 183–216.

[281] E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible."

[282] Piet. V. Boxel, "The God of Rebekah," *SIDIC* 9 (1976): 14–8 (here 16)

[283] Book of Jubilees 19:16–25; 26–30. Robert H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or The Little Genesis* (London: SPCK, 1902); John C. Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees*, CBQMS 18 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987), 27.

Esau.[284] In addition, the laudatory introduction for Rebekah through the story of betrothal in Gen 24 carries implications that she is a divinely approved wife for Isaac, thus building up her positive image as a chosen ancestral mother.[285]

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the evaluation of Rebekah, raising moral questions, met with a negative assessment that she was a schemer, a heartless Lady Macbeth, and a "discreditable and indefensible" person who broke family unity by instigating discord.[286] Mary Donovan Turner attempts to restore Rebekah's positive image, underlining her prophetic, clear-sighted, and courageous character.[287] Exum, on the other hand, claims that Rebekah is just as manipulative as Sarah: "Sarah is callous" and "Rebekah is deceptive."[288] Rebekah, according to Exum, even disrupts the natural line of inheritance — the right of primogeniture.[289] However, it seems not appropriate to judge a person as all bad or all good.

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[284] Or partly due to Rebekah's dissatisfaction with Esau's exogamous marriage. She reveals hostility toward his Hittite wives and sends Jacob away from a furious Esau on the excuse of the endogamous marriage for Jacob, which is likely to be applauded by those who strongly oppose religious syncretism. See further, Il-Seung Chung, *Liberating Esau: A Corrective Reading of the Esau–Jacob Narrative in Genesis 25–36* (PhD diss. The University of Sheffield, 2008 [esp. 'Esau's Marriage']). According to Chung, Isaac intended to bless Esau from the outset regardless of his marriage to Hittite women. On the contrary, Deborah Steinmetz (*From Father to Son*, 100) argues that Esau was unqualified to receive his father's blessing because of his choice of wives and his second choice of marrying Ishmael's daughter, which was wrong again since he selected a line that was not chosen. Exum observes the importance of the patrilineal endogamy to keep a pure line of descent in order not to share the land of Canaan with its indigene in particular. The descent from a proper mother, according to Exum, is at the same time significant for determining Israel's identity (J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 107–20). On this issue, see further Naomi A. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993).

[285] Different from Sarah who is introduced simply as a wife of Abraham with no particular explanation of her qualities but with a negative statement, "and Sarai was barren; she had no child." (Gen 11:29–30). Nevertheless, Sarah is divinely approved by her name change from Sarai to Sarah through her husband and by the annunciation given to her husband again in her absence; See also Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky, *The Bible Now* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

[286] Mary Donovan Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," *LTQ* 20.2 (1985): 42–50 (here 48 in reference to S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* [London: Methuen, 1906; 1904], 255; A. S. Herbert, *Genesis 12–50*, TBC [London: SCM Press, 1962], 76–7; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12–50*, CBC [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 137). On early Jewish and Christina interpretations, see M. D. Turner, ibid, 47–8.

[287] M. D. Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," 45, 47.

[288] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 133. Exum argues that they behave in such a way on account of the maternal instinct for protecting their son(s) and ensuring their interest, which reflects a male view since Genesis is the product of the patriarchal worldview and its narrator is androcentric. Cf. E. Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," 154 [*Semeia* 46]).

[289] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 133.

The nature of the biblical characters is often multidimensional or ambivalent, and Rebekah is no exception.

Taking these considerations into account, I will delve into the analysis of the texts — not imposing biased views on her character — and will move to a deeper level of understanding of Rebekah's behaviours. In doing so, the motifs behind her manipulative conduct shall be figured out.

3.1 The Oracle: Who Interprets What?

The birth narrative of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:19–26) consists of the following elements: introduction and information about Isaac and Rebekah's family background (vv. 19–20) — Isaac's prayer for his barren wife, Rebekah, and her pregnancy (v. 21) — the oracle (vv. 22–23) — twin birth and the name etiology (vv. 24–26).[290]

After the short introduction, the narrative gets quickly to the point. In comparison with Sarah's case, there is a prominent change in how the narrator reports the process of Rebekah's impregnation. Unlike Sarah, Rachel and Hannah, "Rebekah does not seem too bothered by her barrenness," as Fewell and Gunn put it.[291] Without referring to any familial trouble or to the distress of their being childless, readers are told immediately that Isaac prays to YHWH to heal his wife's sterility.[292]

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[290] After the birth of Isaac and the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, a series of stories is grouped before the birth of Jacob and Esau: a treaty between Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba (Gen. 21: 22–34), the Akedah and Genealogy of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Gen 22), Sarah's death and Abraham's purchase of Machpelah for her burial (Gen 23), the story of Rebekah's betrothal to Isaac (Gen 24), Abraham's taking another wife Keturah and sending her children away from his heir, Isaac followed by his death and the Genealogy of Ishmael (Gen 25:1–19).

[291] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 73.

[292] Readers are informed Rebekah is barren by narration but the characters — Isaac and Rebekah — would have not known who is responsible for their childlessness, as explained earlier in Chapter 2 when dealing with the case of Abraham and Sarah.

ויעתר יצחק ליהוה לנכח אשתו כי עקרה הוא ויעתר לו יהוה ותהר רבקה אשתו

"Isaac interceded to YHWH on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and YHWH was moved by his plea,[293] and his wife Rebekah conceived." (v. 21)

The actual time-gap between two events, Isaac's prayer and Rebekah's impregnation is not known.[294] The fast-moving plot, however, causes readers to feel that YHWH answered Isaac's intercession on her behalf with no hesitation.[295] Through Isaac's prayer and her resultant impregnation, Rebekah might have experienced that YHWH, the god of her husband's family, is highly potent in solving human matters. Thus, when faced with the prenatal struggle between the children in her womb, she takes emergency steps to deal with her own problem. That is, Rebekah goes to inquire of YHWH about what to do, expecting again his outstanding effectiveness. So what we have in this birth narrative is the divine oracle rather than the divine annunciation. YHWH directly responds to her, giving, however, an enigmatic oracle, which shall be discussed in more detail later.

As predicted by the oracle, Rebekah gives birth to twins. Isaac and Rachel name them Esau, the elder and Jacob, the younger.[296] They are distinguishable by appearance since Esau is ruddy and hairy (Gen 25:25).[297] Inevitably, the portents of the fraternal conflict, as foreshadowed by their prenatal struggle in the womb, become clearer as the story unfolds: they have totally different preferences — one for hunting in the wild and the other for "dwelling in

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[293] Many translations choose an active form: "YHWH responded to his plea" (TNK); "and the LORD granted his prayer" (NRS); "ἐπήκουσεν δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεός" (LXX/ "and the Lord heard him" LXE). In fact, the Hebrew text uses Niph. of עתר (Waw consc. Imperfect, 3masc sg.) + ל differentiating from qal of עתר (Waw consc. Imperfect, 3masc sg.) used in the principal clause of the prior sentence. As to the similar phraseology, see 2S 21₁₄.

[294] Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah and sixty years old when the twins were born. It is unclear whether he prayed for twenty years or he decided to pray after twenty years have passed without children. The narrator does not elaborate on this point.

[295] Different from the long wait of Abraham and Sarah for a child after God's promise of offspring., which reflects the delayed promise of innumerable descendants given to his father. Nevertheless, the narrator does not elaborate this issue.

[296] As for Esau, literally "they named"(ויקראו) while for Jacob, "he was named" (ויקרא) (Gen 25:24–25).

[297] Perhaps binovular twins rather than identical twins. V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 178; Benjamin Goodnick, "Rebekah's Deceit or Isaac's Great Test," *JBQ* 23 (1995): 221–8 (here 222–3).

tents" (Gen 25:27), which anticipates their incompatible personalities (v. 27). The immediate

following description of parental partiality (v.28) ignite further conflicts:

ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו ורבקה אהבת את יעקב

Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Gen 25:28
RSV)

Isaac's partiality for Esau seems to stem from his pleasure in eating meat.[298] Esau hunts and

cooks. Strangely, there is no elucidation why Rebekah favors Jacob, although the omission of

the causal subordinate clause (~כי) breaks its symmetrical structure. The concealment excites

the reader's curiosity: she may have some plausible reasons for it in contrast with Isaac's

worldly value; she may have found good personal qualities in him.[299] Or it is conceivable that

she would have been motivated by her sense of which son would better handle the family's

inheritance and would be more likely to care for her in her old age, as Fewell and Gunn

suggest.[300] It is also presumable that her partiality for Jacob arose from defiance to her husband:

she loves Jacob in her attempt to ensure him psychological protection from feelings of relative

deprivation caused by his father's partiality for Esau.[301] Indeed, that Isaac favouritizes Esau

over Jacob kindles strife. Isn't it unfair that Isaac devised a plan to bestow every good blessing

on Esau, the firstborn, while completely ignoring Jacob who is also his son?[302] At the very

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[298] "Venison" according to KJV, JPS Tanakh 1917, KJB (The Koren Jerusalem Bible), ASV.

[299] As implied in the expression, תם (25:27) which is often translated as 'quiet,' 'mild,' or 'peaceful' but can also be rendered as 'complete,' or 'perfect' (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 177)

[300] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 74–5. As a tent dweller, Jacob could have stayed close to his mother and spent much time with her, consequently suggesting that he may have had a strong tie with her.

[301] Or perhaps due to psychological attraction for the opposite of their characters: Rebekah's outgoing personality versus Jacob's indoor lifestyle; Isaac's introverted personality versus Esau's outdoor lifestyle. Cf. Goodnick draws parallels between Isaac and Esau, saying that: Isaac is "described as *walking in the field* and Esau *as a man of the field*" and both are self-indulgent (B. Goodnick, "Rebekah's Deceit or Isaac's Great Test," 222 [italics original]).

[302] When Abraham sent away his other sons by Keturah from Isaac, he gave them at least some gifts (Gen 25:6); the Hebrew uses a term "sons of the concubines" (בני הפילגשים), although neither Keturah nor Hagar is defined as a concubine. Speiser reads it as an abstract "concubinage"; If the plural form is retained, this implies

least, Sarah's preference for Isaac over Ishmael is justified by the fact that Isaac is her own son, whereas Ishmael is not. On the other hand, Isaac's unfair distribution of blessing is hard to understand. Esau's outcry twice in interrogative sentences throws out the same question: "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (27:36 RSV) הלא־אצלת לי ברכה; "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." (27: 38 RSV). הברכה אחת הוא־לך אבי ברכני גם־אני אבי.[303] Esau's speeches could mirror Jacob's feeling, as he was actually the one who was rejected by his father.

If Isaac planned to distribute equal blessings to both sons or make them co-beneficiaries of his blessings even if there are differences, there would have been no need for Rebekah's counteraction — masterminding Jacob's deception of Isaac and Esau and stealing the blessings. The implication in the narrative, however, is that Isaac has only one blessing to give, so a choice has to be made. The oracle Rebekah received may hold the clue to understand the motives behind Isaac and Rebekah's actions and behaviours.

It is important at this juncture to pay attention to the interaction between the oracle and the characters' motives behind actions and behaviours.

Let us examine the oracle over four half verses (Gen 25:23) closely.

<div dir="rtl">

ויאמר יהוה לה
שני [גיים כ] (גוים ק) בבטנך
ושני לאמים ממעיך יפרדו
ולאם מלאם יאמץ
ורב יעבד צעיר

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And YHWH said to her:
"Two nations are in your womb
And two peoples shall be separated even from your body
And one people shall be stronger than the other

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not only Keturah's six sons but also Ishmael received the gifts in the long run after Sarah's death. See G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 159–60; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*,164; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 187.

[303] The phrase "my father," repeated twice, emphasizes the father-son relationship, thus implying father's unfair treatment toward a fruit of his loins.

And the elder (or the younger) shall serve the younger (or the elder)."

The language used here differs from simple prose. It is very ambiguous and more like poetry which retains unresolved metaphorical implications.[304] One of the characteristics of this oracle is that it provides gradually increasing information. The oracle begins with the existence of two nations, then moves on to the difficulty of their peaceful coexistence. The particle preposition from מְ (מִמֵּעַיִךְ, from your body) presents that notion that they had drawn apart ever since they were still embryos. Such a separation even before the birth emphasizes the fact that the destiny of the two children has been preordained.[305] Secondly, the oracle foretells in more detail the future of the two peoples. It is, however, cruel to some extent: not only shall one people be stronger than the other, but also one shall serve the other, which is the actual core of the oracle.

The last part of the oracle draws our special attention by its enigmatic feature. First, it is worthy of special notice that the three half verses have employed the same terminology for the two groups: "two nations" (שני גיים) and "two people" (שני לאמים).[306] Hence, even when referring to superiority, there is no specific indication of which one prevails (לאם מלאם יאמץ, "one people shall be stronger than the other"). However, for the last part of the oracle, in the

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[304] For about some textual problems on 'שני' and 'יפרדו,' see Robert A. Kraft, "A Note On the Oracle of Rebecca (Gen. xxv. 23)," *JTS* n. s. 13 (1962): 318–20.

[305] Interestingly, we have a very similar usage of this מְ (*min*) in the birth narrative of Samson (Judg. 13:5,7), again, in the context of the fate of the child to be born:

כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן…(…for the boy shall be a Nazirite to YHWH from the womb… [13:5bα];

כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן עד־יום מותו…(…for the boy shall be a nazirite to YHWH from the womb to the day of his death [13:7bβ]).

The expression מן־הבטן alludes that Samson is destined to be a Nazirite from his mother's womb. Probably for this reason, even the mother is subject to the Nazirite regulations: she must not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat anything unclean in order not to defile the consecrated embryo.

[306] The meaning between "*goy*" and "*le'om*" is not strictly distinguishable. The former seems to indicate a great individual group that can make a nation, whilst the latter suggests a kind of ethnic community (Is 51:4). Otherwise, it can be a simply an archaic word which has less examples in the Hebrew bible. Elsewhere in Pentateuch, appears this word only in Gen 27:29 in plural form in similar context, i.e. Isaac's blessing, thus perhaps for poetic use as Westermann points out (*Genesis 12–36*, 411 [but Westermann gives a wrong verse indication; needs a correction from Gen 27:39 to Gen 27:29]). Speiser sees *le'om* as a poetic synonym for "nation" used in preference to 'am (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 194)

last line of the above v. 23, two different words are used to show parallel contrast: רב (the

elder) and צעיר (the younger).[307]

Most translators and commentators have read this phrase as "the elder shall serve the

younger." Yet this interpretation often depends on reading back from the fulfillment of the

oracle. In fact, the Hebrew text leaves the door open for a reversed translation since the Hebrew

syntax does not give a clear indication which noun is the subject or the object of the sentence.[308]

Therefore, "the younger shall serve the elder" is a possible translation as well.[309] In sum, what

the last part of the oracle signifies is that *one* of the twins shall serve the other one.

However, readers often fail to notice this double-edged oracle, and consequently read it as

predicting the younger's predominance since they know the story ends in Jacob's dominion

over his elder brother.[310] Viewed in this light, readers have traditionally interpreted Rebekah

as one who is fulfilling YHWH's will according to the oracle she received.

Richard Elliott Friedman and Shawna Dolansky argue interestingly on this matter. A more

remarkable suggestion is given by him:

> In Hebrew the verb can come before or after the subject. The oracle can therefore mean
> *either*. "the elder will serve the younger," *or* "the elder, the younger will serve." It can have
> two opposite meanings, and so the person who receives it may hear it either way. Rebekah
> favors her younger son, Jacob, and so it comes as no surprise that she hears the former
> meaning. She will take action to ensure that her favorite, Jacob, will be the next patriarch.[311]

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[307] Heb. *rab* is normally used for quantitative sense (numerous, plentiful). However, Speiser has pointed out that its cognate Akk, "rabu" has its pair contrast "sehru." According to him, *mahru rabu* (elder son) and *mahru sehru* were used in regard to an "inheritance share" in family law (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis,* 194–5). When considering the archaic or poetic characteristics of the oracle, Heb. pair "רב" and "צעיר" for indicating "the elder" and "the younger" seems to have no problematic issue.

[308] Due to the lack of case marker of the verb עבד.

[309] R. Alter, *The Art of Bible Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 31.

[310] Regarding his purchase of the birthright and usurpation of the blessing, the story does not specify whether Jacob overpowered Esau; he simply became wealthy and remained in the land of Canaan, while Esau moved to Seir. According to Heard, the traditional interpretation, "the elder shall serve the younger" appears to be the "Israelite" narrator's wish for the "Israelite" audience to read in this manner (*Dynamics of Diselection*, 99). See also Friedman and Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, 86–7

[311] Friedman and Dolansky, *The Bible Now*, 87.

I agree with Friedman's opinion that the meaning of the last part of the oracle is uncertain as I stated before.[312] Provided that Rebekah interpreted the oracle as she wished or understood only after the twins were born and had grown, Friedman's opinion stands to reason.[313] Then, another question arises: Why did Isaac want to bless only Esau? Applying Friedman's view the other way around on the premise that Rebekah shared the oracle with Isaac, he might have interpreted the oracle in the opposite way, "the elder, the younger will serve" since he favors Esau, the elder. These above-mentioned presumptions suggest both Rebekah and Isaac actively took part in accomplishing the divine plan, even though their arbitrary interpretations of the oracle differed: Rebekah for "the elder will serve the younger," and Isaac for "the younger will serve the elder."[314]

The narrative shows that the deception of Isaac and Esau in order to usurp the father's blessing is a joint production of Rebekah and Jacob. Probably Jacob's purchase of the birthright functions to justify his action. However, acquiring the birthright[315] means to become an "elder." If Rebekah and Jacob, as one team of players, understood the oracle as meaning "the elder shall serve the younger," why did Jacob want to be the "elder," destined to meet a misfortune, by taking the right of primogeniture? Did they regard the birthright privilege, inheritance of the first born in other words, more valuable than the divine oracle? That explanation contradicts

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[312] Heard (*Dynamics of Diselection*, 99–102) also discusses this issue of ambiguity in detail, offering a translation "the older the younger will serve" to provide the same ambiguity also in English (ibid, 99).

[313] Before the birth, neither Isaac or Rebekah can decide who is the elder and who is the younger or whom they favor more. At least at the moment when the oracle was given, either of them could not make any decision to determine its meaning as Friedman suggests.

[314] It is also possible that Rebekah interpreted "the younger will serve the elder," whereas Isaac did "the elder will serve the younger." If this is the case, it stands to reason that their actions against the oracle were intended to prevent the oracle from coming true. However, this assumption is not very convincing given that their depending upon God represented by his prayer and her inquiry in the narrative context, aside from the overall portrayal of Isaac's faith and piety in God in larger narrative.

[315] Take notice of the wordplay between "beraka" (ברכה blessing) and "bekorah" (בכרה, firstborn) by reversing the order of ר and כ. Wenham (*Genesis 16–50*, 178) has pointed out the anagram too in his commentary. Interestingly, the status of בכרה between Jacob and Esau is reversed, which is in close association with ברכה.

the idea that Rebekah deceives Isaac for the purpose of fulfilling YHWH's will. In this case the only plausible answer is that Jacob did not know the oracle and acted autonomously without consulting his mother.

All things considered, the crucial point about the oracle is not the matter of elder and younger but the oracle's ambiguity itself: the bitter-sweet or the bright as well as the dark side of the destiny of Rebekah's twins. On the one hand, the oracle implies the fulfillment of YHWH's blessing of the great descendent which has been given to Abraham, while it affirms at the same time the blessing given to Rebekah by her family that she will be a mother of innumerable progeny (Gen 24:60). But on the other hand, it foretells the unequal distribution of fortune for the twins. It goes without saying that one sibling asserting dominance over the other evokes conflict, especially when it is unclear who is to be dominant. This double-sided character of the oracle offers blessing and curse at the same time. The narrative puts emphasis on these contrasting terms and ideas, as we observe that Rebekah and Jacob mention blessing (ברכה) and curse (קללה) when making a plan to deceive Isaac (Gen 27:12–13), that Isaac states "Cursed be everyone who curses (ארר) you, and blessed be everyone who blesse (ברך) you!" (Gen 27: 29c, RSV), and that he blesses one but curses another (Gen 28: 28–29, 37, 39–40).

Therefore, a more persuasive hypothesis is that Rebekah took the initiative due to the anxiety caused by ambiguity of the oracle. Rebekah gave birth to twins who were distinguishable by appearance and were entirely different in character (vv. 24–27) as predicted in the first part of the oracle. If so, on the assumption that Rebekah shared the oracle with Isaac, the parents could guess that the second part of the oracle that is inauspicious would be realized too. Consequently, this ambiguous oracle must have been a source of worry for Rebekah and Isaac. What they actually did was to fight for their own favorite son to prevent him from being a victim of the oracle, so to speak, the ill omen.

This interpretation explains many of the otherwise unexplained actions. As for Rebekah, she was sure that Isaac would practice his right to bless or conduct the inheritance issue.[316] Therefore, she deliberately listens to[317] what is going on between him and Esau, and takes action against it. In this regard, Alice Ogdon Bellis rightly points out, "Rebekah was a character who had difficult choices to make, choices that were severely limited by her social context."[318]

As for Isaac, he chooses to grant every good thing only to Esau. In doing so, he may believe that he protects his favorite from falling victim to the ill omen. As for Jacob, he acquired the birthright for self-protection, judging from his disadvantageous situation due to his father's partiality for Esau. Considering his hesitation and fear (Gen. 27:11–12), Jacob may not have been interested in his father's blessing but rather may have had expectations about the material possessions that he would inherit as his father's primogeniture.[319] It is a very sensitive issue to determine who is a firstborn if they are "twins": it is an almost a neck-and-neck game that is won by a very narrow margin. That might be the very reason Jacob adhered to the birthright. Surely, YHWH presets a human being's destiny by giving an oracle yet at the same time he leaves room by making it ambiguous. So how to discern the meaning and divert the outcome into the option they prefer, belongs to the human domain. For this reason, Isaac prepares to enact the unfair blessing while Rebekah disrupts it. If it is the case, is it not YHWH who always offers the cause? YHWH does not reveal his full plan at once,[320] as seen in the case of the ambiguous oracle, but then approves the outcome — Jacob as the heir which is yielded by

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[316] For about the social and legal laws of primogeniture and its displacing, see N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 185–7. In regard to the issue of primogeniture and the prominent feature of younger offspring in biblical literature, see further Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1994),

[317] On this issue, see 3.2. See also Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 75.

[318] A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, 71.

[319] For about the firstborn's privilege, receiving a double share in particular, see the commentary of Wenham on Gen 25:31 (*Genesis 16–50,* 178).

[320] Similarly, as discussed in the previous chapter, when he promised Abraham an heir.

human interactions or chain reactions.[321] In fact, YHWH's characteristic of acting as a troublemaker behind the scenes has appeared constantly even from the first story of Genesis: it is YHWH who causes the first conflict between husband and wife by putting a strange prohibition to eat and not to eat a certain fruit; it is YHWH who causes the first murder of mankind by accepting only Abel's offering, thus stirring up Cain's hatred;[322] it is YHWH who causes the conflict between Sarah and Hagar as well as the expulsion of the innocent by letting Sarah's impregnation be so long delayed.[323]

A deity associated with mischief is often found in Greek and Roman myths. The well-known Delphic oracles are almost always puzzling or tragic as found in the case of Aegeus (the father of Theseus),[324] Acrisius (the grandfather of Perseus), king Laius of Thebes (the father of Oedipus) and the like. Obscurity is characteristic of Greek oracle, and the heroes understand its meaning only after it is realized. The actions they have taken to thwart it, often boomerang.[325] From this perspective, the Greek oracle is very analogous to our story.

When it comes to Isaac, he is hoisted with his own petard. Although he made a plan to give all the blessing to Esau, according to his interpretation of the puzzling oracle, this turned out to be a failure because he blessed Jacob after all.[326] It is Isaac who eventually actualizes the

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[321] A similar view has been taken by Friedman and Dolansky (*The Bible Now*, 88). They argue that God does not intervene at all in Rebekah's actions, but rather allows her to determine the meaning of the oracle and then confirms her choice.

[322] The motif of siblings hatred (Esau against Jacob, ten brothers against Jacob) resulted from favoritism indeed goes back to the story of Cain and Abel. In the latter, it is a deity who displays unreasonable partiality.

[323] See the previous chapter.

[324] For example, Aegeus, the father of Theseus receives the oracle at Delphi: "Do not loosen the bulging mouth of the wineskin until you have reached the height of Athens, lest you die of grief." See Plutarch, *Vita of Theseus* (*Lives*, vol 1, LCL); Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca,* 3,15.6 (*The Library*, vol 1, LCL); Goeffrey S. Kirke, *The Nature of Greek Myth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Herbert J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology. Including its Extension to Rome* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2005 [1928]).

[325] Cf. Thetis foretells her son Achilles that his fate is either to gain glory and die young, or to live a long but inglorious life (the Trojan war/ *Iliad* 9.410ff. [LCL]).

[326] There are some scholarly opinions that Isaac was not deceived. Goodnick claims that the old and dim-sighted Isaac had forgotten the divine oracle favoring Jacob, but when he realized the voice had to be Jacob's, he remembered it and blessed Jacob, overcoming his inner conflict—personal inclinations towards Esau (B. Goodnick, "Rebekah's Deceit or Isaac's Great Test," 225–6). Adrien J. Bledstein reads Gen 27 as a trickster story: Isaac is an arch trickster who tests his sons rather than be deceived; he on purpose let Rebekah overhear his plan to bless Esau (Adrien J. Bledstein, "Binder, Trickster, Heel and Hairy-Man: Re-reading Genesis 27 as a Trickster

oracle. In his own tongue, he put an end to the ambiguity of the oracle by irreversibly blessing Jacob, "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers (הוה גביר לאחיך), and may your mother's sons bow down to you..."(Gen 27:29ab RSV)" and cursing Esau "...By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother (ואת־אחיך תעבד)..." (Gen 27:40a). It becomes a tragic ending for Isaac and Esau since it is no one else but the father who brought the ill omen to bear on his favorite son. All Isaac can do is now to resign himself to fate and remain silent.[327]

There is also a possibility that Rebekah did not share the oracle with her husband. Given that Rebekah went to inquire of YHWH (ותלך לדרש את יהוה, 25:22c) in person, not going through Isaac, it is probable that she received a direct response from YHWH[328] and this information she kept for her own power.[329] If this is the case, the original plan of Isaac to bless *only* Esau is not reasonable but simply unfair, thus demonstrating his lack of perception. The

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Tale Told by a Woman," in *Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 282–95. David J. Zuker has a similar but slightly different viewpoint: Isaac and Rebekah made a difficult decision together and collaborated to devise a stratagem to make Esau believe this blessing was given by mistake, while challenging Jacob, the "homebody," to experience personal growth by completing this task, thereupon being forced to leave home, which is another rite of passage; in sum, Jacob, rather than Isaac, was tricked by his parents (David J. Zucker, "A Still Stranger Stratagem: Revisiting Genesis 27,"*CJ* 56. 2 [2004]: 21–31; idem, "The Deceive Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27," *JBQ* 39.1 [2011]: 46–58). Though these perspectives are intriguing, they seem to interrupt the consistent narrative flow in which "the family underdogs, the mother and younger son capsize the traditional power structure, namely the link between patriarch and firstborn" (Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 75). Rather they appear to be influenced by later rabbinical interpretations that are midrashic, most likely in an attempt to defend the honour of the Israelite progenitor by not portraying him as foolishly gullible. For example, Bereshit Rabbah 67:3 says,

> Rabbi Isaac said: He [Isaac] was going to curse him [Jacob], but the Holy One, blessed be He, cautioned: "Beware, for if you curse him, you curse your own soul, for you said: 'Cursed be they who curse you' (Genesis 27:29)."

Midrash Tanchuma (ed. Buber), Toldot 10:3 raises the issue of Isaac was suspicious (in Gen 27: 20, 21f.):

> Now, when Isaac heard him say: BECAUSE THE LORD YOUR GOD MADE IT HAPPEN FOR ME, he said: This is not Esau. He said: Esau never mentions THE LORD YOUR GOD.

[327] It also leaves the question how his blessing took an effect on them.
[328] For women associated with divination, see Esther J. Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy, Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), esp. 43–60.
[329] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 74. In this sense, Rebekah is in juxtaposition with Abraham who is also in question whether he shared the birth announcement with his spouse or not.

portrayal of Isaac as a blind, decrepit old man who falls for a trick supports this idea.[330] Thanks to her monopoly on divine knowledge, Rebekah could be prepared for this worst case — Isaac's *exclusive* favoritism for Esau.

Whether or not she shared the oracle with Isaac, it is Rebekah who ultimately defeats him. The conflict due to sibling rivalry and envy directly related to parental favoritism splits the family into two separate teams: Isaac–Esau vs. Rebekah–Jacob. The former, consisting of paterfamilias and primogeniture, is usually predominant over the latter, made up of woman/mother and the second son. However, the eventual winners of this game of domestic power structure are the underdogs.[331] That is, maternal partiality prevails over paternal partiality. This brings us to the next topic as a consistent characterization of Rebekah in the larger narrative. Her dauntless and manipulative personality shall be dealt with, focused on her pursuit of information and her sending Jacob away.

3.2 *Scientia Potentia Est*: Information, Manipulation, and Renunciation

Most people will agree that Rebekah is an active schemer and a manipulator. She demonstrates competence in solving problems, while taking the lead and controlling the situations. Particularly in the context of a power struggle, if Sarah put Abraham to the test, Rebekah dauntlessly stands against Isaac, the patriarchal authority. As supporting evidence of marital disharmony, in addition to their partiality to different sons, it is worth noticing that not one

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[330] This description is reminiscent of Eli, the High priest (1Sam 3:1–2; 4:15–18) who also loses perspective and judgement.

[331] According to Fewell and Gunn, "nothing better illustrates the contrast between Isaac's authority and Rebekah's power than the story of the usurped blessing" (idem, "The Way of Women," 75).

dialogue between Isaac and Rebekah is found in the long Isaac–Jacob cycle except just one direct speech from Rebekah's side which entailed no answer from Isaac (Gen 27:46).[332]

According to Bellis, "Rebekah's efforts to ensure that Jacob is blessed reveal her lack of authority in inheritance decisions."[333] Given that a patriarch alone has authority for the disposition of property and determining heirship, Rebekah's attempt to make Jacob at least a recipient of the blessing which is *nonmaterial* is as much as she could do for Jacob. Bellis also rightly suggests that "the lack of feminine authority and structural power made many of the women resort to trickery."[334] Rebekah's trickery is well manifested in Gen 27:6–17: she instructs Jacob how to deceive his father, by cooking young goats from their flock, using goatskins, taking the fine garments of Esau. These stratagems could be established thanks to Rebekah's knowledge in household affairs.

One cannot dismiss the fact Rebekah gained the information, Isaac's plan to bless Esau, by overhearing the conversation between them:

Now Rebekah <u>heard</u> when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I <u>heard</u> your father speak to your brother Esau…" (Gen 27:5–6)

Scholars often associated Rebekah's hearing with eavesdropping (27:5–6), thus comparing her behaviour to Sarah's.[335] The text, however, is ambiguous as it is in the case of Sarah.[336] It just says that Rebekah "heard" (שמע) the conversation between Isaac and Esau; we have no idea

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[332] The story unfolds through third-person narration or dialogue between Esau–Jacob, Isaac–Esau, Rebekah–Jacob and Isaac–Jacob, but not between Rebekah–Isaac. All the more reason to suspect discord or a lack of communication between them is that Isaac neither expresses his anger at Rebekah and Jacob nor punishes them. It is more likely that they feel apathy toward each other.

[333] A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, 80.

[334] In discussing the general depiction of the women of Genesis. A. O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, 81.

[335] Eavesdropping has more negative notion that one listens to intentionally someone's private conversation without them knowing.

[336] For further details, see chapter 2.

whether it was a secret talk or not, or where it took place. As such, her overhearing or eavesdropping may not be reprehensible. As suggested in the previous section, Rebekah was mindful of the oracle, whereupon she was watchful as to what was going on around her. Hence her (over)hearing might be done accidentally on purpose. This assumption is underpinned by the fact that she hears again: Esau's plan, this time.

> And the words of Esau her elder son <u>were told</u> to Rebekah; so she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself in regard to you to kill you. (Gen. 27:42)

The words of Esau "were told" (וַיֻּגַּד) to Rebekah. Using hophal stem of נָגַד, the action of her hearing is expressed in a passive manner. This may have happened accidentally, yet it is also possible that Rebekah planted someone beforehand around Esau so that she kept him under constant surveillance, thus ensuring she was prepared for any contingency.[337] Upon obtaining this information, she could save Jacob's life from his furious brother just as she could make Jacob the beneficiary of his father's blessing thanks to the information attained through her hearing. The recurring conversations that she "hears" suggests it is not accidental but a result of her deliberate desire to know something.

Female desire for knowledge goes back to Eve, the first woman created.[338] Fewell and Gunn make an intriguing connection between Eve and Rebekah, claiming that the former is "mother of all living," the latter is "the mother of all Israel." They argue that Rebekah is "entrenched in Eve's legacy" in terms of pangs in childbearing, knowledge of good and evil, and dominance over passive husband: she is troubled by her difficult pregnancy, keeps the power of knowledge — the oracle — to herself; it is Rebekah who "decides and risks," not

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[337] For similar action made by Tamar, see Chapter 6.
[338] Both witness their sons' fraternal conflict, which centers on the issue of divine or parental partiality and results in one being sent away from home.

Isaac.[339] However, as Fewell and Gunn continue, there are significant differences between them: Rebekah "upsets the status quo";[340] she overturns a woman's priority concern — "allegiance to her husband|" over "other familial ties"; she "acts with God's sanction" instead of "divine rebuke"; and she "gains a blessing and a better life for her son," unlike Eve, who "gained knowledge but lost paradise and self-autonomy."[341]

In patriarchal society, information must have been a strong weapon, especially for women, since they are relatively vulnerable in terms of physical capacity and lack authority. Rebekah's craving for this weapon is already presented by her immediate action of inquiring (דרש) of YHWH, when faced with the prenatal struggle in her womb (Gen 25:22). Therefore the narrative is consistent with Rebekah's characterization. As *scientia potentia est* ("knowledge is power"),[342] Rebekah is astute in handling the situation by using information as an effective means to achieve her goals.

Rebekah's daring and ambitious character is in line with the earlier characterization attested in Genesis chapter 23. That she draws water from a well and invites the servant and his camels drink indicates her active, diligent, and generous character. More than that, she is a shrewd judge of a situation. Rebekah daringly takes decisive action, risking her life by leaving her homeland[343] and just following the stranger — Abraham's servant.

Such a decisive character is manifested in her manipulative conduct in our stories. First of all, Rebekah is described as a puppet master: she tries to convince him when Jacob hesitates to deceive his father and brother for fear of detection:

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[339] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 74–5.
[340] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 72.
[341] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 76.
[342] A Latin aphorism commonly attributed to Francis Bacon.
[343] In contrast to Isaac, who sends someone else to find a suitable wife for him rather than leaving himself to the unknown (M. D. Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," 43; Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 72).

But Jacob said to his mother, "You know that Esau is a hairy man, but I have smooth skin. Perhaps my father will touch me and find out that I am deceiving him; in this way, I will bring a curse on myself instead of a blessing." His mother answered, "Let any curse against you fall on me, my son; just do as I say, and go and get the goats for me." (Gen 27:11–13 RSV)

Her speech indicates she is ready to take the blame alone for the consequences. In fact, she takes joint responsibility through her second manipulative act: sending Jacob away to Haran. She maneuvers Isaac into sending Jacob with his authority under the pretext of a need for endogamy in finding his wife.

Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth like these from the daughters of the land, what is life to me?"[344] (Gen 27:46)

Again earlier information is used effectively: Esau's exogamous marriages were displeasing not only to Rebekah but also to Isaac (26:34–45).

What draws our attention is that Rebekah is not only manipulative but also selfless for the benefit of her son. Given that Jacob was not married yet,[345] one can imagine that Rebekah might have a close relationship with him. However, she bears being separated from him for his safety.[346] In this regard, Sarah is recalled. In the context of choosing an heir or passing a blessing, both Sarah and Rebekah send away one son, though not her biological son in Sarah's case. Yet whereas Sarah sends away the rivals — Hagar and Ishmael — for the benefit of her

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[344] למה לי חיים Lit., "Why to me (is) my life". Hamilton translates it "Why should I go on living?" (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 232); Cf. אם־כן למה זה אנכי on Rebekah's statement (Gen 25:22aβ)

[345] Esau married at his age of 40 (Gen 26:34).

[346] I shall discuss the issue of mother's renunciation of a son later in chapter 8 and 9.

own son, Isaac, Rebekah sends away her favorite son for his own sake.[347] One might speculate they never met again after this separation given that Jacob's return was delayed,[348] Rebekah disappears from the scene, and only the death of Isaac is reported, not Rebekah's.

One last point not to be missed is that Rebekah's sending away Jacob is not only to save Jacob's life from Esau but also to prevent Esau from committing fratricide, which eventually would end in his death or banishment.[349] That Rebekah favors Jacob does not mean she hates Esau; the text clearly mentions the reason for her conduct in her own speech: "Why should I be bereaved (אֶשְׁכַּל)[350] of both of you on one day?" (27:45b). Accordingly, her act should be understood as protecting both sons.

As Rebekah foresaw, Esau's anger cooled down and he forgot what Jacob had done to him (27:45a). By making them separate from the household, she could eventually prevent this evolving into a much bigger conflict between two sons, the potential competitors.[351] This brings forth a positive outcome: Esau, having experienced a long separation, could welcome Jacob, the stealer of his blessing, then could move to Seir of his own accord (Gen 36:6–8). It is feasible that Esau's living base may already have been in Seir when Jacob returned on the basis of Gen 33:16. In any case, the narrator clarifies Esau's peaceful separation without dispute, describing it with almost the same expression used in Lot's split from Abraham:

ולא נשא אתם הארץ לשבת יחדו כי היה רכושם רב ולא יכלו לשבת יחדו

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[347] Jacob is exposed to potential danger on his way and experiences theophany (Gen 28:10–22) as Hagar does. Interestingly, Jacob dispatches Joseph to Shechem which causes danger to Joseph and leads to the separation between father and his favorite son.

[348] Despite Rebekah's words, "and stay with him for a while, until your brother's anger cools down and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send someone to bring you back" (Gen 27:44–45a RSV).

[349] As it happened in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis ch. 4

[350] Jacob uses the same verb repeatedly in a similar context. See Gen 42:36; 43:14 (x2).

[351] For the same reason, Abraham sends away the sons of his concubine from Isaac during his lifetime (Gen 25:5–6), while Sarah sends away Ishmael. On the matter of rivalry and divisions among tribes, See R. Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing the Hero."

And the land could not bear them to dwell together, for their property was great, so they could not dwell together. (Gen 13:6)

כי היה רכושם רב משבת יחדו ולא יכלה ארץ מגוריהם לשאת אתם מפני מקניהם

For their property was great for them to dwell together; so the land of their sojournings could not bear them because of their livestock. (Gen 36:7)

This sort of split is understood as an act to avoid further dispute about the succession, which is a wise solution to sibling squabbles as opposed to the harmful solution of eliminating a potential competitor. Given that both take part in Abraham's burial together (Gen 25:9), it goes without saying that Ishmael and Isaac did not keep up a feud over the promised land. This cooperation might have been possible due to their separation at an early stage as well as Ishmael's safe and stable settlement in a different area. All this considered, this family reconciliation in a denouement is to some extent indebted to Sarah and Rebekah. These women are farsighted enough to lay the groundwork for the establishment of an Israelite ethnos with minimal potential conflict. That would be a small price to pay to avoid the tragedy of fratricidal or clan warfare. As for Rebekah, it is plausible to say that she helps to prevent the worst outcome of the ominous side of the oracle.

On the linear surface, the patriarchal narratives are a series of conflicts, but they end in family reunion and reconciliation. The son who does not inherit the promised land moves peacefully to another land, flourishes there establishing another ethnos, and becomes the father of many nations in keeping with YHWH's promises given to Abraham. Further, it fulfills the blessing given to Rebekah by her family before she left her homeland: "May you, our sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your offspring[seed] possess the gate of those who hate them" (Gen 24:60b). Although this blessing was not from YHWH, its phraseology, ויירש זרעך את שער שנאיו shows a close affinity to the divine blessing given to

Abraham, וירש זרעך את שער איביו "and may your offspring [seed] possess the gate of his

enemies" (Gen 22:17b).[352] Accordingly, it gains credibility, and is realized by descendants of

her sons.[353]

So far, we have discussed how Rebekah, rather than her husband Isaac, the patriarch, controls

the issue of the family inheritance, and we have suggested that she took initiative in response

to the oracle she received. Indeed, the oracle plays a similar role to the stories of the birth

announcement in the sense that the future of the child is foretold. Interestingly, it is Rebekah,

after her pregnancy, who *goes to consult* YHWH. What matters the most is that the last part of

the oracle is ambiguous. ורב יעבד צעיר can have two opposite meanings due to the lack of case

markers: "the elder will serve the younger," or "the elder, the younger will serve." This phrase

indicates unequal distribution of fortune between the twin sons.

   The assumption is that Rebekah and Isaac fought for their favorite son, each wanting to

prevent him from being a victim of the ominous oracle. Therefore, while Isaac intends to grant

every good blessings only to Esau, Rebekah deliberately disrupts this plan. In this view, Isaac

is analogous to a tragic Greek hero whose fate is predetermined by an enigmatic oracle: the

action he has taken to foil it backfires on him. That is, it is no one but Isaac who eventually

brings the oracle to fruition by pronouncing first-hand the inadequate or ominous things[354] to

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[352] This drew scholarly attention to her as a woman who followed in the Abraham's footsteps. See Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 73; M. D. Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," 43.

[353] It is worth noticing that despite the short statement on Rebekah's sterility, her potential fecundity has been alluded at the very outset of her cycle. As I argued that water is figuratively used for a metaphor for fecundity as for Hagar, the same holds for Rebekah: Her first appearance on the stage is marked with a water jar upon her shoulder at the spring of the water (24:15). Indeed, Rebekah gave birth to two sons at a time. Her initial barrenness is likely to be a device to juxtapose her with other barren women, since barrenness in itself becomes a sign of a mother who will bear the heir to the promise. See Chapter 2.

[354] Heard suggests reconsidering the traditional interpretations of Isaac's pronouncements (27: 39–40) to Esau, which are frequently qualified to be an "anti-blessing" or a "curse." According to him, Isaac's words are ambiguous, and thus may indicate Esau's dwelling as "part of the bounty of the earth…and part of the dew of heaven," based on reading *min* (מ) as partitive rather than privative, and *hereb* (חרב) not necessarily directed against human beings (sword in this case), but possibly to animals (knife in this case), which fits an overall portrayal of Esau as "an outdoorsman and hunter." Herd opines that Isaac is *mitigating,* in the last lines (v. 40),

his favourite son Esau while blessing Jacob. There is also a possibility that Rebekah did not share the oracle with Isaac, which suggests Isaac is simply unfair: with his lack of perception, he wanted to bless *only* his favourite son,[355] which is in a way reminiscent of the arbitrary will of God, thereby causing the family conflict. In either case, Rebekah defeats her husband.

Rebekah is prominent for her ambition. She is a person with initiative and drive, acting with subjectivity for her aim. Her dauntless and manipulative personality is consistently described within the larger narrative complex. To gain the upper hand in the family power struggle, she uses knowledge as her weapon, whether when pursuing the divine oracle or when she is deliberately hearing information; she deceives her husband and her son, and controls situations. Not only does she mastermind the whole scheme, but she also takes responsibility for her actions. To avert fratricide, she endures sending her favourite son away, which means Rebekah sacrifices herself to protect *both* sons.

In the narrator's overarching agenda, again woman/mother plays a distinct role in passing on the divine will to the next generation as opposed to ineffective man/father. Rebekah, like Sarah, is described as one who determines the heir, and takes the role of separating two brothers, thus eventually contributing to the fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham. In this light, it is worth noting Fewell and Gunn's comments:

> Taking her revealed knowledge to heart, Rebekah becomes the first voluntary guardian of the promise, ensuring, through whatever dubious means, that Jacob (Israel) inherits the choice land and prosperity rather than Esau (Edom).[356]

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his earlier, irrevocable blessing to Jacob by attaching an "expiration date" at which time "Esau's own attitude toward subservience" may end his servitude (R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection,* 114–7).

[355] Recalling Elkanah's unequal distribution of sacrificial meals. See chapter 9.

[356] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 89.

Furthermore, it is conceivable that YHWH approves Rebekah's conduct, as evidenced by YHWH's call of Jacob and his establishment of the covenant with him in subsequent stories (28:10–15; 31:3; 35:9–12). God is on Rebekah's side: maternal partiality prevails over paternal partiality. In all probabilities, trickster underdogs are welcomed in constructing Israelites' communal identity.

Chapter 4   Leah and Rachel's Sororal Competition and Cooperation for Fertility (the Births of Jacob's Children)

It is notable that so far the patriarchal blessing had been passed from father (Abraham) to one son (Isaac) and to one grandson (Jacob). Thus selecting one heir among siblings was a crucial issue that involved competition among the co-wives (Sarah, Hagar) or brothers (Esau, Jacob) as well as conjugal conflicts (Abraham, Sarah; Isaac, Rebekah). In Jacob's generation, however, the case is characterized by different features: what matters most for his two wives is to have more children — the most boys who will inherit.

Scholarly opinions diverge on this issue. On the one hand, Joseph is regarded as Jacob's chosen or the primary heir since he receives not only an extra blessing (Gen 48) but also more property (Gen 48:22), and it is through him the storyline continues. As van der Toorn comments,

> At Abraham's death, God transferred the blessing to Isaac (Genesis 25:11, ברך pi'el), and Isaac in turn transmitted it to Jacob. Of the twelve sons of Jacob (ברך pi'el, Genesis 27:27–29) it was Joseph who eventually inherited the patriarchal blessing (Genesis 39:2–6), passing from father to son to grandson, constituted the link between the generations.[357]

On the other hand, the subtext reflects (later political) supremacy tensions between Judah and Joseph (Ephraim), as most commentary on Gen 37–50 acknowledges. The rivalry between Leah and Rachel foreshadows such tension.

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[357] Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Ugarit and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life*, SHCANE 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 206. Bradford A. Anderson takes hold the same opinion though his focus is that other unchosen sons are also blessed: "The younger son in the ancestral narratives often seems to obtain the "better" blessing, which includes some sort of familial superiority, if not outright succession. It also seems to invoke fertility and prosperity, elements common to the Abrahamic blessing… it serves to establish the family line through which the storyline will continue…But to say that Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (and the latter's sons) are chosen does not mean that others are not blessed…" (Bradford A. Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance: A Canonical Reading of the Esau and Edom Tradition*, LHBOTS 556 [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 77).

Nevertheless, on the surface narrative structure, all twelve sons are considered as Jacob's heirs since he blesses all of his sons (Gen 49). As Leon Kass argues that in Jacob's generation "the covenant becomes the inheritance of an entire clan, twelve sons in all,"[358] all Jacob's descendants are expected to return from Egypt to the Promised Land inherited by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 50:24). Naomi Steinberg offers a thoughtful understanding,

> In the case of the generation of Jacob's sons, the narrative reaches negative results on the subject of the chosen heir… the Rachel–Leah cycle includes all the brothers, and two grandsons, as Jacob's heirs. By default, all of Jacob's family become his heirs as they share the destiny of (temporary) removal from the land. The conclusion of the Genesis ancestral stories establishes that the heirs to the Terahite lineage are a family residing outside their land. The narrative expects that one day these heirs will return to their patrimony (50:24–25). Together they share this fate because they are all equal to each other and all are potential lineal heirs to the their father. They share the patrilineal name — they are sons of Israel.[359]

The substance of Genesis is intended to establish multiple offspring from Abraham's seed who will be possessors of the Promised Land, as Steinberg correctly observes. Given that all twelve sons begotten by Jacob inherit the religious heritage and the Promised Land, the land of Canaan shall be distributed among the twelve tribes who are the descendants of Jacob, the prime function of the Leah–Rachel cycle is to tell about the birth of each tribal ancestor and the etymology of their names.[360] Thus, to have sons in quantity becomes the central issue as both Leah and Rachel hope that their own sons may achieve or maintain a firm, strong, and

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[358] Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 404.
[359] N. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, 141.
[360] Given that the twelve tribes constitute the Israelite nation, putting emphasis on their belonging to a single family tree would have enhanced national identity and confirmed solidarity.

influential position that can be supported and rallied by the maternal brothers,[361] while considering them as assets that could ensure mothers' future economic security.[362]

With this particular feature in mind, I will examine the issue of pregnancy and childbirth of these two sisters. The first part of this section will analyze Gen 29:31–30:5, and discuss Rachel's resistance to the irresponsible Jacob. In the second part, Jacob's passive character will be the subject for discussion in line with his wives' competition, negotiation and cooperation while dealing with the story of naming children, bargaining over the *duda'im* and turning back on their father. The last part will discuss further the story of the teraphim while comparing and contrasting parallels between the actions of Rachel and Jacob.

4.1 Silent Husband and His Resistant Wife

Leah and Rachel along with their maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah give birth to twelve sons and one daughter. The births of Jacob's offspring are narrated through Genesis 29:31–30:24 and 35:16–22. Yet the whole Jacob cycle is closely connected to them within a larger narrative complex. The backdrop of Jacob's marriage is as follows.

Jacob who escaped from his furious brother arrives in Haran safely and meets Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban, his uncle, at the well (Gen 29).[363] Inspired by his love towards Rachel, Jacob serves seven years under Laban to win her as his wife. But Laban tricks him into marrying Leah, his elder daughter instead of Rachel. Since Jacob has agreed with Laban's

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[361] It is probably for this reason that the birth of Dinah, the daughter of Leah is simply mentioned with no etymology (Gen 31:21).

[362] For more discussion on fertility as a source of wealth in the ancient world, see Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Will Die*: *Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature*. ESS (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), esp. chapter 2 "Interpreting (In)fertility."

[363] As for biblical betrothal type-scenes, see E. Fuchs, "The Bride and Biblical Betrothal Type-Scenes" in idem, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*, 91–115.

request that he will serve him another seven years for the hand of Rachel, he also receives Rachel seven days after his marriage to Leah.

Leah and Rachel, the two sisters, continue to follow the structure of a contrasting pair, i.e. Sarah vs. Hagar, Esau vs. Jacob. They compete over having more offspring by giving their maidservants to Jacob, taking *duda'im* (דודאים), and giving their children meaningful names. As contrasted with female dominant characters, Jacob is described as an acquiescent man for the entire cycle of the births of his children: he is not against having surrogate wives as suggested by Rachel and Leah (30:3–4, 9); without objection, he sleeps with Leah as if he accepts the negotiation between his two wives over *duda'im* (30:14–16); he is even not involved in naming his children except for Benjamin, the youngest.

Let us examine closely the verses that introduce the two sisters with the description of their appearance.

ועיני לאה רכות ורחל היתה יפת־תאר ויפת מראה
ויאהב יעקב את־רחל ויאמר אעבדך שבע שנים ברחל בתך הקטנה

The eyes of Leah were tender and Rachel was beautiful in form and countenance. And Jacob loved Rachel so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." (Gen 29:17–18)

That Rachel is beautiful (Gen 29:17) does not necessarily mean Leah is not beautiful. The meaning of the Hebrew text describing her appearance is not certain. A number of English translations render רך as "weak" thus interpreting the term in a negative way in contrast to the description of Rachel as "beautiful" (RSV, NIV, NAS, LXX). Given the symmetry of the sentence structure, however, it is also possible that the above phraseology introduces the merits of each in terms of physical traits and appearance. As Ephraim A. Speiser points out, it is

plausible that Leah has lovely eyes,[364] thus having her own visual merit. Or, it is possible 'eyes' indicate a general appearance rather than literal eyes.[365] At any rate, the wife of Jacob's preference is Rachel.

What draws our attention is YHWH's prompt intervention in their lives by opening the unloved elder sister's womb.

וירא יהוה כי־שנואה לאה ויפתח את־רחמה ורחל עקרה

YHWH saw that Leah was unloved[366] so he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. (Gen 29:31)

Opening the womb may simply refer to the first childbirth of any woman without any suggestion of barrenness as a problem. It is clear that the narrator does want to emphasize YHWH's role here, but that does not imply anything miraculous or unusual about Leah's pregnancy.[367] What is interesting is that Rachel's barrenness is not explicitly referred to

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[364] See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 225; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 258–9; Rashbam suggests that Leah's eyes were soft, gentle or beautiful and similarly Targum Onqelos reads she had lovely eyes whereas Rashi interprets the passage to mean that her eyes were tender because she was unhappy (Quoted from Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "Biblical Women that Come in Pairs: The Use of Female Pairs as a Literary Device in the Hebrew Bible," in *Genesis*, ed., A. Brenner, FCB, 217–39 [esp. 218–32]). Various renderings are given by modern commentators: "Leah had tender eyes" (Speiser, Hamilton); "Leah's eyes were without lustre" (Westermann); "Leah's eyes were soft" (Wenham). Fewell and Gunn suggest Leah has "tender," "affective", an "responsive" eyes. This indicates, according to them, "each woman possesses something the other does not," thus introducing "the problem for Rachel and Leah is indeed one of un-wholeness" — not being "complete" but only existing "as parts" (Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 78.

[365] Aaron Michael Jensen reads עין here not as indicating "Leah's eyes specifically," but as indicating "Leah's overall appearance," and suggests the phrase ועיני לאה רכות signifies that Leah "at least in comparison with her more shapely younger sister, looked weak and frail." Jensen further points out that "a largely ignored irony present within the Genesis text. Leah's very appearance made her seem biologically the poorer candidate to raise up children for Jacob in comparison with her sister, but unexpectedly it is Rachel who is barren for many years." (Aaron Michael Jensen, "The Appearance of Leah," *VT* 68/3 [2018]: 514–8 (here 517–8)). This may explain why Rachel, not Leah, worked as a shepherd which requires outdoor activities and physical strength.

[366] Rather than "hated." שנואה is often used in comparison with 'loved' thus it rather implies Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah or Leah was unloved whereas Rachel was loved. See, Ramban (רמב״ן, Moses ben Nachman/Nachmanides) on Genesis 21:39; Bereshit Rabba 71:2; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 266. As for rendering "unloved," see, commentaries of Wenham and Hamilton.

[367] Quoting Bereshit Rabba 71:2, Ramban comments that Jacob intended to divorce Leah because she cheated her sister (Gen 29:21–26) so God gave her children so that Jacob should not leave her. However, according to the code of Hammurabi, if a man wished to divorce his wife who has born him no children, the husband should give back her the bride-price he had paid to her parents and the dowry which she had brought on marriage. Given that Jacob worked for Laban 14 years instead of paying the bride-price, he would not have thought to divorce Leah. Cf. If the bride-price had not been given, the husband paid a fixed sum of money (one mina of gold for a patrician or a third for a plebeian) (Hammurabi code § 138–140). See Claude H. W. Johns, *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws,*

YHWH. The narrator could have said "but YHWH refrained from opening Rachel's womb so she was barren" but he does not. Does YHWH play favorites with Leah just as Jacob favors Rachel, thus opening only Leah's womb?[368]

While Leah gave birth to four sons, Rachel remained barren (עקרה), thus causing her a sense of inferiority similar to what Sarah felt after Hagar's prompt impregnation.[369]

ותרא רחל כי לא ילדה ליעקב ותקנא רחל באחתה ותאמר אל־יעקב הבה־לי בנים ואם־אין מתה אנכי ויחר־אף יעקב ברחל ויאמר התחת אלהים אנכי אשר־מנע ממך פרי־בטן

Rachel saw that she did not bear Jacob [any children] then Rachel became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me sons, or I'll die!" And Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has prevented you from [bearing] the fruit of the womb?" (30:1–2)

As mentioned earlier, Rachel's barrenness is not explicitly attributed to YHWH (Gen 29:31). However, Jacob makes the point that the narrator left out: Rachel's barrenness was as much a matter of divine intervention as was Leah's fertility. Using a rhetorical speech " התחת אלהים אנכי אשר־מנע ממך פרי־בטן," Jacob exposes his own thought that Rachel's infertility is a divine decision.[370] There is also a sensitivity to what Jacob may take as implied criticism of the masculinity and potency of a man who cannot father sons. Jacob seems to be saying it is not his fault, but God's, which implies that he reacts over-sensitively. This fits with Jacob's character, who makes lengthy and forceful self-justifications to his wives (31:5–13) and later to Laban (Gen 31:32; 36–42). It is noteworthy that he overreacts to Laban's investigation into

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Contracts and Letters, LAIn 6 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1904), 141–2; Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 163; Janice P. De-Whyte, *Wom(b)an*, 31.

[368] See also, W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 175.

[369] See G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 244. As for the narrator's voice and the character's knowledge in regard to "barrenness," see chapter 2 "Male Infertility and Female Fertility."

[370] Psalmist says that "the fruit of the womb"(פרי־בטן) is divine reward (Ps 127:3).

his stolen teraphim going so far as to say "any one with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it" (31:32 RSV). Interestingly, Jacob who keeps silent on the issue of bearing children, actively takes part only at this stage by expressing his feelings that go as far as to be angry (ויחר־אף).[371] Jacob resembles Abraham in terms of man's passive attitude toward the issue of procreation. Furthermore, Jacob blames Rachel while attributing the cause of her infertility to God, and Abraham marginalizes Sarah by not revealing the divine annunciation that she will have a child. Jacob and Abraham are both unconcerned about their wives' childless situation since they already have an heir.

Nevertheless, traditional readings have tended to criticize Rachel for her reckless outburst or for blaming her husband. For example, John Calvin interpreted Rachel as one who seeks "pre-eminence" and "scarcely refrains from venting her anger against God, for having honored that sister with the gift of fruitfulness."[372] Franz Delitzsch contends that Rachel's grief was just, but her demand on her husband was unjust and childish.[373] According to David W. Cotter, Rachel followed Sarah's way in providing a maidservant instead of praying to God.[374]

However, Rachel's pestering Jacob is not entirely puzzling since a woman's reproductive role was highly important across the ANE. If a wife did not bear a child for her husband, she would damage her reputation and sometimes even be divorced.[375] In addition, infertility was often considered to be a curse from the gods resulting from sin,[376] hence it was a widespread

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[371] The verse 2 is the only place Jacob speaks in Gen 30.

[372] John Calvin, *Commentaries on The First Book of Moses called Genesis*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; 1850), 141. Calvin also opines that "Jacob had been already sorrowful on account of his wife's barrenness. He now, therefore, fears lest her folly should still farther [sic] provoke God's anger to inflict more severe strokes" (ibid, 141).

[373] Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1888), 174.

[374] David W. Cotter, *Genesis, Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 229

[375] Hennie Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East,* OTS 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 91.

[376] K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia*, SSN 22 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 85–7.

custom for infertile persons to turn to divination or magical/medical treatments and rituals.[377]

Various goddesses controlling and helping female fertility, pregnancy, maternity and childbirth, such as Isis, Hathor, Taweret etc., are widely known in ANE. Further, a mother/fertility goddess Asherah (אשרה)[378] is frequently mentioned in the HB either as a consort of El or in conjunction with Baal, or simply as a wooden cultic object.[379]

In contrast, Israelite religion regards God, who is referred to consistently as male, responsible for childbirth, whereas most other systems recognize the need for a female god to deal with this. That the ancestral mothers in patriarchal narratives do not plead directly with YHWH to give them children is perhaps correlated with this absence of a female god. For example, it was Isaac who prayed to God for his childless wife, Rebekah, and here too, it is Jacob, her husband, to whom Rachel turns.

Rachel's desperate plea to her husband is to some extent analogous to the prayer to the goddess Ishtar in ANE text:[380]

You are the judge, procure me justice!

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[377] For various reproductive magic in ANE and Egypt, see further Susan Ackerman, ""I have Hired You with My Son's Mandrakes": Women's Reproductive Magic in Ancient Israel," in *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, eds., Mark Masterson, Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, and James Robson (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2015), 15–29. For rituals concerning male impotence, see Stephanie Lynn Budin, "Fertility and Gender in Ancient Near East" in ibid, 30–49 (esp. 42–4). As for an amulet stone for pregnancy, see M. Stol and Frans A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting,* CM 14 (Groningen: Styx-Publications, 2000), 49–52. See also the British Museum's collection of approximately 660 magical/medical cuneiform clay tablets, including the oldest known Sumerian medical tablet (c 2400 BC) from Nippur in King Ashurbanipal's library.

[378] Perhaps Athirat(u) in Ugaritic myth.

[379] Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess,* UCOP 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82–3; Nicholas Wyatt, "ASHERAH," in DDD, 99–105.

[380] The third prayer among five prayers to Ishtar introduced by Marie–Joseph Seux, in a section of Mesopotamian laments and petitions known as the Akkadian Šuilla ("Rasing of the Hand") genre (Prières Conjuratoires à Main Levée in Seux's book). Marie–Joseph Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie*, LAPO 8 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf. 1976), 325–6. As for the transliteration of the Akkadian texts, see Ishtar 4 in Werner Mayer's *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der Babylonischen* "Gebetsbeschworungen," SPSM 5 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 458. For literary nature and context of Šuilla, see John H. Walton, "Hymns, Prayers, and Incantations," in idem, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990; 1989), 135–65.

You bring order, inform me a ruling!

May my god who is enangered with me turn back to me.

May my transgression be forgiven and my guilt be remitted.

…

May the worries disappear from my heart.

Give me a name and a descendant!

May my womb be fruitful…[381]

The above prayer is not only a childless woman's penitential plea but also her appeal for divine justice that matches Rachel's naming Dan (Gen 30:6) derived from the verb דִּין (*din*) "to judge, vindicate."[382] The supplicant's deep emotional distress leads to a petitionary speech "……Give me a name and descendants! may my womb be fecund" which is suggestive of Rachel's phraseology "Give (הבה) me sons, or I'll die!"

In this light, worthy of mention is Shalom E Holtz's recent work in which he refers to Hebrew petitionary prayers — especially the psalms — comparable to ANE trial records that demonstrate the language of human courtrooms: prayer becomes an opportunity to bring one's case before divine judge(s) and to demand justice.[383] According to Holtz, the Hebrew prayers present legal concepts such as judgment, confessions, and accusations as if they are a legal petition made before a human adjudicator. Such an idea is applicable also to the cases of women in the patriarchal narratives: they employ courtroom language and legal concepts as we shall observe.[384]

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[381] English translation is borrowed from Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave*; H. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 196.

[382] J. Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 387; Hamilton suggests that this is "connected with *has vindicated me* (dānannî)" and interprets it as a meaning "pass a favorable judgment on behalf of, vindicate" (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 271; with reference to Alexander Globe, "The Muster of the Tribes in Judges 5:11e–18," *ZAW* 87 [1975]: 169–84 [here 179]). Westermann interprets it as "God has given judgment for me!" (C. Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 474). Wenham offers a possibility that Dan is "an abbreviation of Danilu, or Daniel, "The god El has judged/is my judge" comparing it to "Akk. names *Shamsh idannani, idin Enlil*." (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 245).

[383] Shalom E. Holtz, *Praying Legally*, BJS 364 (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2019).

[384] In regard to Tamar's manipulation of customary law for justice, see Chapter 6.

Viewed in the context of such parallels, Rachel's plea to Jacob may be related to the ritual prayer that was commonly addressed to a goddess in ANE tradition. From this perspective, מתה אנכי (I will die) can be regarded not as indicating a real death but as emphasizing that her agony is as great as death. On the other hand, it also functions as a narrative device that foreshadows her tragic ending: her lack of *sons* (בנים) results in her dying at childbirth in the later story (Gen 35:16–18).[385] Indeed it is ironical that the fact of having sons leads to her death.

To sum up, Rachel may have called upon Jacob to take any action on her behalf, e.g. to make entreaty to his God, YHWH, to resort to divination[386] or to find certain therapeutic methods. However, Jacob who begot four sons already from Leah seems to be insensitive to Rachel's emotional states and anguished feelings.[387] Jacob's refusal to take any action and to express empathy for Rachel's situations leads her to try to resolve her childlessness in a different way.[388] She gives Bilhah, her maidservant, to Jacob as Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham. Jacob has only to accept her proposal since it does not conflict with the existing custom.[389] Thus Rachel's practice of the surrogate motherhood can be regarded as her resistance to the irresponsible Jacob.[390] Within the legal limit, Rachel tries to restore her honor for herself. Rachel's active, independent character against Jacob's passivity becomes more prominent in the following stories.

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[385] Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 79.
[386] As Rebekah, a native of the same area, sought divination when confronted by the prenatal struggle in her womb.
[387] Cf. Elkanah in 1 Sam 1. See further Chapter 9.
[388] See, M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 90
[389] According to the codes of Hammurabi (code 146) and Nuzi texts, the infertile wife could give her husband a second wife in order not to be divorced. See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 119–21; John van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel"; N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 128; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 444.
[390] De-Whyte (*Wom(b)an,*31) points out that to marry a slave of his barren wife was better than to divorce her for financial reasons, as discussed earlier in this study.

4.2 Sororal Competition and Cooperation

Rachel is infertile but is loved by her husband whereas Leah is fertile but unloved. This makes the point that the relationship between Jacob and his wives is not predicated on their fertility — his primary interest is not in procreation, but in Rachel,[391] despite Leah's efforts. After Leah has given birth to four sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah), Rachel feels inferior to her sister and turns to surrogate motherhood accordingly. Then Leah imitates her sister thus giving her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, when she had ceased bearing children.[392]

As for Leah, the purpose of having more children is to gain Jacob's love. Since fecundity was regarded as the foremost blessing, Leah must have believed that she could win her husband's affections through preserving a proud position as a blessed fertile wife. A number of her etymological speeches demonstrate this view well.

Reuben (29:32)	Simeon (29:33)	Levi (29:34)	Zebulun (30:20)
"Because YHWH saw my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."	"Because YHWH heard that I am unloved, he has therefore given me this son also."	"Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."	"God has endowed me with a good endowment; this time my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons."

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[391] Cf. Elkanah in 1Sam 1.

[392] Koepf-Taylor suggests that unlike Hagar and Sarah, Bilhah, Zipah, and Leah and had "harmounious relationships" (*Give me children or I will die*, 48). Cf. Gafney claims that Bilhah and Zilpah are "casualties of nation building" (*Womanist Midrash*, 70), referring to them as "womb-slaves" because their bodies were used for patriarchal purposes. She pays special attention to Bilhah, insisting her "body is used again in Gen 35:22" by Reuben, thus being "raped by more than one perpetrator" and "betrayed by women and men" (ibid, 68–9). This chapter does not address Bilhah and Zilpah, not because I disregard them but because their characterization is hard to discern due to a lack of information in the text, as it is in Gen 35:22.

Leah and Rachel's etymological explanations of the name for their sons occupy the majority of this birth narrative. We see again female characters are dominating a birth narrative, whereas Jacob has little presence as a character. Fokkelman states,

> The names with their etymological explanations are the point at issue from paragraph to paragraph: they are the means of revealing the "inner" meaning of the births, that the wives are engaged in keen competition for the favour of Jacob. Each name-giving serves their psychological conduct of war, which is an incessant propaganda-combat.[393]

I agree with him as to the function of name-giving, but I would contend that it is not both wives but only Leah who conducts it for the favour of Jacob. As regards Rachel, her motivation centers on her own competitive spirit and self-protection, i.e., socio-economic status or divine justice.

Let us examine Rachel's first name-giving.

<div dir="rtl">ותאמר רחל דנני אלהים וגם שמע בקלי ויתן־לי בן על־כן קראה שמו דן</div>

And Rachel said "God vindicated me and also heard my voice. So he gave me a son."
Therefore she called his name Dan. (Gen 30:6)

She gives the son born through Bilhah a name, "Dan" (דן) the root of which is "to judge"(דין). From Rachel's point of view, Jacob's silence and anger must have seemed like an injustice to her, although having offspring is connected directly with her social and economic status as well as social reputation. Such a verbal act may represent Rachel's perception that she is innocent before God.

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[393] Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 132–3.

Rachel's connecting childbirth with the issue of judgement recalls Sarah's use of a legal term שפט בין ... ובין ("to judge between…" Gen 16:5).[394] Both accounts involve not only the surrogate but also the conflict between husband and wife which ends in the wife's self-justification that God is on her side through her concluding remark (Gen 21:6–7)[395] or particular name-giving (Gen 30:6, 8).

Rachel's second naming is even more remarkable with respect to her conflict, competition, and conviction, which are well represented in Gen 30:8 by the verbs פתל (to wrestle, fight) and יכל (to prevail). There are several English translations available for this verse.

ותאמר רחל *נפתולי אלהים* | *נפתלתי* עם־אחתי גם־*יכלתי* ותקרא שמו נפתלי

Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed"; so she called his name Naph'tali. (RSV)

And Rachel said, Wrestlings of God have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed; and she called his name Naphtali. (DBT[396])

Rachel said, "In my wrestlings with God, I have wrestled with my sister and won," and she named him Naphtali. (CSB[397]).

The rare words נפתולי אלהים in the first half have created much scholarly discussion since נפתולי as a noun of פתל is a hapax. On the grounds of Ps 18:27 (Eng. 26), Prov 8:8, and Job

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5:13, this word has been interpreted as referring to a wrestling match or struggle.[398] The word

אלהים (Elohim) that qualifies פתל has been construed either as "of God" or as a superlative, "mighty" or "great."[399] Accordingly, it has been translated in various ways: "with mighty wrestlings" (ESV); "a fateful contest" (JPS 1985); "mighty wrestlings/struggle"(KJB, ASV, RSV, ISV, JPS 1917); "struggling/fighting with God" (CSB[400])"

> On reading it together with the second part, Gunkel raises a contextual question,

> …with whom did Rachel struggle? The text says "with my sister." But she has not vanquished her, since she herself has only two, whereas her sister already has four sons.[401]

His suggestion is that Rachel fought with God who had denied the sons to her. Wenham also presents the possibility of Rachel's perception that God was in alliance with Leah, her sister.[402] However, such readings are inconsistent with Rachel's previous view manifested in her first naming: "God vindicated me and also heard my voice"(Gen 30:6). It does not make sense that Rachel takes suddenly an offensive attitude toward God — not only fighting with God but also *prevailing* over him — after praising God for hearing her voice and allowing her an offspring.

What draws our attention is that Rachel's wrestling in Gen 30:8 bear striking similarities to Gen 32:25–26, 29 (24–25, 28 Eng.), the scene of Jacob's wrestling.[403]

ויותר יעקב לבדו *ויאבק* איש עמו עד עלות השחר

וירא כי לא *יכל* לו ויגע בכף־ירכו ותקע כף־ירך יעקב *בהאבקו* עמו

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[398] Its primary meaning is "to be crafty" or "twist" (e.g. NEB). See further, J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 135 (Note 22); V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 272. Cf. "God has helped me…" (LXX); similarly Ibn Ezra opines that "God helped her in struggle; "God compared me with my sister…" (VUL); Cf. Westerman: "I have struggled mightily with my sister and have prevailed" (*Genesis 12~36*, 470).

[399] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 245; Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 474. In regard to the divine names that express the superlative, see further, D. W. Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," *VT* 3 (1953), 209–24 (esp. 214–6).

[400] Christian Standard Bible.

[401] Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 325.

[402] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 245–6.

[403] See also V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 269 (FN 9).

And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When [the man] saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him. (32:25–26 [Eng. 24–25])

ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם־ישראל כי־*שרית* עם־אלהים ועם־אנשים *ותוכל*

And he said: "Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel because you have wrestled with God and with men, and you have prevailed." (32:29 [Eng. 28])

Although the above verses use אבק[404] and שרה rather than פתל for "wrestling," here יכל is used also for "prevailing." Particularly, Gen 32:29 demonstrates strong parallels to Gen 30:8 in terms of language, style, and context. Both cases are associated with name-giving where the etymology is rooted in 'wrestling'(or 'struggle') and resultant 'prevailing.' In addition, both accompany first God (אלהים) then human (עם־אנשים, עם אחתי). This evidence points to Rachel as a counterpart of Jacob.[405]

Accordingly, Fokkelman's argument is worth noticing. Calling Rachel a female Jacob (Jacoba), he points out that her wrestling anticipates Jacob's wrestling with God, but Rachel's struggle with Leah is, unlike Jacob, in fact a struggle with God and for God's *favour*, since he had closed her womb but opened Leah's.[406] Fokkelman renders, "twists of God I have twisted (in the fight) with Leah, but I have prevailed,"[407] thus reading *Naptule Elohim* in the plural construct form.

Francis I. Andersen analyzes נפתולי as an infinitive absolute of *Naptoli* (niphal) rather than a noun *Naptule*. Even more remarkable is his comparison between Gen 30:8 and 32:29.

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[404] Perhaps a phonetic wordplay: יבק, יעקב, יאבק.

[405] In addition, both employ the same verb הבה in the same form (qal, impv. sing. of יהב): when Jacob asks Laban to give him Rachel. "Give [me] my wife that I may go in to her…" (הבה את אשתי כי מלאו ימי, Gen 29:21); when Rachel pesters Jacob to give her sons "Give me sons, or I'll die!" (הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנוכי, Gen 30:1)

[406] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*,135–6.

[407] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 135.

Andersen pays attention to their stylistic similarity with a bicolon structure and divides the verse of Genesis 30 into two parts based on 32:29, different from the authoritative division, *Naptule Elohim/ Naptalti Im ahoti Gam Yakolti* (נפתלתי עם־אחתי גם־יכלתי/נפתולי אלהים).

Gen 32:29	כי־שרית עם־אלהים ועם־אנשים ותוכל	for you struggled with God; And with men you did succeed
Gen 30:8	נפתולי אלהים נפתלתי עם־אחתי גם־יכלתי	I wrestled [with] God; with my sister I did succeed[408]

He suggests that this new division demonstrates well how both contain a matching struggle with God in the first colon and success in a struggle with a sibling rival in the second colon, while postpositive ו (ותוכל, 32:29) matches גם (גם־יכלתי, 30:8).[409] Anderson's use of division is very feasible since the end rhyme becomes apparent: Naptul*e*//*I*m ahot*i* (hireq [vowel]- י//י), Elohi*m*//Ga*m* (ם//ם), Naptal*ti*//Yakol*ti* (ti//ti).

The infinitive absolute followed by a verb of the same root is used in Biblical Hebrew to convey an intense or emphatic sense. If this is the case, אלהים cannot be a superlative or a qualifying adjective. Another plausible way to read אלהים, which I believe fits best in the context, is a vocative,[410] as found in the context of prayer, e.g. Gen 17:18 (אל־האלהים); 24:12, 42 (אלהי אבי אברהם ואלהי אבי יצחק יהוה); 32:10 ([Eng. 9], יהוה אלהי אדני אברהם), all in a construct form though. Notably, the last example appears in Jacob's wrestling scene with God. Therefore I present a new rendering of this verse: "O God, I struggled greatly, then I also succeeded [in having children] like my sister." That Gen 30:3 uses גם in this manner[411] in

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408 According to Anderson's translation.
409 Francis I. Andersen, "Note on Genesis 30:8," *JBL* 88/2 (1969): 200–200.
410 LXX and VUL read it as nominative.
411 וְאִבָּנֶה *גַם־*אָנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה "I *also* shall be built through her" ("I *also* shall have sons"). See also, Gen 16:2

comparison with her sister, supports this idea. It reflects that Rachel suffered severe inner struggles due to her rival sibling, as Jacob does prior to his encounter with Esau in a forthcoming event. Furthermore, this interpretation makes sense of the narrative in a consistent and congruent way: Rachel's petitionary speech to Jacob (30:2); her taking action following legal practice (30:3–4); her first name-giving Dan (דן, derived from the verb "to judge") that takes up the juridical nuance (30:6) and her second name-giving "Naphtali" as the realization of divine justice. We can also entertain the possibility of poetic license: the complement עם אחותי can be taken as connected to both the first and the second colon. Then this verse may bear a double meaning. On the one hand, she competed with her sister. On the other hand, like her sister, Rachel also succeeded [in having children].

In all probability, Rachel involves God as a witness. Such self-justification reminds the readers/listeners of Sarah's speech "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me…" (Gen 21:6–7). Like Sarah, Rachel attributes her becoming a mother to divine intervention, thus vindicating herself: her childlessness was not derived from divine punishment; God was on her side, and so rehabilitated her.

We have so far focused on the issue of conflict between Rachel–Leah and Rachel–Jacob. We turn now to explore how two sisters/wives negotiate or cooperate in a certain situation. Let us examine the event of the *duda'im* (דודאים), which takes relatively a lot of space (Gen 30:14ff).

> In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Give me, I pray, some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." (30:14–16 RSV)

Duda'im is traditionally believed to be the Mandrake (*Mandragora autumnalis*) based on LXX "apples of the madragoras," but it is not clear what exactly this fruit or plant is. Some identify *duda'im* with the plant of birth that appears in the Mesopotamian myth of Etana: the infertile Etana, king of Kish, saves an eagle from a snake. In return, Etana flies on the wings of the eagle to heaven in order to obtain the plant of birth that is known as Imhur-lim in Akkadian. Imhur-lim is introduced as a "plant for a woman who does not bear" in the Babylonian pharmaceutic or therapeutic *vade mecum*,[412] the three-column clay tablet that enumerates a list of plants for magical/medicinal treatise for various cases of infertility.[413]

Wenham explains that both Leah and Rachel were in need of *duda'im* as a herbal remedy because Rachel was still barren and Leah had ceased bearing.[414] It is uncertain what caused Leah's cessation of bearing.

ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את־יהוה על־כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמד מלדת

And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time I will praise YHWH"; therefore she called his name Judah. Then she *ceased bearing* [children]. (Gen 29:35)

ותרא לאה כי עמדה מלדת ותקח את־זלפה שפחתה ותתן אתה ליעקב לאשה

When Leah saw that she had *ceased bearing* [children], she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. (Gen 30:9)

Notably, the above verses use not עצר רחם or עצר מלדת [415] but עמד מלדת (ותעמד מלדת 29:35, עמדה מלדת 30:9) the implication of which is temporary cessation of bearing. It leads to a further conjecture that Jacob stopped having a sexual relationship with Leah. His denial of

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[412] See, M. Stol, F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible,* 52–3; Maddalena Rumor, "At the Dawn of Plant Taxonomy: Shared Structure Design of Herbal Descriptions in Šammu šikinšu and Theophrastus Historia Plantarum" in *Mesopotamian Medicine and Magic: Studies in Honor of Markham J. Geller*, eds., Strahil V. Panayotov and Luděk Vacín, AMD 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 446–61 (448).

[413] See further, M. Stol, F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 52–3.

[414] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 475

[415] Gen 16:2; 20:18; 29: 31; 30:22. For this issue, see the previous section on Abraham–Sarah–Hagar cycle.

the conjugal duty seems to have lasted even after Zilpah has given birth to Gad and Asher. That is why Leah took a chance to sleep with Jacob as a reward for giving Rachel *duda'im* (Gen 30:15).[416]

It is noticeable that in the aforementioned *vade mecum* different plants apply to different childbearing issues: plants for acquiring seed (offspring), for a barren woman who does not bear, plant for a woman who does not get pregnant, for a woman in hard delivery and the like.[417] Given that the list distinguishes between a barren woman who seeks to bear children and a woman who wants to have another child, it is proper that Leah and Rachel should each have taken a different plant since Leah is not barren, unlike Rachel, but has just ceased bearing. However, the fact that Leah's first son Reuben brought *duda'im* for his mother's use and Rachel wished to have it enables us to surmise that this plant/fruit was believed to excite sexual desire[418] as well as to help barren women to become pregnant. Hence it was required by both for different purposes: an aphrodisiac effect for Leah; a fertility effect for Rachel.[419]

Since both desired what they lacked but what the rival had, the deal could be sealed without any further problem. The outcome, however, is ironic. Rachel, who took the *duda'im* with the desire to conceive, became pregnant only after waiting three more years. In contrast, it is Leah who gave birth to three more children, without the help of this plant, unless the text is simply silent on this point.[420]

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[416] See further Gunkel, *Genesis*, 325–6; G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 246.

[417] See, M. Stol, F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 52–9.

[418] On the basis of Song 7:14 (13 in English) that associate love (דוד) and *duda'im*.

[419] Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 475; Karalina Matskevich, *Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis: The Subject and the Other*, LHBOTS 647 (London: T&T Clark, 2019*;* PhD diss., University of Sheffield*,* 2013) 185. Cf. Wenham argues that "But whatever the plant Reuben brought home, it seems clear that Rachel and Leah valued it as a fertility drug, Rachel because she had never conceived, Leah because she had become infertile" (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 247).

[420] Fewell and Gunn suggest that Leah and Rachel are "caricatures of the roles assigned to married women," with Leach representing the mother and Rachel representing the wife, the lover. They argue that despite her attempt to be a wife and lover through trading the fruit, Leah's "role as mother is reinscribed: she conceives and bears more sons" (Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 78).

On this matter, Gunkel and Wenham suggest that the implication is that reproductive power belongs to YHWH rather than to the magical effect of *duda'im*.[421] However, one must acknowledge that it is hard to reconstruct for the modern readers/listeners the cultural significance of *duda'im*. On the one hand, Leah and Rachel were still living in Mesopotamia where magical/medical therapies were widespread. Considering their matrilocal marriage, they would have been under the influence of Laban's family cult of Mesopotamia. Thus their depending on this plant should not be regarded as misleading magic but as a therapeutic intervention which is not against religious norms. On the other hand, such a custom may also be true within ancient Israelite culture even at the time of the writing of the texts.

Therefore, we can construe the meaning of this ironic consequence differently: it may reflect YHWH's mischievous character[422] which is reminiscent of the case of Sarah and Abraham who had to wait a long time before YHWH kept his promise of offspring.

וישמע אלהים אל־לאה ותהר ותלד ליעקב בן חמישי

And <u>God heard Leah,</u> and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. (30:17)

ויזכר אלהים את־רחל וישמע אליה אלהים ויפתח את־רחמה

Then <u>God remembered Rachel,</u> and God heard to her and opened her womb. (30:22)

If God really had heard what Leah wished, he should have given her Jacob's affection. But how come God misunderstood her? And why does God remember Rachel at this belated time, after her sister gained another three children (Issachar, Zebulon and Dinah)? Has God forgotten or ignored her? Rachel's death in a difficult delivery manifests well YHWH's mischievous, even ruthless character. After she has called her son Joseph, saying, "May YHWH add to me

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[421] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 326; G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 247.

[422] Cf. W. Lee Humphreys gives a different opinion. According to him, YHWH is a character "struggling to keep some balance and to neutralize the tensions that lace Jacob's marriage to rival sisters." W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 177.

another son!" (ותקרא את־שמו יוסף לאמר יסף יהוה לי בן אחר, Gen 30:24), God fulfills her wish but at the same time he takes her life dramatically at the exact moment she bears that son, Benjamin (Gen 35:16–18).

What draws our attention is that Jacob, the head of household who has control over wives and children, is portrayed as a passive, powerless husband during the negotiation over the *duda'im* between Leah and Rachel. *Duda'im* in exchange for sleeping with Jacob is likely to be a square deal for them both.[423] They treat Jacob, however, as a trade good, which anticipates a ridiculous paradox that later in the narrative they complain bitterly about their father's having sold them as if they were foreigners (Gen 31:14–15).[424]

It is remarkable how Leah speaks confidently to Jacob about this closing deal and demands boldly that he sleep with her.

ויבא יעקב מן־השדה בערב ותצא לאה לקראתו ותאמר אלי תבוא כי שכר שכרתיך בדודאי בני וישכב עמה בלילה הוא

When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. (30:16 RSV)

Jacob submits to their decision with no objections, which demonstrates female dominance and male subordination, at least in the birth narrative.

Furthermore, Rachel's purchase of the *duda'im,* the *fruit* of birth, can be considered to be a satire on Jacob who has rebuked her earlier using the term "the *fruit* of womb (פרי־בטן)": "Am I in the place of God, who has prevented you from [bearing] the *fruit* of womb?" (Gen

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[423] In regard to the unfair contract relationship between Jacob and Laban and "working and pay" as key terms, see G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 234.

[424] See Gunkel, *Genesis*, 333; S. Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Extended Edition*, eds., Carol Newsom, and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 2014), 10–25.

30:2b). Rachel pays the price (שכר)[425] of the fruit to Leah by allowing her to have sex with Jacob in an attempt for herself to have an offspring ("fruit of womb)" as a result of the effect of the fruit of birth. In this way, Rachel pays back Jacob by making him to pay for the fruit of birth; Jacob pays a price for his reckless speaking.

The story of the *duda'im* demonstrates that Leah and Rachel are not always competitive but do sometimes negotiate in the situation. Further, not only negotiation but also the sororal cooperation is found in later stories (Gen 31): they rally to the side of their husband who has met with hostility from Laban and his sons. Jacob explains to them the divine instruction in the form of his dream to flee, after his long speech of self-righteousness (Gen 31:3–16), then Leah and Rachel cooperate to resist the injustice of their father:[426]

> Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, whatever God has said to you, do. (Gen 31:14b–16 RSV)

Interestingly, they do not express any sympathy over the hardships Jacob underwent due to Laban's tricksterism and exploitation.[427] Rather, they are concerned to weigh their financial advantages and disadvantages in order to arrive at a decision. The resultant answer "whatever God has said to you, do!" (כל אשר אמר אלהים אליך עשה v.16b) suggests they are not just obedient but in control of the situation by convincing Jacob and urging him to actualize what God indicated in his dream.

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[425] See Ps 127:3 and the etymology of Issachar derived from שכר.
[426] See Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 493; H. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 104–5; N. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis,* 106–7.
[427] Jacob does not mention that Laban tricked him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. This was most likely done to win Leah over his side.

As for Jacob, he may have been hesitant to carry out YHWH's command to return home since it could simply have been a dream (Gen 31:11). On the surface, Jacob seems to ask for his wives' consent before putting his plan to flee into practice.[428] His act is, at bottom, passing the final say on others rather than taking the bull by the horns. What he always chooses in the face of impending crisis or danger is escape, although it is he himself who creates the tense situation, once by cheating his brother and now by outwitting his father-in-law. As Jacob's previous flight to Haran was settled by his mother, this time his flight from Haran is made in compliance with the decisions from his two wives.

4.3 Rachel's Trickery against Patriarch's Authority

Rachel's active character again stands out in the story of her theft of Laban's teraphim, envisaged as small figurines of household gods [429] (Gen 31:30ff). The narrative lacks information about teraphim and her motive for stealing it, thus bearing different interpretations.

Theological approaches to it often regard Rachel's theft as due to her pagan idolatry, which implies that she still sticks to her family cult despite her decision to leave her father.[430] There are attempts to read this story in a cross-cultural context: H. H. Rowley suggests that Rachel wanted to keep Jacob's "chief title to Laban's estate"[431] based on the presupposition that Laban

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[428] See, N. M. Sarna, *Genesis,* JPSTC (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989)*,* 214.

[429] Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, OTL. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 37; See further, Theodore J. Lewis, "TERAPHIM," in DDD, 1588–601.

[430] In ancient time, woman must adopt her husband's cult and gods. See Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia*, 42–3; 75–7; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 113. According to Gunkel, by stealing it, Rachel believed that the good fortune of the house will be brought with her (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 334).

Various early and medieval Jewish commentaries attempted to explain Rachel's motivation for stealing the teraphim. According to Josephus, "in case they were pursued, and taken by her father, she might have recourse to these images, in order obtain his pardon" (Ant. I: 309); Rashi and Rambam argue that the reason was "to wean her father from idol-worship"; and Ibn Ezra speculates that it was most likely because "Laban, her father, was an astrologer, and Rachel feared that he would look at the stars and discover which way they fled."

[431] Quoted from Moshe Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," *JBL* 81 (1962): 239–48 (here 240).

yet had no sons when Jacob married to his daughters.[432] Martha A. Morrison points out that in ancient Mesopotamia, family gods were taken over from father to heir and Rachel thought her father had no right to hold teraphim since her unlawful father did not discharge his duty as a head of household.[433] Moshe Greenberg assumes that there was a custom to take along objects of worship in the house when going abroad, and Rachel had to steal them instead of receiving them from her father since it was a secret flight.[434] Ktziah Spanier came up with another intriguing idea. She sees Rachel's theft as a continuation of her struggle for family supremacy: the goal was to elevate her position in the family and ensure her son Joseph's priority over his brother.[435] In a similar vein, Thalia Gur-Klein relates Rachel's theft to her ambition: it symbolizes Rachel's defiance of her father and husband as an "attempt to perpetuate her metronymic prerogatives and societal status by her teraphim."[436]

It is also within the realm of possibility that Rachel may have intended to use the teraphim in a fertility ritual or divination since she was eager to have another son. Her sitting upon teraphim and not standing up under the pretense of her menstruation ("the way of women," דרך נשים) on the verge of being discovered is closely associated with the motif of pregnancy. Whatever the truth may be, through her act we can get a sense of Rachel's active and ambitious personality that fits into this narrative flow. Her theft, however, provides a good reason for Laban's pursuit of them.

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[432] As for specific cases of inheritance including the household god between adopter and adoptee, see Nuzi tablet Gadd 51.

[433] Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *BA* 46 (1983): 155–64 (here 162).

[434] M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," 246–7.

[435] Ktziah Spanier, "Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim: her Struggle for Family Primacy," *VT* 42 (1992): 404–12. Spanier argues that this episode is "part of the original basis fort the textual basis for the legitimacy of the house of Joseph as the leader of the family and subsequently of the nation of Israel" (ibid, 410).

[436] Thalia Gur-Klein, *Sexual Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible: Patronymic, Metronymic, Legitimate and Illegitimate Relations,* GTS (London: Routledge, 2013), 240.

Rachel escapes by her wits from an emergency: she hides an item under a saddle and uses menstruation as an excuse for not moving.

ורחל לקחה את־התרפים ותשמם בכר הגמל ותשב עליהם וימשש לבן את־כל־האהל ולא מצא ותאמר אל־אביה אל־יחר בעיני אדני כי לוא אוכל לקום מפניך כי־דרך נשים לי ויחפש ולא מצא את־התרפים

Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat upon them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household gods.(Gen 31:34–35 RSV)

In the previous section, I drew an analogy between Rachel and Jacob in terms of struggle/wrestling. Here Rachel's tactic to avoid a crisis enables her to stand out again as a counterpart of Jacob as Melissa A. Jackson points out her role of playing the trickster.[437]

It is worth noticing that Jacob is depicted as a traditional trickster in this entire narrative cycle. And the trickster figure is indeed loved by YHWH.[438] Furthermore, there is also a reversed link to Joseph's trick of having his cup[439] hidden in his brothers' baggage in Gen 44 as Yair Zakovitch argues.[440] Considering that Jacob and Joseph are both divinely chosen and blessed, Rachel's flash of wit should be praised too. If that is the case, Rachel's theft plays a role of underlining her quick and witty readiness as well as her fearless character, which is similar to Rebekah's.

At this juncture, we have to point out that if Rachel is referring to her menstruation, then her trick only works because she is *not* pregnant or her pregnancy is not yet noticed.[441] In fact,

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[437] M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible,* 41–66.
[438] J. E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster*, 124.
[439] Used for divination on the assumption that his stewards' saying is true.
[440] Seeing in perspective of symmetrical inversion, Zakovitch demonstrates minutely the relationship between two stories claiming these are about sin and "eye for an eye" punishment. See, Y. Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible," *BibInt* 1/2 (1993):139–52.
[441] It is difficult to estimate when Rachel conceived Benjamin.

menstruation is double-sided: on the one hand, it signifies fertilization failure but on the other hand female reproductive ability, namely, potential childbearing.

The Hebrew term used for menstruation is דרך נשים meaning literally "the way of women," which shows a slight difference from ארח כנשים — mostly translated as "the manner as women" — employed for Sarah's case (Gen 18:11). In Rachel's statement, דרך נשים sounds like a double entendre. In this perspective, Jacqueline E. Lapsely's interpretation is worth noticing. Lapsely regards דרך נשים as a term implying female resistance: as a woman who has not had access to the same legal process, Rachel tries to get justice not by the way of *men* but by the way of *women*.[442]

Not only Rachel's language but also her posture represent her daring, challenging and resistant character. Suspense increases as Laban's tent-search one by one approaches closer to Rachel's tent but what awaits him in the tent is Rachel's sitting calmly on the camel saddle (כר הגמל) where she has put the teraphim. Mark G. Brett claims that her sitting upon teraphim is "a humiliation of the divine images, which is heightened by her claim that she does not wish to move."[443] This scene is, however, far more significant than Brett claims.

Like a plunderer, Laban is on the move to search through all the tents, whilst Rachel, the actual thief holds it herself. Both take an opposite posture: Laban who is standing is juxtaposed with Rachel who is sitting. Standing is a courtesy towards one's superior or an expression of respect in front of one's elders. We can observe many scenes in Genesis that describe one person bowing down before honorable men or persons of high rank, which implies the one who bows needs to take a standing position prior to that action (Gen 18:2; 19:1; 24:52; 33:3; 37:7,

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[442] Jacqueline E. Lapsely, "The Voice of Rachel: Resistance and Polyphony in Genesis 31.14–35," in *Genesis*, ed., A. Brenner, FCB 2/1, 232–48 (243); see also Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 79.
[443] M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 96.

9; 41:43; 42:6; 43:26, 28; 48:12; 50:18). Hence through holding on to sitting, Rachel occupies a position that is superior to her father, the patriarch.

Ibn Ezra argues that Rachel was sitting on a camel.[444] The text does not clearly indicate whether she was sitting on the camel saddled up or just on the camel saddle. If Ibn Ezra's argument is the case, we can visualize Rachel occupying the position higher than others by not dismounting from the camel. Moreover, she is sitting on the teraphim, the object that is in general under the authority of the head of household. Rachel smothers the symbols of authority with her haunches, with the way of woman. If she was really in a state of menstruation, it is an added profanity since a woman's menstrual blood defiles anything coming into contact with her, according to the Levitical law concerning the Niddah (Lev 15:19–32).[445] It is ironical that the patriarch, Laban is ridiculed by the androcentric law of menstrual separation. Therefore this scene reflects Rachel's defiance towards the patriarchal authority and, by extension, subversion of the unequal gender structure.

In regard to Rachel's death, it is no exaggeration to say that Jacob's hasty and imprudent talk which occurred in the teraphim scene is involved.

עם אשר תמצא את־אלהיך לא יחיה נגד אחינו הכר־לך מה עמדי וקח־לך ולא־ידע יעקב כי רחל גנבתם

"Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. (Gen 31:32 RSV)

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[444] Cited in Tarja S. Philip's *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity,* SiBL 88 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 39, note 21.

[445] See, M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 96; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 303; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 170; J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 128.

His reckless speech brings about fatal consequences, the death of his beloved wife. One can argue that Laban has to find the culprit for the curse to be effective. To answer the question, it would help to remark Genesis 44:9.

<div dir="rtl">אשר ימצא אתו מעבדיך ומת וגם־אנחנו נהיה לאדני לעבדים:</div>

"With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves." (RSV)

Here too unwittingly pronouncing a curse upon a culprit is found under an analogous situation with similar phraseology. However, the outcome is the reverse of the previous one: Jacob, the accused, being unaware of Rachel's theft curses her. Although Rachel was *not caught*, she dies giving birth; Joseph's brothers, the accused, being unaware of Joseph's scheme of the false theft curse Benjamin. Although Benjamin was *caught*, he does not die.[446] Hence the matter of finding or not finding the culprit seems not to have really resulted in the effects of the curse. In a similar vein, Fokkelman makes a point about Jacob's foolish act: "We are seized with terror as we see Jacob, in a fit of honest indignation, fix a death-penalty for the one found guilty. The fool, little does he know that he signs the death-sentence of his favorite wife!"[447] Besides, Jacob's delay in fulfilling his vow to build a house of God (Gen 28:20-22) alludes to his imprudence — in other words a man of words and not of deeds. Even though God reminded him of the vow he made (31:13), Jacob does not fulfill it until the tragedy — the rape of Dinah and the punitive action of Simeon and Levi — takes place and God himself calls upon him to keep the vow (Gen 35:1).[448]

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[446] According to Zakovitch, Rachel dies for her sin whereas Benjamin does not die for an uncommitted sin. Y. Zakovitch, "Through the Looking Glass," 142.

[447] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 169–70.

[448] See Ugaritic epic of Kirta (Keret) in regard to punishment for a man's failure to fulfill a vow.

There is one more point that should be made before concluding this discussion. The effect of the curse uttered by Jacob is an ironic reversal of the blessing he received from his father by *stealing.*

אֹרְרֶיךָ אָרוּר וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ

Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!

(Gen 27:29b RSV)

Jacob's curse in 31:32 is a reversed version of it: "Cursed be whoever you curse, and blessed be whoever you bless!" Once spoken, words cannot be retrieved. The wage of his imprudent curse, though uttered unwittingly, is the death of Rachel, his most beloved one. Rachel dies (מֵתָה) giving birth Benjamin,[449] and "was buried *on the way* (בַּדֶּרֶךְ) to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (Gen 35:19b)."[450]

On his deathbed, Jacob narrates again Rachel's death (מֵתָה) and burial, using the term "on the way" (בַּדֶּרֶךְ) twice (48:7). Based on the combination of 'death' and 'way,' it is feasible to link her death with the story of teraphim. In this way the heroine makes her exit *on the way*, as if she did not move from the camel saddle, she stops on the way, not following man's (her husband's) way.

The issue of a younger and elder sister reminds the readers/listeners of the fraternal struggle between Esau and Jacob for their birthright. As for the confrontation between two wives, it is also reminiscent of Sarah and Hagar. Furthermore, the motif of partiality that flowed over the previous birth narratives reappears, but this time not a parental partiality but a husband's

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[449] In this regard, Rachel represents well "the poignant trap of patriarchal motherhood," as stated by Fewell and Gunn: "women face social death without children and physical death to bear children" (Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 79).

[450] The careless vow and its tragic result reminds us of the vow of Jephthah in the book of Judges.

partiality towards his younger wife over the elder which stirs up sororal conflict.[451] The substantial issue which concerns Leah, the elder, and Rachel, the younger is having as many male children as possible to inherit Jacob's possessions, which is most likely related to mother's future economics. In this regard, special attention is given to Rachel: she takes the initiative by giving her maidservant to Jacob to ensure her own survival, which is later imitated by Leah. Rachel, like Sarah, invokes divine justice and self-justification when naming Dan and Naphtali. Rachel is especially a counterpart of Jacob in terms of a strong sense of rivalry, i.e., her struggle/wrestling runs parallel to that of Jacob and of tricksterism. Her stealing of the teraphim and her tact in averting a crisis demonstrates well her character as a trickster.[452] In addition, Rachel's posture of sitting on the camel as well as on the teraphim represents her defiance towards patriarchal authority. Her דרך נשים, *way of women*, is probably pursuing subversion of the gender unequal structure.

Above all, we have again predominant female characters. Leah and Rachel are focalized as central characters who are actively involved in the fertility issue as well as family relocation, whereas Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac, is depicted as passive and powerless on these matters. Leah and Rachel not only compete to take the primacy with each other but also work out a reasonable *modus vivendi* when necessity arises, as presented in the story of *duda'im*. Further, they pursue practical interests, weighing the pros and cons. When the benefits outweigh the costs, they reach an accord, as evidenced by their unified agreement to flee their father's presence to relocate.

It is remarkable that the female voices come to the fore, at the moment of crisis in particular, even when Jacob occupies center stage in confrontation scenes with Laban (Gen 31:25ff).

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[451] Within the narrative, this sororal conflict is also juxtaposed with the conflict between uncle (Laban) and nephew (Jacob).

[452] Leah, to some extent, embodies the trickster image by disguising herself as Rachel in order to marry Jacob, though it is unclear whether this was her intention.

These women are determined when their family needs to move on for a fresh start in a different place, so that they persuade Jacob to take an action. Therefore the narrator assigns important roles to Leah and Rachel, as he did to Sarah, Hagar and Rebekah: they, not intentionally though, contribute to fulfilling the divine covenant by ensuring Jacob's lineage as well as his return to the Promised Land.

Even though the overarching patriarchal narrative is about men's genealogies and the development of the (male-centered) Israelite community, the narrative focuses on female characters. The narrator is consistent in portraying the ancestral mothers as enterprising, and proactive rather than obedient and submissive. Despite their motivation, which is most likely socioeconomic interest, implicit in the narrator's agenda is that women are empowered as active agents of the divine covenant, which is the theological basis of Israel's communal identity. This leads us to speculate on the social contexts of the story's production. That is, the time and situation in which women must be included in the formation of national identity in order to promote communal solidarity, in the face of the need for prosperity (both in offspring and in wealth) for reconstruction as well as strong, sagacious, and keen human resources for survival against surrounding perils.

We will now proceed to the second part of our journey: the birth narratives of Lot's two daughters and of Tamar. They are socially vulnerable women — virgin daughters and a childless widow — who are denied the right to motherhood by their own father or father-in-law. I will investigate how they take the initiative, in their exceptional circumstances, to protect themselves by becoming mothers.

Part II Daughter(s)' Challenge to Father:

The Desire for Motherhood and Sexual Initiative

Chapter 5   Lot's Two Daughters' Sororal Cooperation for Fertility (the Births of Moab and Ben-ammi)

The birth narrative of Lot's two daughters is recounted in Genesis 19:30–38. This narrative forms a self-contained unit, but in the larger narrative, it has an integral connection with the preceding narrative of the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1–29), while marking a sub-narrative of the complex chain narrative concerning Abraham.

After the births of Moab and Ben-ammi, born to Lot by his daughters, these two children disappear from the stage in Genesis: the narrator does not deal with them except in mentioning their descendants (19:37–38). So the focal point of the stories are the parents: under what circumstance Lot's daughters came to produce their father's offspring. The following is a brief summary of the narrative.

Two of the three messengers who came to announce that Abraham and Sarah will have a son (Gen 18) visit Sodom in the evening.[453] Lot invites them to stay overnight in his home, but before they lay down, all the men of the city surround Lot's house, demanding that he bring his guests out so that they "may know them."[454] Lot protects them, offering his two virgin

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[453]   Though three messengers appear in Gen 18, only two arrive in Sodom. There are scholarly assumptions that one of the three remained to have a conversation with Abraham (18:22–33); he may have proceeded to Sodom after the conversation (Jack R. Lundbom, "Parataxis, Rhetorical Structure, and the Dialogue over Sodom in Genesis 18," in *The World of Genesis*, 136–45); maybe two were the divine messengers while one is YHWH who came down in the form of a human.

[454]   Though open to other interpretations, the phrase has been mostly interpreted as implying sexual assault. (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 55). Lyn Bechtel places strong emphasis on the fact that the issue is not homosexuality but rape (Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1-11," in *Genesis: A Feminist*

daughters in place of his guests. When the furious Sodomites are about to attack Lot, the two messengers strike them blind so that they cannot find the entrance of the house and then pull Lot back into house. Lot is then warned about the imminent destruction of the city. With the help of the divine messengers, he escapes from Sodom with his wife and two daughters. Yet, despite being admonished not to look back, Lot's wife becomes a pillar of salt when she does look back. Lot requests and is granted divine permission to take refuge in the nearby small town of Zoar[455] rather than in the mountains. However, for some reason, he is afraid to stay there, and so he goes out of Zoar and dwells in a cave in the mountain, with his two daughters. Under the impression that there is no man to engage in conjugal relations with them, the daughters make Lot drink wine and each one lays with him in order to produce offspring through their father. Each bears a son. The elder calls her son Moab, the father of the Moabites, while the younger calls her son Ben-ammi, the father of the Ammonites.

Biblical scholars have often related the stories of Lot and his family to Noah, who was saved as a righteous man from destruction but later becomes intoxicated with wine (Gen 9:21f)[456] or to the Gibeah story in line with a motif of 'stranger in your gate'[457] as well as sexual violence (Judg 19). The comparison to Abraham in terms of hospitality has also received attention. Others highlight mythical elements behind the story.[458] Above all, what draws most

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Companion to the Bible (Second Series), ed., A. Brenner [Sheffield Academic Press, 1998] 108-128 [esp. 117–26]).

[455] Segor (Σηγὼρ) in LXX.

[456] In regard to wine and intoxication, see, Ilona N. Rashikow, "Daddy-dearest and the 'Invisible Spirit of Wine'" in *Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, ed., A. Brenner, 82–107; John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis*, vol 2, DSB (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 92; Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 166–209. As for a link between Noah and Lot in terms of incest, see further Frederick Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?" *VT* 21 (1971): 232–7 (here 235). cf. V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17,* 322–3.

[457] Termed by Western W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup 231 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 27–53.

[458] Joshua R. Porter calls it "historicized myth" (Joshua R. Porter, "The Daughters of Lot," *Folklore* 89 [1978]: 127–41). See further Gunkel's Commentary on *Genesis*.

scholarly attention is the sexual relationships — sexual abuse, homosexuality or incestuous intercourse — consequently raising disputes about moral and ethical issues. Thus quite a few commentators took the view that the births of Moab and Ben-ammi were the product of transgression of the moral law, i.e., father–daughter incest.

In this section, I would like to suggest an alternative reading of the story of Lot and his daughters, giving particular prominence to dominant and positive female characterization, and consequently reversing the traditional gender hierarchy of male dominance/female submission as well as subverting male authority/female submission.

5.1 Virgin Daughters Deprived of Maternity and Paterfamilias' Task of Crisis Management

Unlike other birth narratives in Genesis where married women (Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah) and a widow (Tamar) become mothers, here in Genesis 19 the unmarried daughters are engaged in carrying on the family line. Barrenness, the pervasive motif found in the patriarchal birth narratives, is absent in this narrative[459] but the narrative of the daughters' virginity[460] is followed by their attempts to become mothers. Throughout the scenes of the hospitality and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, however, these unnamed daughters remain silent, whereas Lot, their father, has been at the center of the action and the story.

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[459] The same holds for the birth narrative of Perez and Zerah.

[460] According to the Jewish law, the marriage consists of two steps: אירוסין (betrothal) and נישואין (the actual marriage ceremony under 'chuppah' [חופה]). During the period of אירוסין, it is not permissible to have a sexual relationship. The couple after אירוסין, though before נישואין is already considered to be husband and wife. Thus Lot's sons-in-law must have been betrothed to his two daughters but not to have entered the stage of אירוסין since the daughters did not "know" (to have sexual intercourse) men yet.

In fact, female voices are not heard in these above-mentioned scenes. Especially, the wife of Lot appears as a peripheral character as if she is not present.[461] Lot offers not his wife but his daughters to the townsmen.[462] In the long run, she remains ever stationary by being transformed into a mute and lifeless salt pillar, namely something really barren, though she already gave birth to two daughters, not son(s). Hence the divine prohibition not to look back might have played a role just in eliminating the *mother/wife*. How about the daughters? Under their father's authority, they are even treated as an object of negotiation[463] and powerless victims of abuse from men regardless of their will.[464]

Lot's offering his daughters to the mob as substitutes for his guests has been the focus of so much scholarly debate. For example, John Skinner praises his hospitality,

> Lot's readiness to sacrifice the honor of his daughters, though abhorrent to Hebrew morality (see Judg 19:25, 30), shows him as a courageous champion of the obligations of hospitality in a situation of extreme embarrassment, and is recorded to his credit.[465]

Fewell and Gunn, on the other hand, read it as "patriarchy caricaturing itself," criticizing father's scarifying his innocent and socially vulnerable (in terms of gender and age) daughters, in order to "uphold his honour."[466] According to Ilona Rashkow, Lot's offering his own daughters to be raped by the mob is a threat of sexual brutality to them.[467] On the contrary, other scholars proposed a more moderate hypothesis. Heard suggests that it could be "an ironic

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[461] Fewell and Gunn, "Assault at Sodom," in *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 64; L. M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11"; Katherine B. Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters: Reconceptualized Kinship for the Sake of Our Daughters," *JFSR* 26.2 (2010): 37–54 (here 41).

[462] Perhaps the *virgin* female would have been a more precious gift.

[463] Cf. Laban in Chapter 4.

[464] J. Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 307; See also E. M. Speiser, *Genesis,* 123; N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, 65, 135; Scott Morschauser, "Hospitality, Hostiles, and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19.1-9," *JSOT* 27(2003): 461–85.

[465] J. Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Genesis,* 156. See also N. Sarana, 135.

[466] Fewell and Gunn, "Assault at Sodom," 58, 66.

[467] Rashkow, "Invisible Spirit of Wine." See also K. B. Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters."

utterance" or "sarcastic indirect request" not to make the Sodomites "rape *anybody* found under the shelter of his roof" (author's italics).[468] In a similar vein, for Bechtel, who reads this story from the group-oriented perspective, the townsmen acted not for sexual pleasure but for the protection of the community from suspicious outsiders/strangers;[469] thus, Lot's "incongruent" and "inappropriate" offer under the circumstances" implies that he was confident that his offer would "stop the action and prevent further aggression."[470] Scott Morschauser also claims that the townsmen's attempt "to know" is not sexual. He interprets it in a juridical context: they wanted "to interrogate" or "discover" the identity of the strangers, while Lot's intent to offer his daughters is understood as "hostage–exchange" rather than sacrifice.[471]

The interpretations presented above are attempts to make sense of the bizarre — in *our eye*s — actions of both Sodomites and Lot. Yet they are mere presumptions, albeit intriguing ideas. It is hard to reconstruct the reaction of early audiences to the actions within the text. What shocks modern readers/listeners might not have shocked earlier readers/listeners and vice versa. Whether Lot's offering is justified or not, the crux is that it could have led the daughters into death[472] or endangered their reproductive power, if it had not been for the messengers' intervention. Further, they stand to lose the right to be mothers due to the incredulity of their future husbands (19:14), and the situation becomes worse when Lot chooses a cave in the mountains for a dwelling place (19: 30).[473] Therefore the daughters' taking initiative after the

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[468] As one of multiple possible interpretations (R. C. Heard, "A Lot to Talk about," in idem, *Dynamics of Diselection*, 54–5).

[469] See also Randall Bailey, "Why Do Readers Believe Lot? Genesis 19 Reconsidered," *OTE* 23/3 (2010): 519–48. Comparing this episode with spy narratives (Josh. 2:1–4) in military context based on the same terms such as סבב (to surround) and עם (whole army) and focusing on the dual meaning of the verb ידע, Bailey suggests that ידע used by the Sodomites does not necessarily mean sexual intercourse: the Sodomites wanted to *inspect* (ידע) the strangers suspecting their motives in visiting the city is military spying whereas Lot interpreted it as *having sex* (ידע) with his male guests.

[470] L. M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," 123–4.

[471] Scott Morschauser, "'Hospitality', Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19.1–9," *JSOT* 27 (4, 2003): 461–85.

[472] See, Judg 19.

[473] The two guests indicated the mountains as a place for escape (19: 17) but not for dwelling.

destruction can be construed as a female counterattack: the daughters *who did not know man* (לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ v.8) make their own decision to *know* a man while this man (Lot) does not *know* (לֹא יָדַע vv. 33, 35). To facilitate understanding of the significance of their conduct, we must analyze Lot, the paterfamilias, who led the stories (Gen 19:1–30) before our birth narrative (Gen 19:31–38).

It seems at first sight that Lot has very positive personal qualities. He is depicted as a generous host (Gen 19:1–3) just as his uncle, Abraham was (Gen 18): Lot does his best, at any cost, as a host responsible to protect his guests. Then he seems to be as righteous and obedient as Noah: he trusts at once the divine foretelling of the destruction of Sodom, and delivers the message to his sons-in-law who do not believe it. As the story unfolds, however, Lot's negative characteristics such as his hesitation, timorousness and passivity are revealed.[474] He lingers when it is very necessary to make all haste in order to escape in the early dawn. In consequence, the messengers have to seize Lot, his wife and his two daughters by their hands in order to bring them forth out of the city (Gen 19:15–16). Lot is afraid to flee to the hills, so he begs for Zoar, a little city close enough for him to flee to. But on the other hand, he follows the visitors' admonition not to look back, unlike his wife.[475] As it turns out, he chooses to hide out in a cave in the mountain instead of Zoar, which demonstrates his cowardice.

In the larger narrative, the issue of dwelling goes back to the separation scene between Abraham and Lot (Gen 13), caused by the crowding of range lands and the resultant strife

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[474] In addition, Lot is 'undecisive' according to Wenham (G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 58) or is a 'paranoid figure' according to Turner (Turner, *Genesis*, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 88).
  For more discussions in regard to the narrative ambiguities, see R. C. Heard, "A Lot to Talk about." It is Paul Tonson who is strongly against moralistic reading (Paul Tonson, "Mercy Without Covenant: A Literary Analysis of Genesis 19." *JSOT* 95 [2001]: 95–116). Tonson correctly observes the "mix of positive and negative elements in Lot's behaviours" (ibid, 109), which is "a realistic portrayal of life in which there is no heroic progression nor tragic regression," reflecting "the character of humanity in dynamic terms, always fluid and still in formation" (ibid, 112).
[475] Jeansonne doubts whether Lot informed his wife of the order not to look back (S. P. Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis*, 39).

between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. Being at a crossroads, the uncle Abraham gives his nephew Lot a choice. Thus Lot dominates the well-watered region as his dwelling place,[476] whereas Abraham remains on the land, taking Hebron as his main stronghold while still dwelling in tents. Nevertheless, Abraham becomes a recipient of the divine blessing, gains possession of a large territory and has many descendants; the choice of Lot turns out to be wrong — and he keeps making wrong choices.

Lot's pursuit of living in ease and comfort in a city brings him to the worst place, Sodom. At an early stage, Lot stayed in the Jordan area, then kept moving his tent from city to city until he reached Sodom. Even after being taken as a captive by a coalition of kings and rescued by Abraham (Gen 14), Lot chooses to come back to Sodom[477] where he encounters xenophobia, threat, danger, destruction and loss of his wife as well as his house.[478] His preference of city life over a semi-nomadic life is manifested also by his wish to dwell in a city, Zoar, in disregard of the messengers' advice to flee to the hills.[479] Ironically, Lot, the admirer of city life ends up within a mountain cave, "a primitive surrounding"[480] that is far removed from the city house he left. Based on such a contrasting parallel between Abraham and Lot, George Coates suggests

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[476] Larry Helyer states that the primary function of this separation is an elimination of Lot as heir to the covenant promise made with Abraham. See Larry Helyer, "The Separation of Abraham and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narrative," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 77–88 (85).

[477] Jeansonne comments, "Lot is in Sodom by his own scheming choice," "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis" (S. P. Jeansonne, "The Characterization of Lot in Genesis," *BTB* 18 (1988):123–9).

[478] In this perspective, it is similar to folk narrative that provides a social satire or life lesson. For example, it is a reminder of the well-known fable of Aesop 'the town mouse and the country mouse' in line with two characters' different choices (country vs town) that bring different consequences (peaceful atmosphere vs fearful atmosphere/escape) (Perry index 352; recorded also in Jean de La Fontaine [1621-1695], Le rat de ville et le rat des champs, *Fables*, book 1, fable 9). Also Gunkel suggests the story of Sodom-Lot is a very widespread legend type comparing it to Misie Sindbad, 7 and Grimm nos. 11, 112, 113, 322 etc (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 213).

[479] Heard offers an alternative interpretation: it is "a concern for other people" that lies behind Lot's request to flee to Zoar, that is, an attempt to save it (R. C. Heard, "A Lot to Talk about," 57; cf. Fewell and Gunn, "Assault on Sodom," 61). Heard relates it to the motive of Lot's delay, which he suggests, as his commitment "to an ethic of not forsaking one's neighbors in time of crisis" (R. C. Heard, ibid, 57). However, when considering the larger narrative context, as I explained above, I find it less convincing.

[480] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50,* 51

that Lot is a *comic foil* to Abraham. Coates extends further Lot's contrast with Abraham not as one of opposition but as hero vis-à-vis buffoon.[481]

Multivalence, however, does not escape our notice. A hero, Abraham in our case, is not always morally perfect. We have already examined how Abraham was to some extent far from the paragon of faith: he did not believe in the divine promise that Sarah would have a son so he laughed. Abraham is not much different from Lot. His passive character is demonstrated when he gutlessly sits back and watches his wife being handed over to another man (Gen 12: 20) in order to save his own life. Brenner observes that the second wife–sister narrative (Gen Ch. 20) is "concerned with the ethical problem of Abraham's cheating."[482]

It is worth noticing that Abraham and Lot have interesting resonances in connection with conflicts surrounding birth stories. Firstly, both leave the childbearing issue for woman to sort out.[483] Just as Abraham does not take initiative in resolving the problem of childlessness, Lot is not concerned in perpetuating his family line. Secondly, Abraham permits Sarah to abuse (ענה 16:6) Hagar; later he listens to Sarah and so expels Hagar and Ishmael, even though he thought "the matter was very bad in his eyes"[484] (וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם, Gen 21:11a); Lot treats his daughters as his possessions and delivers them up to the Sodomites' sexual abuse. Further, we can observe both — Abraham and Lot — predicted some bad things would happen to this female family member judging from their verbal expressions that are analogues to each

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[481] George W. Coats, *Genesis*, FOTL 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 114, 143–8. See also von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL, revi. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 219.

Their similar acts of hospitality produce different outcomes: Abraham receives a divine annunciation to beget Isaac and walks along with the visitors *to bring them on their way*; the visitors go along with Lot *to bring him out*, and Lot has his descendants with *no* divine intervention but by human (his daughters') initiative. Lot's failed deal with the Sodomites contrasts with Abraham's persuasion of YHWH (18:22–32) not to destroy Sodom. Further, the narrator does not attribute Lot's deliverance from the destruction to his righteousness, but rather to Abraham (19:29).

[482] A. Brenner, *On Incest*, 115.

[483] Sarah even concerns herself with the inheritance issue and YHWH has Abraham obey (Lit. "Hear") Sarah in whatever she says to him (כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה Gen 21:12).

[484] Though YHWH told him it would be okay to send them away, it is Abraham who made a final decision.

other: "do to Hagar what is good in her eyes." (עשי לה הטוב בעיניך, Gen 16:6b),[485] "the thing was very bad in the eyes of Abraham." (וירע הדבר מאד בעיני אברהם, Gen 21:11a); "Please, my brothers, do not act so wickedly." (אל נא אחי תרעו, Gen 19:7b), "do to them as is good in your eyes." (ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם, Gen 19:8b)[486] Therefore, both Abraham and Lot demonstrate passive, subordinate qualities, but at the same time have female-oppressive characteristics.

It is again women who are deeply concerned about offspring in this narrative. Lot's two daughters know that their father does not have a mature and responsible attitude. This paterfamilias neither knows how to handle the crisis nor does he make a proper decision or even take the initiative. Therefore the daughters, who had been repressed, do not expect protection from their father but take the lead autonomously in family reconstruction after the destruction. Besides, God does not step in to defend their right to be mothers. They decide not to remain virgins but to be mothers at any cost, thus perpetuating the family line. In the following section, I will discuss in more detail the dominance of females, the daughters in our case, as opposed to Lot, the passive father.

5.2 Female Tricksters' Sexual Initiative and Control over their Father

There has been widespread criticism of what these daughters did to their father, judging them as sexual aggressors who dared to commit incest,[487] demonstrating that the issue of incest has

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[485] The formula "לעשות ....טוב בעיניים" is a paradoxical expression that connotes "do whatever you want regardless of how bad it is."

[486] Lot's speech demonstrates that he lacks proper conversational skills. He begins to speak towards the townsmen with a negative imperative sentence accompanied by critical language "Please, my brothers, do not act so *wickedly*" (אל נא אחי תרעו, 19:7). Then he turns into a positive imperative "do to them as is *good* in your eyes" employing the term "טוב" (ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם, 19:8), the opposite of "רע" (evil). Lot adds fuel to the fire with his words: the townsmen decide to employ force (19:9) instead calling for action in the form of verbal demands (19:5).

[487] Cf. Johanna Stiebert points out the biblical text hardly suggests either celebration or condemnation about them. See J. Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134, 137.

been the center of scholarly attention. As Brenner points out, however, in this story female initiative stands out whereas the incest occupies only a subplot concerned with "survival of the species" by tricksters.[488]

After their coming to a cave in the mountains, both Lot and his daughters encounter the absence of any spouse:[489] among Lot's family members, first his sons-in-law (the spouses of his daughters) then his wife[490] have been eliminated, thus leaving just Lot and his two daughters as persons of different sexes. At this juncture, the daughters become the main characters who take the lead. For the first time in Lot–Sodom cycle, the female voice is heard, as the elder daughter (הבכירה) says.

אבינו זקן ואיש אין בארץ לבוא עלינו כדרך כל־הארץ...

לכה נשקה את־אבינו יין ונשכבה עמו ונחיה מאבינו זרע

Our father is old, and there is no man on earth/land to come in to us like the way of all the earth/land. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the seed of our father. (19:31–32)

The above verses account for why the intercourse with their father is needed: their father is *old* (זקן) and there is no other man on earth/land (ארץ) to come in to them in the manner of all the earth/land (כל הארץ).

Wenham raises a question whether the elder daughter's remark "Our father is old" implies that he is too old to look for a husband for her, or he is too old to have sexual intercourse. According to Wenham, the former is more plausible in the light of the second clause "there is no man…," as he says "what she is concerned about is the lack of potential husbands for her

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[488] Brenner, "On Incest," in *Feminist Companion to the Bible: Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed., A. Brenner. FCB 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 113–38 (118–9, 130).

[489] The case of Tamar shall be discussed in the following chapter. It is also the matter of substance that the visitors/God take part as accomplices in creating the situation: they forcibly persuade Lot and his family to escape without his [prospective] sons-in-law; if 'prohibition against looking back' had not been set, Lot's wife would have survived.

[490] Though we do not know how old she was.

father to seek out, not possible lack of virility."[491] To my mind, however, the latter is also convincing since the concern about virility is consistent with its presumed outcome, "we may preserve seed of our father" (ונחיה מאבינו זרע, v.32b). The daughters might indeed be very much concerned about their own economic and social stability which is formalized through marriage; otherwise, having a child is the only way for them to ensure that they will have some provision in later years.[492] Instead of putting it bluntly, however, she brings the issue of the father's age to the forefront then repeats twice the purpose of this stratagem, "we may preserve the seed of our father" (נחיה מאבינו זרע) in v. 32b and v. 34b. In doing so, the attention is effectively diverted away from their own concern to their father's concern, as if this illegitimate sexual conduct is purely for the sake of their *father*. Hence each has to sleep with the father for the high success rate of perpetuating his line, but the subtext says each has to sleep with the father for each one's need to have future provision.

The remark "There is no man on earth/land" requires another careful consideration within the context. The prevalent view has been that the daughters' conduct was erroneous: they believed the whole human race had died except themselves[493] or at least they might have thought this as long as they were dwelling in the cave in the mountain, a place that is isolated and closed.[494] However, since the divine visitors have promised Lot to spare Zoar (19:21) and

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[491] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 61.

[492] L. M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," 119.

[493] See also the commentaries of the antiquities: Philo, *Questions and Answers in Genesis 4:56*; Josephus, *Ant.* 1:205; Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4, 31.2; Jerome, *Questions in Genesis* 19:30 (with reference to James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998], 359). Talia Sutskover claims that, despite having acquired "geographical perspective" acquired already (Gen 13:10, 11:31, 12:5), he did not share this "personal knowledge" with his daughters, leading readers to conclude Lot was an "abusing father who relished the prospect of remaining isolated in a cave with his two virgin daughters" (Talia Sutskover, "Lot And His Daughters (Gen 19:30–38): Further Literary & Stylistic Examinations," *JHS* 11 (2011): 2–11).

[494] The metaphor of cave in association with Freudian psychology, see further, David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story,* JSOTSup 14 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 94; Low interprets the incest in the cave as a "psychoanalytical symbol for the locus of subconscious desires and suppressions" (K. B. Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters," 39). For more about sexual connotation of "cave" (מערה), see Randall C. Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives," in *Reading from this Place: I. Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States,*

the text clearly states that Lot had gone to Zoar before going up to the mountain (ויעל לוט מצוער,
19:30), the daughters might have been aware that not all of the human race perished. Assuming
they knew that there were people living, the phraseology ואיש אין בארץ לבוא עלינו כדרך כל הארץ
(there is no man on earth/land to come in to us like the way of all the earth/land, 19:31b) is
more hyperbolic than referring to an actual worldwide disaster.[495] In addition, Hamilton
suggests reading ארץ as "a local reference to the *land* rather than a reference to the *world*."[496]

Even if one reads ארץ as a regional/local land, a question still remains. Why was Lot afraid
of dwelling there (כי ירא לשבת בצוער, 19:30b)? Gibson infers that it was because the people of
Zoar had driven him out.[497] Yet it can be the other way round: Lot himself chose to leave there,
since the people of Zoar treated him badly, not different from what the Sodomites did.[498] Both
cases suggest that Lot was not welcomed as a member of the city community. That Zoar was

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eds., Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 121–38 (here 128–9); T.
Sutskover, "Lot And His Daughters," 8–9.

[495] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 51.

[496] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 51. J. R. Porter translates it also 'in the country'
rather than 'in the earth' (J. R. Porter, "The Daughters of Lot," 130). Most commentaries read it as "there is no
man *on earth* to come in to us like the way of *all the earth*." However, it is worth noticing the use of the same
term ארץ and כל הארץ in chapter 13 where the separation between Abraham and Lot occurs, which is closely
linked to Gen 19 in larger context:

ולא־נשא אתם *הארץ* לשבת יחדו כי־היה רכושם רב ולא יכלו לשבת יחדו

so that *the land* could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they
could not dwell together. (13:6 RSV)

הלא *כל־הארץ* לפניך הפרד נא מעלי אם־השמאל ואימנה ואם־הימין ואשמאילה

Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand,
then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.(13:9 RSV)

כי את־*כל־הארץ* אשר־אתה ראה לך אתננה ולזרעך עד־עולם

for *all the land* which you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever (13:15 RSV).

Except עפר הארץ ("dust of the *earth*," v.15 [x2]), all ארץ employed in Genesis 13 indicate 'land': כארץ מצרים
("like the *land* of Egypt" v.10); בארץ כנען ("in the *land* of Canaan" v.12); בארץ לארכה (the breadth of the *land*,
v.16). In relation to Sodom, a compound form כל הארץ appears in Gen 18:25 as meaning 'all the earth': "….
Shall not the Judge of *all the earth* (כל הארץ) do right?" (18:25b).

The above examples demonstrate that the term ארץ signifies not only 'earth' but also 'land.' The former
implies the whole world, and the latter implies a regional area. Given that there are more usages of 'land' than
'earth' when it comes to the stories involving Lot or Sodom, we have no absolute reason to read ארץ and כל
הארץ in Gen 19:31 as 'earth.' Crucially, the verse 28 of the same chapter uses ארץ and כל הארץ as a meaning
of 'land.' ארץ used in the verses 1 and 15 in the immediate following chapter refers to a local land as well.

[497] Gibson, *Genesis*, vol.2, 92

[498] R. C. Heard, "A Lot to Talk about," 59.

originally included on the list to be destroyed enables us to think the people of Zoar might be pretty wicked too.[499] Hence perceiving there are men around but there are no appropriate or righteous enough men to be their husbands, the elder sister might have made an unavoidable decision and the younger one readily consented.

It is also a possible assumption that there is expectation in the patriarchal narratives that marriages should be within the wider family such as Isaac's and Jacob's marriages. The marriage within the clan may also be related to the idea of preserving rights to the land.[500] However, as long as the daughters live in an isolated place, they have no way of accessing their relatives even if they have survived.[501] In this view, Gunkel's acclaim of the female heroism in preserving pure blood and avoiding strange seed gains support.[502] It is probable that incest may represent the highest form of endogamy so as to keep pure blood. For example, in ancient Egypt, father-daughter or brother-sister marriages were sometimes practiced for the purpose of preserving pure royal blood.[503] Viewed in this light, Bruce Waltke's argument that "the daughters are an illustration of people doing what is right in their own eyes"[504] should be reconsidered.

Further, it is worth noticing LXX supplies the extra phrases to the report of their birth and naming (Gen 19: 37–38), which is marked with bold italic in the chart below.

MT (Gen. 19:37–38)	LXX (Gen. 19:37–38)
The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi;	And the elder bore a son and called his name Moab, *saying, "[He is] of my father"* *(λέγουσα ἐκ τοῦ πατρός μου)*. This is the father of the Moabites to this present day.

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[499] Gen 18:25 implies that the righteous (צדיק) and the wicked (רשע) should be separated.

[500] It is the crucial issue in regard to the Levirate marriage as well, which shall be discussed in Chapter 6.

[501] On the premise that Lot's sons-in-law were of kin to him.

[502] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 217.

[503] Brenner points out the origin of Moab and Ben-ammi was derived from an extrabiblical myth. According to her, "divine incest is the prerogative of the gods" (Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible*, BibInt 26 [Leiden: Brill, 1997], 102).

[504] Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 279.

he is the father of the Ammonites to this day." (RSV)	And the younger also bore a son, and called his name Amman, *saying, "**The son of my family**"(υἱὸς τοῦ γένους μου)*. This is the father of the Ammanites to this present day.

Whereas MT provides only the narrator's voice, LXX adds the daughters' voices that put emphasis on the origin of their sons: "[He is] of my father" (v. 37); "The son of my family" (v. 38). These sayings imply their pride, rather than shame and disgrace, in having sons resulting from this incestuous relationship, thus supporting the idea that the daughters made this effort to preserve the pure-blood consanguinity.[505] Perhaps the *virginity* of Lot's two daughters has been emphasized (19:8) in order to make it clear that their sons, Moab and Ben-ammi, are certainly conceived through none other than Lot. In this regard, Walter Brueggemann's statement is worth quoting.

> …the new children at least come of pure stock. Lot and his daughters are clearly treated as members of the family of promise. In an odd way, this is one more evidence of the inclusive attitude of Genesis toward other people. If Lot is saved because of Abraham (cf.19:29), then it is also true that Moab and Ammon are blessed because of Abraham (cf. 12:3; 18:18)[506]

From this perspective, these neighboring peoples are reaffirmed as descended from Terahite patrilineage, since Lot is a son of Haran and a grandson of Terah. In addition, the ancestral mothers, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel are all from Haran. Therefore Lot's descendants are viewed positively as "Israel's kinsmen" in accordance with Deut 2:9, 19 as Westermann claims.[507] Brett also views the story of the origins of Moab and Ammon in the "widest possible sense to

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[505] Given that the daughters are not ashamed of their children's origins but openly proclaim and label it forever in their names, Von Rad speculates that Gen 19:30-38 could be "an original Moabite tradition in which the wild determination of both ancestral mothers were glorified"(von Rad, *Genesis*, 224).

[506] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis,* IBCTP (Atlanta: John Knox Press,1982), 176–7.

[507] Westermann, *Genesis 12~36*, 315.

include kinship relationships excluded from the covenantal promises"[508] in contrast to von Rad's negative assessment as "derogatory stories about their most disgraceful origin" that connote enmity towards Israel's antagonists.[509]

The text is open to ethnic ambivalence, which most likely reflects the dynamics of polemic in a wider social context, as seen in the case of Hagar.[510] Ostensibly the key issue is divine grace and how the marginalized women contrive to carry on the (pure) lineage while also ensuring their own survival. At the same time, attention is directed to the continuation of the contrasting parallel between Abraham and Lot woven into the larger narrative complex: the illicit sexual relationship can be an implicit innuendo differentiating between Abraham's divinely chosen seed (12:7; 21:12; 22:17–18) and Lot's dis-elected seed (19:32).

Considering the broader narrative point of view of patriarchal birth stories, what is intriguing is that Lot shows no interest in preserving his family line, whereas it is the daughters who grapple with the critical situation in their family. It is not only the case in Lot's family. Women are mostly concerned with family lineage or family inheritance, whereupon they take the initiative; men are often negligent in this kind of procreation matter, as I discussed in the previous chapters when dealing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the process of resolving the problems surrounding procreation or inheritance that have emerged in the complicated family relationship, Sarah and Hagar are locked in conflict; Rebekah works on her own in controlling her son, Jacob, to benefit him; Leah and Rachel are mostly in conflict but do negotiate and cooperate as needed. In the case of Lot's two daughters,

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[508] M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 66. See also L. M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," 127.

[509] von Rad, 223. See also W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 128–9 (FN 33), 147–54; S. D. Kunin, *Logic of Incest*, 192.

[510] R. C. Heard, "A Lot to Talk about," 60–1; R. C. Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards,"132. Observe how the Ammonites and Moabites, along with Egyptians, are mentioned as circumcised people in Jer 9:25-6, whereas Ezra 9:2 prohibits intermarriage with them (M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 65). Notably, Ruth is the Moabite ancestor of David, while the genealogy of Boaz is in the line of Perez who was also born through an illicit relationship (Gen 38).

they display no conflict at all but only partnership. Although the younger (הצעירה)'s voice is

not heard, we are able to know from the narration that she accepted her elder sister's proposal.

The plan and its implementation are described in detail through four long verses (19: 32–35).

ותאמר הבכירה אל־הצעירה אבינו זקן ואיש אין בארץ לבוא עלינו כדרך כל־הארץ

לכה נשקה את־אבינו יין ונשכבה עמו ונחיה מאבינו זרע

ותשקין את־אביהן יין בלילה הוא ותבא הבכירה ותשכב את־אביה ולא־ידע בשכבה ובקומה

ויהי ממחרת ותאמר הבכירה אל־הצעירה הן־שכבתי אמש את־אבי נשקנו יין גם־הלילה ובאי שכבי עמו
ונחיה מאבינו זרע

ותשקין גם בלילה ההוא את־אביהן יין ותקם הצעירה ותשכב עמו ולא־ידע בשכבה ובקמה

And the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth
to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine,
and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father."

So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with
her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my
father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we
may preserve offspring through our father."

So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with
him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. (Gen 19:31–35 RSV)

These verses well demonstrate the trickster figure of Lot's daughters: they get their father

intoxicated with wine[511] and lay with him for two consecutive nights. The narrator repeats the

elder's plan (vv. 32 and 34) almost literally when explaining how the plan was executed (vv.

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[511] Dwelling in a cave, a remote place far away from city is not harmonized with wine, a symbol of a civilized
culture. At this point we can realize an additional function of Zoar. It is necessary to mention Zoar (v.30) for the
provision of wine since it seemed be impossible that the family took wine with them when fled from Sodom in a
hurry. In addition, to get someone intoxicated for two nights, a sizable amount of wine might have been needed.
So it is plausible that they brought wine from Zoar. See further, Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night
in Sodom:Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Leiden: BRILL, 1995), 233–6.

33 and 35).[512] They are aware that what they plan to do is not acceptable to their father. That is why they trick Lot into being under the influence of alcoholic intoxication.

The omission of a father's natural daughter from the list of forbidden sexual relationships in Leviticus 18:6ff has raised suspicion that there is no explicit biblical injunction against incest between a father and his natural daughter, and has thus been used as a justification throughout history. This omission, however, is most likely due to common sense, and therefore "no need was felt to name them." In support of this contention, Goodnick presents the trick of Lot's daughters as evidence, saying "had incest with a daughter been normative and permissible, this deception would hardly have been necessary."[513] Indeed, the Rabbinic ordinance in Mishnah that invokes 15 cases of forbidden family incest clarifies "the daughter" right at the start.[514] Further, Father–daughter incest is one of the taboo issues in the ANE world too. According to the code of Hammurabi §154, if a man is guilty of incest with his daughter, he must be driven from his city.[515] From a *narrative* viewpoint, however, some circumstances beyond the characters' control may permit incest.[516] For example, Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah (Gen 38) uses also unusual or bizarre ways of manipulating her father-in-law and has a sexual relationship with him in order to preserve her husband's family line.[517] In sum, Judah acknowledges that Tamar is more righteous than he is (Gen 38:26); neither Judah nor Tamar is punished. If the wits of Tamar are approved, cannot one also credit Lot's daughters who

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[512] Sutskover suggests that the repeated details implies that the elder sister's original plan of acting "together" was not carried out exactly as she intended: only she had sexual relationship with Lot on the first night, so she had to persuade her younger sister by repeating her suggestion (T. Sutskover, "Lot And His Daughters, 7).

[513] B. Goodnick, "Is Incest with a Daughter Permissible?" *JBQ* 30 (2002) 41–4 (quotation, 43).

[514] Yebamot 1.1;1.2.

[515] Literally, "If a man has got to know his daughter, they shall make that man leave his city" (šumma awilum marassu iltamad awilam šuati alam ušeessûsu). The principal meaning of the verb *lamādu* is 'to learn' ('to know') , and it is used as a euphemistic phrase to connote 'to have sex.' Cf. Hebrew verb ידע 'to know' connotes 'to have sex' (Mervyn Edwin John Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* [London: T&T Clark, 2004] 88–9).

[516] Sarna highlights that the daughters did not act out of lust. N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, 139. See also, A. Brenner, "On Incest," 113–38.

[517] As for Tamar, for her own sake as well, which shall be discussed later.

were in a similar circumstance?[518] Rather, this may be a variant of the heroic birth: the extraordinary or miraculous circumstances distinguish the born child from ordinary people, serving a similar function to the barrenness or annunciation motif.

It is unknown whether Lot was still ignorant of what had happened to him when he sobered up. What draws our attention more is that "the text is silent on Lot's reaction" as Hamilton points out.[519] On the contrary, quite a few scholars offer an argument in favor of Lot based on the twice-repeated phrase ולא־ידע בשכבה ובקומה (And he did not know her lying down and her arising vv. 33, 35), which consequently exonerates Lot from the incest. However, it is even more plausible that this reiteration rather indicates Lot's being ridiculed or that it serves as accentuating his negative aspects such as stupidity and incompetency, being of unsound mind, which well accords with the expression אבינו זקן (Our father is old): he is no other than a helpless old man lacking in discernment.

Here lie inherent ambiguity and multivocality again. The narrator caricatures Lot as a buffoon of tragicomedy: he becomes a passive victim to his own daughters, falls in with their schemes, and is violated sexually by them, while intoxicated.[520] On the other hand, his honour, at minimum, is defended as Abraham's nephew (Israel's kin), avoiding a strict moral condemnation of him. Further, the implied male-centered narrator protects male pride by hinting that this paterfamilias could never have been sexually conquered and violated by women/daughters if he was in a sober state of mind.[521]

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[518] Jackson gives an explanation that Lot's daughters are tricksters like Tamar, and their stories are better understood as comic (M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughter and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *JSOT* 98 [2002]: 29–46; see further, idem, "Trickster Matriarchs, Lot's Daughters, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Tamar"). See also Gunkel, *Genesis*, 217.

[519] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 53.

[520] Similarly, Susan Brayford suggests that narrator's referring to Lot's 'not knowing' twice is an attempt to partially exonerate him from the incestuous sexual relationship with his daughters, but at the same time it demonstrates he is an easily manipulated man (Susan Brayford, *Genesis*, SCS [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 321). Cf. Elke Seifert, "Lot und Seine Töchter: Eine Hermeneutik des Verdachts," in *Feministische Hermeneutik und Erstes Testament: Analysen und Interpretationen,* ed., Hedwig Jahnow et al (Stuttgart:Kohlhammer, 1994), 48–65.

[521] Cf. Gen 38:26.

In regard to the sexual conduct of Lot's two daughters, noteworthy is the reversal of their accepted role and the sexual initiative. In fact, the book of Genesis feels free to make women the initiators of sexual intercourse for the conception of children. Rachel makes a deal with Leah on *duda'im* in exchange for sexual access to Jacob. Hence, Leah claims confidently that Jacob must sleep with her for she hired him (תבוא כי שכר שכרתיך בדודאי בני Gen 30:16b). Nevertheless, it is a male who works as a main agent for the sexual act itself, as the Hebrew text chooses the masculine subject-verb along with preposition third-person feminine singular:[522] וישכב עמה בלילה הוא (So *he lay with her* that night Gen 30:16b). On the other hand, Lot's daughters are always the subject of the sexual act as shown in the chart below.

and we will lie	1st person common plural + prep;3rd masculine singular	נשכבה עמו (19:32)
And the first born went in and lay with her father	3rd person feminine singular 3rd person feminine singular +prep; Noun masculine singular construct; 3rd fs	ותבא הבכירה ותשכב את־אביה (19:33)
when she lay down or when she arose	Infinitive construct;3rd fs Infinitive construct;3rd fs	בשכבה ובקומה (19:33)
Indeed I lay yesterday with my father	Interjection+1st cs +prep; Noun masculine singular construct, 1st cs	הן־שכבתי אמש את־אבי (19:34)
and you go in [and] lie with him	Imperative feminine singular Imperative feminine singular + prep; 3rd masculine singular	ובאי שכבי עמו (19:34)

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[522] Also used תבוא "You must come in" (2nd person masculine singular) instead אבוא "I must come in" (1st person common singular) in the same verse, which implies sexual intercourse as well.

And the younger arose and lay with him	3rd person feminine singular 3rd person feminine singular +prep; 3rd masculine singular	ותקם הצעירה ותשכב עמו (19:35)
when she lay down or when she arose	Infinitive construct; 3rd fs Infinitive construct; 3rd fs	בשכבה ובקמה (19:35)

The text clearly displays that it is a female who works as the main agent for the sexual act. They dominate not only a male mind by intoxicating him with wine but also a male body physically. [523] In this sense, the daughters conduct incest according to sexual self-determination: it is probably the Bible's most provocative story of women undertaking a leading role in sexual practices: they reverse a male dominant–female subordinate sexual relationship.

My last concern to be discussed in this chapter is overturning the existing hierarchical structure and gender roles within the family. Interestingly and significantly, the two sisters' trickster figure emerges at a stage of the family journey in search of its new dwelling. In this respect, they resonate with the two sisters Leah and Rachel: they work together on behalf of their husband against Laban, their father so as to force Jacob to leave Haran (Gen 31); Rachel plays a trick on Laban on the family's journey out of Haran, in regard to her theft of the teraphim (Gen 31). Likewise, Lot's two daughters completely control the situation, in particular when the family goes on the move.

In relation to this issue, it will be important to recall that Lot was a marginal man even in Sodom. As we have already examined, he is viewed as an unsuccessful immigrant or a man of

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[523] In a modern view, their acts do not differ much from rape. In regard to the analysis of rape, see further Susanne Scholz, *Rape Plots, A Feminist Cultural Study of Genesis 34*, SiBL 13 (New York: Peter Lang, 2000; PhD diss. Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1997).

marginal status in the city, similar to Fields's expression "societal outsider."[524] From this perspective, Lot's being seated near the city gate (Gen 19:1) can be viewed differently. The city gate, more often than not, represents a very prominent and public place where the men of the city come to be seen and to do public acts such as commercial and juridical affairs (2 Sam 19:9 [8]; Prov 31:23; Ruth 4:1).[525] Yet it is highly likely that the city gate was a social center rather than a center of the city in terms of physical distance. On the rhetorical side, the city gate implies a boundary line or a liminal space of coming in and going out. It is a passage, on the one hand, to enter the interior of the fortified city, and is, on the other hand, intimately linked with exterior, e.g., others/foreigners who are temporarily allowed to be in since the gate is closed at night as well as during an approaching siege.[526] That Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom in the evening (בערב) — when darkness was at near hand — supports this ambivalent tone, that is city versus periphery, which may allude to his status in Sodom: dwelling within the city as a marginal man, an unwelcomed foreign immigrant.[527] A similar case is found in

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[524] W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 54–85.

[525] See further W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 90–1.

[526] Bechtel posits a similar view, arguing Lot's sitting at the gate is related to his marginal status. Bechtel also notes Lot's limited place "at the *entrance* of the city and the *entrance* of his house" (Italics mine). Although Lot, as a sojourner, has limited political rights, and only insiders are permitted to play "judging' role at the gate," he attempted to act as a judge, which is "violating the norms of the community" (L. M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," 114–5, 125). Cf. Morchauser takes a different approach, claiming that Lot's "sitting in the gate" indicates that he was *influential* "within the social order of Sodom," with the authority to adjudicate as a gate keeper or guard duty (S. Morschauser, "'Hospitality', Hostiles and Hostages," 464–7).

[527] Hence the townsmen in Sodom may have kept an eye on him suspiciously thus quickly discovering the strangers' arrival and Lot's hospitality to them. The whole population of Sodom might have gathered around the house of Lot *before* the guests lay down (19:4). Given that the two guests arrived at *evening* (בערב), such a conduct reflects a rapid community cohesion. The marginal status of Lot is well demonstrated by means of their calling him "this one who came to sojourn" (האחד בא לגור). From the wording 'לגור' (to sojourn) rather than 'לשבת' (to dwell), we can conjecture that they are thinking of Lot not as a member of the community but as a temporary sojourner. Therefore Lot's playing the role of a mediator by offering his virgin daughters instead of his guests would have been interpreted by them as defiance against existing authority and as subversion of the established social order. See also Robert I. Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom*: *Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19*, BibInt 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 151–2.

the story of Rahab, a prostitute: her house was situated on the city wall of Jericho (Jos 2), which is in accordance with her status as a social outcast.[528]

Contrary to the father who failed in settling in a city but finally chose to remain passively in an isolated cave in the mountain, the daughters form the substantial core of the new family society. They prepare a scheme actively for a new start: through childbearing, they increase family members, which paves the way for creating their own community.[529] These daughters/mothers become the center of it. In sum, Lot's daughters dominate their father in the sexual realm, specifically for procreation, and gain control of the head of household, thereby upholding female authority. It is the power of virgin daughters, who are generally considered to have a socially vulnerable power, that allows them to overcome the difficulties on their own: they decide to have children who will support them in later years. On a metaphorical level, their task is to bring about a new creation after the destruction or to sow the proper seeds through which the families shall be increased.[530]

So far we have analyzed the characterization of Lot and his two daughters. After the destruction of Sodom, his two daughters come to the fore as dominant characters. Contrary to their unreliable father who is pathetic, feeble-minded, timorous and passive, they take control and maneuver the new situations in a very decisive way, namely giving birth Moab and Ben-ammi

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[528] Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," in *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, eds., M. Amihai, G. W. Coats, and A. M. *Solomon,* OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress,1989), 197–218.

[529] K. B. Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters," 52.

[530] Within the larger narrative framework, due to his two daughters, Lot succeeds in having his own descendants, and with this, he disappears from the stage, which signifies also the exclusion of Lot from being Abraham's potential heir. Consequently, the narratives fully revolve around Abraham's family line that continues for three generations. In addition, one's expectation increases of how Abraham begets his offspring next in the stories.

through illicit sexual acts. Indeed it is a daughters' counterattack to their father who once treated them as sexual trade, and then deprived them of maternity.[531]

Further, one must take into consideration that Lots' two daughters are chosen survivors who have passed the tests unlike their husbands-to-be[532] and their mother. They have believed the visitors' notice of the forthcoming destruction and have kept the admonition not to look back. Such interpretations shed positive light on these female characters.[533] A new family phase is accomplished by means of this sororal cooperation; they, as "members of the family of promise,"[534] take part in the proceedings of perpetuating the family line of Haran who is the father of Lot, the brother of Abraham and the son of Terah.

Additionally, Lot's daughters can be considered as trickster figures who prevail over a male/father in order to achieve a common goal, being mothers for future provision as well as perpetuating the family lineage. The illicit sexual act with their father is not only the utmost effort to preserve pure blood but also the subversion of the patriarchal authority by taking the sexual initiative — a shift of generation and a genderquake. The daughters dominates the household for a fresh start. It is also significant that the distinctive female dominance is especially found at the stage of family migration, as discussed in the stories of Leah and Rachel, in search of a new settlement or towards the family's crossing/transition.

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[531] Reading the story through a psychoanalytic lens, Low proposes that Lot's daughters recover the memory of sexual abuse by forging a new kinship tie by becoming mothers (K. B. Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters," 44, 48, 52–3).

[532] Calling "their husbands" (Gen 19:14, חתניו) already after engagement, but before the marriage ceremony that allows sexual relationship.

[533] Rainer Kessler argues that the women, saved from being victims of male violence, now guarantee that new life sprouts from man-precipitated disaster, thus praising their initiative as 'women's finest hour.' See, Rainer Kessler, "1. Mose 19: "... damit wir uns Nachkommen schaffen von unserem Vater" – Lots Töchter," in *Feministisch Gelesen*, eds., Eva Renate Schmidt, Mieke Korenhof, and Renate Jost (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1989), 22–8 (25).

[534] W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 176

Chapter 6　Tamar Wins Her Case (the Births of Perez and Zerah)

We now have another female character who is prevented from experiencing motherhood. Lot denied his daughters the right to marry. However, Tamar, the childless widow, is deprived of the right to *remarry* under levirate marriage by her *father-in-law*, Judah. As is well known, Tamar challenges patriarchal authority, takes the initiative to resolve her problem, and gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerah, through illicit sexual intercourse with her father-in-law Judah.

The story of Tamar is narrated in Genesis chapter 38. The first and the last parts of the narrative are centered on Judah, the third son of Jacob who is born from Leah (vv. 1–11, 12; vv. 20–26); the middle part focuses on Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, the widow of his firstborn Er (vv. 13–19). Tamar, like Lot's daughters, vanishes from the scene after giving birth to the twin sons born to Judah (vv. 27–30). The focal point of the stories is their parents, and the plot revolves around how they came to have children. The issues of the endangered family lineage and woman's endangered potential maternity come to the fore. Instead of conjugal, sororal or fraternal conflicts that appeared in the earlier stories, our narrative involves conflicting relationships in the extended family network: conflicts between a married woman and her spouse's parent — specifically, a widowed daughter-in-law (Tamar) and her father-in-law (Judah) who later becomes a widower. In addition, the subject matter is an illicit sexual relationship.

Exegetical traditions in regard to Genesis 38 focus on Judah, viewing the story as a tribal history with a consequent concern for the perpetuation of the Judean line. The birth of Judah's twin sons has been explained as an example of the frequently appearing motif of divine preference of the younger over the elder in Genesis, thus celebrating Perez as the ancestor of

the Davidic dynasty.[535] In consequence, Genesis 38 is often discussed in relation to the book of Ruth which shares the motif of levirate marriage as well as sexual manipulation, and provides a genealogy running from Perez to David.[536] Accordingly, Tamar is praised as "the mother of a virile clan"[537] chosen by divine providence.[538] Viewed in this light, however, she is regarded as an instrument of God rather than as an independent actor and has received relatively less recognition in the shadow of Judah. For example, Martin O'Callaghan argues that a main theme of Genesis 38 is propagation and prolongation of Judah's family line and "the whole purpose of Tamar's action is to have a child."[539] Similarly, Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili claims that "procreation of Judah's progeny" is the consistent theme running through the entire narrative of Gen 38, and Tamar's desire is "to bear offspring for Er," thus overlooking her own benefit.[540]

The intertextual relation of Genesis 38 to the Joseph story has received much scholarly attention, often addressing both its own location and its larger narrative context. Robert Alter notes parallels and contrasts of motif, theme, and verbal links between the two stories.[541] More recently Esther Marie Menn[542] and Richard J. Clifford have explored the same issue.[543] Such

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[535] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50,* 454–6; Gary A. Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 36 (1986): 438–46; Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 142–4; Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, "Genesis 38: The Search For Progeny And Heir," *SJOT* 25.2 (2011): 276–88 (esp. 286).

[536] Harold Fisch, "Ruth and Structure of Covenant History," *VT* 32 (1982): 425–37; J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows, Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3" in *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power*, eds,. J. C. Exum and J. W. H. Bos, Semeia 42 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 37–67; Y. Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38" in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed., Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 271–91(esp. 284–5); Claassens, "Resisting Dehumanization: Ruth, Tamar, and the Quest for Human Dignity," *CBQ* 74.4 (2012): 659–74.

[537] E. M. Speiser, *Genesis,* 300.

[538] See also, R. Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Comm* 60/6 (1975): 70–7.

[539] Martin O'Callaghan, "The Structure and Meaning of Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar," *PIBA* 5 (1981): 72–88 (74).

[540] A. I. Abasili, "Genesis 38: The Search for Progeny and Heir," 287.

[541] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 5–11. See also U. Cassuto, "The Story of Tamar and Judah" Pages 29–40 in idem, *Biblical and Oriental Studies, 1* (Jerusalem: Magness, 1973).

[542] Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics,* SJSJ 51 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 75–8.

[543] Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 519–53. See also Judy Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location: Tamar in the Joseph cycle," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory*

comparisons underline Judah's sexual immoderation and contrast it with Joseph's sexual continence, thus generating comparisons between the deceptive image of Potiphar's wife and Tamar.[544]

Fueled by feminist scholars, Tamar has been examined more as a distinctive and unique individual whose actions run counter to patriarchal rules. Mieke Bal interprets Tamar not as a femme fatale but as one who teaches man insight;[545] Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos casts a fairly positive light on Tamar together with Yael and Ruth:

> Each woman steps in at a critical juncture in the life of a family or larger group and brings about a positive turn in events, which were moving in a negative direction. By staying a step ahead of the males who have power over them, the women thus advance not only their own well-being but also that of the community.[546]

Tamar has often been discussed in connection with the motif of the trickster, particularly in the context of social minority-majority relations. According to Melissa Jackson, the story of Tamar is a trickster narrative that should be interpreted comically.[547] Claassens also considers Tamar as a "classic trickster," saying that she "breaks the laws in order to outwit or outsmart" in a "situation of social disadvantage" by use of "cunning, deception, and a change of clothes to gain what is rightfully hers."[548]

Despite such emphasis on the positive character of Tamar, it is less satisfactory that scholarly discussion has given undue prominence to gender perspective such as male

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in Biblical Studies, ed., R. Boer (Atlanta: SBL press), 2007, 59–68; Mark Leuchter, "Genesis 38 in Social and Historical Perspective," *JBL* 132/ 2 (2013): 209–27 (esp. 210–2).

[544] See, V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 432; Y. Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 143–4. See further Joan E. Cook, "Four Marginalized Foils–Tamar, Judah, Joseph and Potiphar's Wife: A Literary Study of Genesis 38-39," *PEGLMBS* 21 (2001): 115–30; Laura E. Donaldson, "Cyborgs, Ciphers, and Sexuality: Re-Theorizing Literary and Biblical Character," *Semeia* no. 63 (1993): 81–96.

[545] M. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 102.

[546] J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 38.

[547] M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," 10, 34, 39.

[548] Claassens, "Resisting Dehumanization," 666.

oppression, sexual subversion, illicit sexual relationship, adultery, prostitution and the like. Given that Tamar fights against the patriarchal authority to retrieve her right to motherhood, and ultimately wins this game by use of a well-thought-out strategy, her intellectual ingenuity should be brought into sharper focus.

Keeping this particular feature in mind, I would like to emphasize the legal aspects of the conflictual relationship between Tamar and Judah. While adding more focus on the character of Tamar, who actually holds power and leads the action in the story, the legal background and the issue of social status shall be the first topic discussed in what follows. Afterwards, I will examine how Tamar prepares a plan that has legal force and reverses her situation.

6.1 Fertility Endangered: Some Understandings of the Legal Background of Gen 38

A brief overview of the story of Tamar and Judah is as follows.

Judah leaves his brothers[549] and turns to Hirah, a certain Adullamite. There he sees a daughter of Shua, a certain Canaanite and takes her as a wife. She gives birth to three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah marries off his firstborn son to Tamar, whose ethnic identity is not disclosed. God slays Er soon after his marriage due to his wickedness. Tamar remains a widow without any children. Onan mates with Tamar according to the custom of levirate marriage that the brother of the deceased takes his wife (Deut 25:5–10) but he spills his semen on the ground so as not to produce offspring for his brother. God slays Onan too due to his wicked conduct. Being afraid that his only remaining son, Shelah, may die like his brothers, Judah tells Tamar, his daughter-in-law, to remain as a widow in her father's house until Shelah grows up. However,

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[549] The text does not explain why he left.

the story suggests he has no intention of keeping his promise that Shelah would wed Tamar. Meanwhile Judah becomes a widower. After some time of mourning, he goes to shear his sheep at Timnah with Hirah. On hearing this, Tamar, realizing that, although Shelah has grown up, Judah has no intention of keeping his promise, "put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up"[550] (ותכס בצעיף ותתעלף), and sits at the entrance of Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah. Judah mistakes her for a harlot, and after giving her his seal, cord, and staff as a pledge for payment upon her demand, he has a sexual relationship with her. Later, Judah sends Hirah to pay the prostitute with a young goat in return for his pledge. Yet there is no harlot or cult prostitute to be found.[551]

Three months later, when Judah hears that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, played the harlot and was pregnant as a result, he orders the people to burn her. Tamar, however, produces the pledged objects that prove Judah is the father of her unborn child(ren). As a result, Judah admits his fault for not giving Shelah to her, and declares Tamar is more righteous than he. Tamar gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerah.

Judah's own story begins (in Gen 37) immediately after the account of the sale of Joseph. It is ironic that Judah, who once emphasized their sibling relationship by having called Joseph "our

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[550] RSV (Gen 38:14a).

[551] The debate about the prostitute (זונה v. 15) and the consecrated/sacred woman (קדשה v. 21) will not be discussed in this section due to its lack of relativity. For this issue, see further Gunkel, *Genesis*, 400; George Wolz, "Pan-Sumerianism and the Veil Motif," *CBQ* 5/4 (1943): 408–29; Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38" in idem, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 34–45 (here 41); E. M. Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis*, 65–75; M. Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 22–8.

brother, our own flesh" (37:27), leaves[552] his brothers and consorts with Canaanites.[553] The

introduction to Genesis 38 shows us that Judah has contact with the local Canaanite population.

<div dir="rtl">

ויהי בעת ההוא וירד יהודה מאת אחיו ויט עד־איש עדלמי ושמו חירה

וירא־שם יהודה בת־איש כנעני ושמו שוע ויקחה ויבא אליה

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It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers, and turned in to a certain

Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

    There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married

her and went in to her. (38:1–2 RSV)

We are not told why Judah went down from his brothers. He might have left his brothers, in

the larger narrative context, either for the sake of his own profit or to be relieved of his guilty

feeling over having initiated the sale of Joseph. Not only does Judah get along with Hirah the

Adullamite,[554] but he also marries a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua (Bath-shua, בת־

שוע).[555]

    Endogamous marriage[556] appears to have prevailed among patriarchs as observed from the

marriage of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and the two daughters of Laban,

his uncle. Lot even begets two sons through the incest imposed on him by his daughters, which

is sexual intercourse between the nearest blood relations — in this case, father and daughters.

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[552] Literally "and Judah *went down* from his brothers"(וירד יהודה מאת אחיו). See also the opening formula of 39:1 "Joseph was *taken down* towards Egypt" (ויוסף הורד מצרימה). See further, Sara M. Koenig, "Tamar and Tamar: Clothing as Deception and Defiance," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household are Clothed in Crimson,"* ed., Antonios Finitsis, LHBOTS 679 (New York: T&T Clark; imprint of Bloomsbury, 2019), 90; Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 34.

[553] Gunkel considers this event as reflecting the entry into Canaan, Judah's abandoning the other tribes of Israel.

[554] Adullam is a city in the eastern *shefelah*, northwest of Hebron, which belongs to the later tribal territory of Judah together with Chezib, Enaim, and Tamnah (C. Westermann, *Genesis 37~50*, 50). Sarna states "This Canaanite royal city, captured by Joshua and made part of the tribal inheritance of Judah, was also associated with the life of David"(N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, 265).

[555] See 1 Chr. 2:3; 3:5.

[556] Or 'in-group' marriage in contrast to 'out-group'. See further, Christian Frevel, "Introduction: The Discourse of Intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible," in *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*, ed., C. Frevel, LHBOTS 547 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 1–14.

Given that Rebekah was displeased with Esau's marriages with Hittite women (Gen 26: 34–35; 27:46), we learn that exogamous marriage was not prohibited, but was not ideal. That both Ishmael and Esau who practiced exogamy[557] were not chosen as heirs to their fathers, Abraham and Isaac, supports this assumption. It is thus noteworthy that, unlike his father and grandfather, Judah himself married a Canaanite woman. Hence, the Testament of Judah, part of the larger Hellenistic work known as the Testament of Twelve Patriarchs, criticizes Judah's intermarriage with Canaanites.[558]

On the other hand, Amit asserts that Gen 38, interpolated into Joseph's story, holds consistent editorial considerations favourable to Judah and intermarriage, as evidenced by the narrator's emphasis on Judah's special prominence, pivotal role, and his final vindication. According to Amit, this reflects the "growing tension" of "acceptance or rejection" of foreign women as part of the "power struggle between different groups" in Yehud during the early Persian period: the story of Judah and Tamar serves as an "anti-isolationist polemical position on the critical issue" of mixed marriage and presents a "pro-Judahite position favoring an open attitude toward the integration of the local populace." [559] Despite Amit's insightful observations, there is no compelling ground for the argument that the narrator has a consistently

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[557] Esau subsequently follows endogamy by marrying a daughter of Ishmael, Ishmael is mixed partially with Egyptian blood and even more so his daughter, for her mother is Egyptian as well. Consequently Esau remains as the collateral branch of the family who belongs to Aramean family. See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 101; Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*, JSOTSup 169 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 134; Benedikt J. Conczorowki, "All the same as Ezra? Conceptual Differences between the Texts on Intermarriage in Genesis, Deuteronomy 7 and Ezra," in *Mixed Marriages, ed.,* C. Frevel, 89–108 (esp. 92–8).

[558] *The Testament of Judah*, ch. 11:1–5 (See further FN 444) and Jubilees ch. 41: 10–13. See also E. M. Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis*, 107–9. Hilary B. Lipka compares the language used for Judah's taking the Canaanite daughter to that of Canaanite Schechem's taking Dinah. She points out the sequence of 'he took her and lay with her' appears only in these passages, saying "Dinah goes out to visit the daughters of the Canaanite. Judah goes down to commingle with the Canaanites, Canaanite Shechem sees Dinah, and then take her and leis with her. Judah sees a Canaanite woman, takes her and goes into her" (Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in Hebrew Bible*, Monograph 7 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006], 189).

[559] Y. Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38," 277, 299, 281–5; also in her articles, "Endings – Especially Reversal Endings." *Scriptura* no. 87 (January 1, 2004): 213–26; "The Case of Judah and Tamar in the Contemporary Israeli Context: A Relevant Interpolation." in *Genesis*, eds., Brenner, Lee, and Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 213–20.

positive view of Judah and mixed marriage; it is rather ambiguous. Furthermore, Amit states in her earlier article that the origin of Tamar is not mentioned, but nevertheless she regards her as "a sojourning stranger who was integrated into the family of Judah."[560] She goes one step further in her later work, positing that "Tamar was from a local Canaanite family that lived in Timna or its surroundings," thus Gen 38 presents an additional voice in contrast to the anti-intermarriage voice in Gen 24.[561] Although not only Amit but also a considerable number of commentators believe that Tamar, in all probability, has a Canaanite origin,[562] it should not be dismissed that the text itself is silent concerning her ethnic identity.[563] It is also probable that the narrator's reticence was intentional as a way to present her as a mysterious or ambiguously blurred figure, leaving the readers filled with curiosity.[564]

Whether or not Tamar is Canaanite, the contrasting symmetry[565] between the first part and the last part of the story stands out:[566] Judah's marriage to a Canaanite provides him with three children, but two among them die as well as their mother; Judah's sexual intercourse with Tamar provides him twin sons and none of them dies. Hence Tamar, the heroine of the birth narrative, is contrasted with Judah's Canaanite wife — the daughter of Shua who neither takes action nor speaks.[567]

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[560] Y. Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38," 282, 284.

[561] "Endings – Especially Reversal Endings," 216.

[562] J. Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 449, 451; von Rad, *Genesis*, 357; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 300; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 434; G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 365.

[563] For example, according to the Testament of Judah (10:1), she is "from Mesopotamia, a daughter of Aram."

[564] In regard to the mother's lack of identity, we also have the account of Samson's unnamed mother (Judg 13:2); Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is introduced without genealogy, as is Peninnah, her co-wife.

[565] For the discussion of the structural feature of Gen 38, see, Anthony J. Lambe, "Genesis 38: Structure and Literary Design," in *The World of Genesis*, 102–20; Dohyung Kim, "The Structure of Genesis 38: A Thematic Reading," *VT* 62/4 (2012): 550–60.

[566] It is worth noticing that Genesis 38 has a special thematic structure: there is a birth episode (Er, Onan and Shelah) within a birth narrative (Perez and Zerah).

[567] Viewing Tamar is of Aramaean ancestry and as a contrast parallel to the Canaanite daughter of Shua has been attested in later Jewish interpretation such as Testament of Judah 10.1 and Jubilees 41.1–2. For further interpretation of her identity, see E. M. Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis*, 51–5; Robert H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 52; Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations (Matthew 1.1-17)*, LNTS 441 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 88–118.

Judah's living among Canaanites, having an intimate relationship with Hirah, and entering into a mixed marriage to a Canaanite woman all anticipate a new phase that the next generation of Jacob faces — the mixed population of Canaanites and certain groups of Israelites who immigrated into their territory.[568] Not only Judah but also Simeon, his brother, marries a Canaanite woman (Gen 46:10) which underpins new circumstances of their immigrant life. Hence it seems plausible that the substantive issue raised in Genesis 38 is not intended to show implacable opposition to intermarriage, but instead is meant to uphold and maintain traditional social institutions, in this case, levirate marriage. In addition, the story deals with another customary law linked to the marriage system — the penalty for adultery. Judah, the patriarch, is the one with authority to make decisions for the entire family in accordance with custom, while Tamar is the person directly involved in both cases mentioned above. Therefore it might be Tamar who actually leads in developing the story lines.

In the previous sections, I have endeavored to demonstrate how women (ancestral mothers) in the patriarchal birth narratives are actively involved in the issue of family lineage or family inheritance, whereas men (patriarchs) are not much interested in matters of procreation and carrying on a family line. The key issue for Lot's two daughters and Tamar is that they take the initiative lest they remain childless because of their social circumstances.

As for Tamar, in particular, males are the cause of her childlessness. Mary E. Shields rightly points out,

Instead of an ancestress being endangered by the possibility of intercourse with someone other than the patriarch himself, as in Genesis 12, 20 and 26, here we have a story in which men endanger their own line: Er, Onan and ultimately Judah in turn take part in this

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[568] C. Westermann, *Genesis 37~50*, 50.

endangering. Instead of the theme of the barren woman (Sarah and Rachel), we have a story in which it is men's actions that keep Tamar from becoming pregnant.[569]

The first man who prevents her from having children is Er, her husband, on account of his premature death: the narrator tells us that YHWH slew him because he was wicked (Gen 38:7) — though no explanation of the wickedness is given.[570] Tamar becomes a childless widow a second time due to the sudden death of Onan who entered into a levirate marriage with her (38:9–10): YHWH kills Onan too because of his refusal to honor the levirate duty. Lastly, it is Judah, the father of those deceased sons, who prevented his daughter-in-law becoming a mother through not giving her Shelah, his last son, who in turn had a duty to enter a levirate marriage. Such a paradigm of the man as a potential problem and the woman as a solution reminds us of Abraham, who appears to be a contributor to why Sarah has no children.[571]

When the text explains that the reason Judah did not give Shelah to Tamar is because he thought Shelah might die like his brothers (v. 11b). Is that a legitimate rationale? Judah's identification of Tamar as a life-endangering woman (v.11)[572] reflects the superstitions about 'killer women' as a possible background which the storyteller and his audience may have shared: men are doomed to die by having sexual intercourse with certain women as a result of their demonic force.[573] If this was the case, the narrator tries to defend Tamar by intervening

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[569] Mary E. Shields, "'More Righteous Than I': The Comeuppance of the Trickster in Genesis 38," in *Are We Amused?: Humour About Women In the Biblical World, ed.,* A. Brenner, JSOTSup 383 (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 30–51 (here 35). See also J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 48.

[570] For example, Jewish exegetical tradition is interpreted to mean that Er and Onan did not want to have children with Tamar: Testament of Judah 10:1-3 states that Er refused to sleep with Tamar because she was not Canaanite, as was his mother; Onan avoided having sexual relationship with Tamar though he spent a year with her. Jubilees 41:2 explains that Er did not lie with Tamar because she was not a kinsfolk of his Canaanite mother. Further, the rabbinic literature Genesis Rabba 85.4 presents Er as a parallel figure to Onan (Michael Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theolog*y, JSJSup 117. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 61; E. M. Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis*, 145; Harm Wouter Hollander, Marinus De Jonge, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*: *A Commentary*, SVTP 8 [Leiden: Brill, 1985], 200–1).

[571] Cf. Lot.

[572] Ironically it is his wife whom Judah lost whereas he was afraid of losing his son.

[573] Sara, the female protagonist in the apocryphal book of Tobit, had been given to seven husbands, and they all died due to the demon Asmodeus. For more discussion on the superstition of killer wife, see Mordechai A.

to tell that Er and Onan were wicked — hence slain by God (v. 7, 9–10). In this way, he highlights Judah as blinded by his own perception or his lack of discernment, without understanding it is God who solely controls life and death.[574] Such an interpretation well corresponds to Judah's character which appears in his later encounter with Tamar in Enaim (עינים). As the place signifies 'place of seeing,' Judah *sees* only what he wants to see: he does not recognize his daughter-in-law but mistakes her for a prostitute.[575]

The first half of Genesis 38 closes with Judah's making a plausible excuse to Tamar: she would stay a widow *temporarily* only until Shelah becomes mature enough to be married.

שבי אלמנה בית־אביך עד־יגדל שלה בני

"Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." (Gen 38:11aβ)

The immediately following verse that marks the second half of the narrative begins with the statement, "Many days later,[576] the wife of Judah, the daughter of Shua, died…" (… וירבו הימים ותמת בת־שוע אשת־יהודה, v.12a)

The opening sentence וירבו הימים is often translated as "and in process of time" (KJB, JPS Tanakh), " Now after a considerable time" (NASB), "After a long time" (NIV), "In [the] course of time" (RSV, NRS) and the like.[577] Yet the literal meaning of וירבו הימים is "and the days were multiplied," which appears to be more straightforward and stronger than the above-mentioned English renderings. The expression וירבו הימים creates a sense of delay so that the audience may feel Judah's promise was not kept for a long time, and thereupon sympathizes

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Friedman "Tamar, a Symbol of Life: the "Killer Wife" Superstition in the Bible and Jewish Tradition," *AJS Review* 15/1 (1990): 23–61. See also, John. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis 38," *VT* 25 (1975): 338–61.

[574] According to Fewell and Gunn, "the dramatic irony" is that Judah is unaware of what the readers are aware of: that his sons are killed by God, not Tamar, as a result of their own wrongdoing (Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 36). The lack of Judah's perception is found in later story development as well, which shall be included in the following discussion.

[575] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 39.

[576] Translation of Wehnam.

[577] "Much later" (Hamilton).

with and defends Tamar: it is reasonable for her to consider that Judah has no will to give her Shelah since she had been waiting long enough (v. 14).[578]

Given that רָבָה (וירבו) is the verb continuously used in line with the divine command and blessing for increase and fertility in Genesis,[579] the audience can naturally bring to mind the procreation issue: Tamar's clinging to the status of a mother is rightfully in compliance with the divine order of procreation. This term also leads the audience to look back to Onan's spilling his *seed* (semen)*,* זרע (vv. 9-10), since seed is the frequently used term in the fertility context as well. Caused by an earlier failure and being bound to the levirate marriage, Tamar may end up childless as she passes through her childbearing years.

Now let us briefly look into the biblical levirate law presented in Deut 25:5–10:

> [5]If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in to her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. [6]And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his brother who is dead, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. [7]And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' [8]Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak to him: and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,' [9]then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face; and she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' [10]And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, The house of him that had his sandal pulled off. (Deut 25:5–10 RSV)

In sum, if a husband dies without a child, the widow should marry one of her husband's

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[578] See also Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 37.
[579] Gen 1:22, 28; 3:16; 7:18; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 16:10; 17:2, 20; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3; 35:11.

surviving brothers; a child born of this union is considered the child of the deceased brother; the widow can be released by the ceremony of pulling off the sandals of the brother-in-law who refused to honor this duty.[580]

Considering the fact that across the ANE, not only Israelites but also the Canaanites, the Assyrians, the Hittites and the Hurrians all practiced levirate marriage, though with slight differences in how the detailed regulations are applied,[581] the storyteller of Gen 38 and the implied audience might have known the levirate marriage as a similar form was stated in Deuteronomy, apart from the real tradition behind its present form.

Coming back to the quotation of the text in Deuteronomy, the deceased's wife may go and report to the elders of the city with a subsequent rite of removing the shoe when her brother-in-law refuses to perform the levirate duty, as portrayed in the book of Ruth (Ruth 4:1–11). However, in the time of Tamar and Judah, the eldership might have not existed: the tribal elders as a representative of people, taking governmental and official roles seems to appear later during the residence in Egypt when the tribes came to be constituted.[582] Thus, it is doubtful whether Tamar could be released from this obligation by the refusal revealed in public in front of the elders. Besides, Emar texts show there is a disadvantage when the widow remarries someone outside her husband's family. As Marten Stol explains,[583]

> The Old Testament law says that the woman may not belong to a 'stranger' (*zār*), meaning a person outside the family. The Hebrew cognate is found in cuneiform texts from Emar as *za-ya-ri* and possibly also *zarrari*. There a woman 'follows a stranger' after the death of her husband. She was allowed to do that, but in consequence she lost all her previous

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[580] See further, Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel Its Life and Instructions,* trans., John McHugh, BRS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997; orig. in French, *Les institutions de l'Ancien Testament,* 2 vols [Paris: Cerf, 1958–60]), 36–8.

[581] See Middle Assyrian Laws § 30, 33, 43: Hittitle Law § 193, Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East,* 296–99. As for the levirate marriage in the OT, see Deut 25:5-10 and Ruth. See further, Millar Burrows, "The Ancient Oriental Background of Hebrew Levirate Marriage," *BASOR* 77 (1940): 2–15.

[582] Exod 3:16, 18; 4:29, 12:2; 17:5; 18:12; 19:7; 24:1, 9, 14; Lev 4:15; 9:1; Num 1:20; 11:16 etc.

[583] See also, Hennie. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel,* 300.

possessions, for property was intended to remain within the family. Perhaps levirate marriage was intended to stop family wealth draining away to a 'stranger.'[584]

The testament at Nuzi has even more severe cases: šilwa-turi, a widow of Ar-tura is not allowed to remove any property if she wishes to remarry, moreover, she should strip and leave naked.[585] We learn from the Emar and Nuzi cases that the custom refers to the consolidation of property, namely, the retention of family wealth within the family, specifically speaking, the husband's family.

Since both the levirate and inheritance law in ANE were customary laws rather than established laws,[586] not uniform, and we have insufficient documents to prove case by case, any of them should not be applied to Tamar. Even the book of Ruth, the text of the Bible, that belongs to the narrative genre delivers a detailed levirate custom that is different from that in Gen 38, which may "represent different regional customs or different stages of an historical development."[587] But at least the case laws mentioned above teach us that we cannot exclude the possibility that Tamar, for a similar reason, had difficulty remarrying other than by the levirate rule: on her part, she would have lost all her previous possessions if she had entered a non-levirate marriage.

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[584] Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 297.

[585] Michael Heltzer, Edward Lipiński. (eds.), *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean, C. 1500–1000 B.C.: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at the University of Haifa from the 28th of April to the 2nd of May*, 1985, OLA 23 (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 91–2; Martha A. Morrison, Ernest R. Lacheman, and David I. Owen (eds), *The Eastern Archives of Nuzi and Excavations at Nuzi 9/2*, SCCNH 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 55–6; Raymond Westbrook, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, Hor 72, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 671; There is also a case from Nuzi (*Sumer* 32 133 no. 2) that "if testator's wife remarries, she should be killed as punishment." H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 300.

[586] Discussing the law of the biblical levirate, Westbrook argues: "In terms of ancient Near Eastern law this is not a valid approach. Ancient Near Eastern jurisprudence failed to develop the tools of legal logic necessary for the formulation of general principles, and consequently its 'law codes' are not codes at all, but seldom more than collections of decisions in individual cases which, of course, refer only to particular aspects of the legal institution involved." R. Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*, JSOTSup. 113 (Sheffield: Sheffield academic press, 1991), 71.

[587] R. Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law,* 70 (With reference to S. Loewenstamm in *Encyclopedia Biblica*, III, Jerusalem, 1958, col.446).

If Tamar possessed property in any shape or form,[588] on Judah's part, he might have desired to have kept the benefits from it or to prevent its flow out of his family clan. Thus, for the sake of economic interest, Judah might not have released her from the obligation but could have *suspended* it. In this view, it is worth mentioning Genesis 37:26, the previous episode, "What *profit* (בצע) is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?" From this speech, we can get a sense that his focus is on *profit,* which foreshadows his calculative and manipulative character.[589]

However, even if she were allowed to remarry someone else, Tamar, being widowed twice, was probably not desirable for marriage to any man. If her father-in-law suspected her to be a killer wife, and was thus hesitant to give her his remaining son, it is no wonder if others outside her husband's family might have been afraid of marrying her. Then Tamar may not have had other options to choose except Judah, the source of Er's line. Her plan to become pregnant from Judah indicates that she has decided at least to have a child in order to secure her future economic well-being and to maintain her socially acceptable position as a mother.[590]

Whatever the situation was, it was the paterfamilias' responsibility to ensure that the levirate marriage practice was observed. When it comes to Judah, he suspends its application

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[588] According to biblical law, a woman could not inherit from her husband's estate (Num 27: 8-11), though the opposite case is permitted, but still has right to possess certain property. For example, a childless widow had rights to the usufruct of her deceased husband's land (Ruth 4:3); the dowry remained as the widow's property. See, H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel,* 718, Judy Fentress-Williams, *Ruth*, AOTC (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2012), 29–30.

[589] M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identit*y, 112–33; Anderson Jeremiah, "Reclaiming 'Her' Right: Rereading the Story of Tamar (Genesis 38:1–27) from Dalit Women Perspective," *BTF* 38, no. 1 (June 1, 2006): 145–56 (here 146).

[590] Coats raises the question of whether the primary function of the levirate marriage is conception or remarriage, saying only if the former is right, the ending is satisfying. However, he misses the point that being a mother also ensures a woman's socio-economic interests. Furthermore, according to Rabbinical law (Kiddushin 1.1), a childless widow's levirate marriage with a yabam (levir) is consummated by sexual intercourse with no other procedure required, which may imply the possibility that Tamar had legal rights as a wife despite not cohabiting with Judah.

until Shelah, the young *yabam*[591] grows up.[592] Through this suspension, Judah probably managed to avoid criticism that such an influential patriarch did not fulfill the levirate law. In this view, Judah is hypocritical as he was in selling Joseph in Gen 37. Mark G. Brett rightly points out that Judah claims hypocritically 'for he is our brother, our own flesh' but he is willing to sell a brother into slavery to make money (Gen 37:27).[593]

What draws our attention is that Judah just sits and waits.[594] If Shelah's life is at risk, it is not only a matter of producing an heir for Er[595] but also of continuing Judah's line,[596] since he has no descendants other than Shelah at this point.[597] However, Judah does not take any action to address this problem. And the situation gets worse for he lost his spouse who could have borne other offspring.[598] In this sense, he is analogous to Abraham and Lot who do not take any initiative to resolve fertility issues.

With these legal aspects in mind, we will explore the initiative of Tamar in the following section, focusing on how she redresses an injustice, how she makes use of legal methods rationally and logically, which is sharply contrasted to Judah's irrational, illogical and self-serving conduct.

6.2 Tamar's Scholarly and Activist Aspects in Legal Domain

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[591] A deceased husband's brother who is obliged to have *yibbum* (levirate marriage) obligation.

[592] Still bound to the levirate obligation, she must wait for the brother of the deceased to grow up, Tamar's status is *Shomeret Yabam* (waiting the levir) according to Rabbinic law, and is absolutely prohibited to have sexual relationship with any other man. See Mishnah Yebamot 4:3, Ketubut 8:6.

[593] M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, 112–3.

[594] Given that Judah names only the first-born and his whereabouts in Chezib when his third son was born, Fewell and Gunn interpret this to mean that "Judah's interest in his sons ceases once he has an heir, someone to carry on his line and his name" (Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 35).

[595] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel Its Life and Instructions*, 36–8.

[596] It is actually a key issue of the Deuteronomic History to trace the line that leads to David and the monarch. Since this thesis takes synchronic approaches, we will not go into that matter in greater detail.

[597] We do not know whether Onan was married before Tamar, but he had no children according to the genealogy given in Num 26:20 and 1 Chr 2:3-4.

[598] After finishing a mourning period, he could remarry but he seemed not to consider that option.

In male-dominated society in ancient Israel, barren, enslaved, unmarried women, and childless widows were regarded as the weakest people among the weak. In patriarchal birth narratives, these women in particular are described as active and manipulative, as we discussed already in regard to Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel and Lot's two daughters.[599] Tamar, *inter alia*, displays the most salient feature of defiance against patriarchal authority.

As for Judah, he neglected his duty to keep the family law and deprived his widowed daughter-in-law of her right to enter a levirate marriage.[600] In ANE texts, widows are primarily mentioned together with orphans and children left without their father. They are often described as poor and vulnerable people.[601] The legal codes in the Hebrew Bible clarify the fact that widow and orphans need divine protection, and social *justice* should be ensured to them (Exod 22:21–24, Deut 10:18; 14:28-29; 16:11, 14; 27:19), which address the fact that they were easily targeted by oppression and injustice.[602]

Further, women such as orphans, prostitutes and childless widows in ancient Israel were, according to Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, liminal with no legal, social, or economic status and did not belong to any social class.[603] In accordance with this view, Susan Niditch has argued that a young, childless widow was a liminal character, not fitted within any acceptable categories for women in society.[604] If that is the case, the levirate marriage must have been the fastest and most practical way to ensure Tamar's social stability again. To put it in another way, leaving Tamar as a childless widow is denying her social, economic and cultural protection. Moreover, it should be noted that, as a widow whose father-in-law was still

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[599] See also, M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*, 41–66.

[600] H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 297.

[601] H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 318–24; M. Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 278–83.

[602] As for widow, fatherless, and alien, see Ps 94:6; Jer. 22:3.

[603] See further Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250–587 BCE*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993, 132–41 (esp. 133).

[604] S. Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *HTR* 72 (1979): 143–9 (146).

alive and being bound by the levirate obligation, Tamar remained under Judah's authority. As Marsman states,

> A Mesopotamian widow probably did not achieve jural independence if her husband's father was still alive and acted as *pater familias*. Since marriage was not so much an arrangement between two persons as between two families, the marriage bond did not automatically dissolve when the husband died. A father-in-law held the authority over his daughter-in-law, who remained a member of his family.[605]

Given that Tamar had no legal standing and Judah held authority over her, it might have been actually an impossibly difficult matter to bring any kind of lawsuit against Judah's unfair dismissal in order to claim her legal right, in a patriarchal society in particular. Presumably, people outside the family were not likely to interfere in family problems: decisions for familial contents such as marriage and inheritance and the like are left up to paterfamilias' own authority. It is explicit from the outset that Judah does act on his own:[606] he left his brothers, organizing an isolated household (38:1): its implicit meaning is that Judah is far from being advised or admonished by his parents and siblings for his deeds.[607] Hirah, a man Judah associates with, is just described as his confidential follower rather than a desirable friend.

In ANE, according to Westbrook and Wells, tribunals worked in royal, provincial, and local levels with no particular separation between administrative and juridical functions.[608] In the patriarchal period, however, the patriarchs seemed to act as "absolute rulers within their household, with absolute power to dispense justice."[609] Judging from this, the primary issue

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[605] H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 292.

[606] For more about the narrative depiction of Judah as "the controller,' see Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 36.

[607] Such case is indicated in Genesis 31:37 where Jacob proposes having a tribunal of kinsmen from his and Laban's families so that they may judge between them. See Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 37.

[608] Westbrook and Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 35–6.

[609] Westbrook and Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel*, 37.

in Tamar's case is that she is boxed in by the fact that her prosecutor and her judge is the same person, Judah the patriarch.

Realizing that only Judah can determine her fate, Tamar approaches from the opposite direction. Judah will take any action needed when the situation involves matters of family honour.[610] That is of greatest significance in patriarchal society. So what if Tamar becomes a defendant in a case that involves dishonor, instead of being a plaintiff?

Tamar probably perceived that Judah was captivated by the superstition about killer wives. The continual death of her husbands without leaving any children to carry on a family line would bring about the ultimate discontinuation of Judah's lineage, which points to her as the source of infertility. In such a situation, being pregnant by Judah is simply 'killing *three* birds with one stone.' Firstly, Tamar would perpetuate the family line while proving her fertility power. Secondly, being a defendant in a case of committed adultery is the only or the best way to make the facts of her previous 'case' public. Then, thirdly, it would save her life from the accusation of adultery since the judge is Judah who would be an unwitting accomplice in her case.

With such a scheme in mind, Tamar takes the risk of making herself the defendant in a legal case. Now she launches her counterattack against Judah by entrapping him into the circumstance of self-contradiction. Verses 13–14 convey her taking the initiative.

ויגד לתמר לאמר הנה חמיך עלה תמנתה לגז צאנו ותסר בגדי אלמנותה מעליה ותכס בצעיף ותתעלף ותשב בפתח עינים אשר על־דרך תמנתה כי ראתה כי־גדל שלה והוא לא־נתנה לו לאשה

And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up,[611] and sat at the

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[610] Judah's fear of being shamed comes out well in Gen 38:23.
[611] The meaning of עלף is debated. Based on Ugar. *glp* and Arab. *galafa*, Hamilton reads it "perfumed herself" on purpose of attracting Judah. V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 18–50*, 438, 440.

entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. (Gen 38:13–14 RSV)

Seen from the perspective of her taking an action so promptly upon hearing of Judah's trip to Timnah, it seems that Tamar has waited for a long time for this event — as if she had set this sheep-shearing event as an optimum day on which to initiate her plan. Further we can conjecture that the third party who delivered Judah's whereabouts to Tamar might have been a proxy whom she planted beforehand so that he could keep her updated on Judah's actions, which recalls Rebekah's use of knowledge as power.[612]

The objectives of her generating scheme are mainly three: to induce Judah to confess officially she was wronged by him; to restore or improve her social status; to prove she is not liable for the deaths of Er and Onan by verifying her fertility. In fact, Tamar's scheme cannot secure success without learning Judah's habits across his life cycle. For this, a preliminary survey and much forethought are necessary.[613] (1) Judah consumes very much wine during the sheep-shearing festival, which puts him under the influence of alcohol, thus causing him to lose his powers of discernment and self-control.[614] (2) He is eager for sexual relations on account of the death of his wife.[615] (3) Tamar in person must make an investigation of the surrounding area of Timnah so as to know the crossroad Judah passes through. (4) She needs to know her ovulation cycle to make it possible to become pregnant from Judah.

Surely, Tamar's trickery is a well-planned stratagem. While considering Tamar, Lot's daughters, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel as trickster matriarchs, Jackson underlines these female characters not as wives and mothers subjugated to their patriarchs, but as active figures

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[612] J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 45; Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 38.
[613] Jackson rightly observes that "She devises a plan, chooses the perfect time to execute it, and does so flawlessly" (M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*, 56).
[614] See G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* 368. This recalls Lot's drunkenness and the resultant incest.
[615] P. A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 123; Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 37–8.

challenging and subverting the patriarchal system or making fools of the patriarchs.[616] Concurring with Jackson, I would draw a comparison between the trickery of Tamar and that of other ancestral mothers. Tamar's trickery is different from Rachel's: whereas Rachel, by using her quick wit, extemporaneously avoided the abrupt and unexpected crisis regarding her theft of the teraphim (Gen 31:19, 34–35), Tamar employed her tactics in accordance with her long-term plan and preparation to achieve her intended goal. In regard to the incestuous sexual intercourse, it is obvious that Lot's daughters employed deceit and secrecy by getting their father drunk; it is unilateral sexual relationships and sexual assault that were completely carried out by the daughters — in a real sense, it is the first-ever woman's rape of man in the Hebrew Bible. However, the case of Tamar was executed by mutual agreement and was initiated by Judah who did not recognize her: he saw a veiled woman and made a hasty generalization that she was a prostitute,[617] in consequence proposing that she have sex with him.

What makes Tamar more distinct from these tricksters is that she is described as a scholarly and even an activist figure in the legal domain. She is a rational, learned, and a well-informed scholar who knows her situation in the social structure and within its legal context. Confronted with a lack of justice, Tamar employs legal tradition in her own favour.

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[616] M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*, 55–8.

[617] M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," 40–1. See further M. E. Shields, "More Righteous Than I," 36; Fokkelien van Dijke-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy: Between Rape and Seduction (2 Samuel 13 and Genesis 38)" in *Anti-Covenant,* ed., M. Bal, 135–56 (esp. 149-150); J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 48–9.

As for Tamar's changing clothes and veiling herself, biblical scholars present various opinions: Tamar deceived Judah as if she were a prostitute (E. Fuchs "Who is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed., A. Collins, SBLCP 10 [Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985], 137–44); she just disguised herself, but Judah misunderstood her as a prostitute (J. W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows," 39; T. J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis*, 151–60 [154], with reference to Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Tamar 1" in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament*, ed., Carol Meyer, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2002],161–3); even if Tamar did not dress as a prostitute, she caused him to misunderstand (V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 442–3). See further P. A Bird, "Harlot as Heroine"; idem, "To Play the Harlot: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed., Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 75–94.

One may argue that women in the ancient world usually have to have a good understanding of their rights under customary law. For example, Naomi in the book of Ruth does use her customary rights to pull strings, but her case is different from that of Tamar. Naomi has not encountered an unjust situation plotted by any man; her trouble is rather triggered by God. As for women's rights, the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27, 36) receive more attention. That they broke a habitual custom concerning the male-oriented inheritance custom is absolutely challenging. However, what they did was asserting a legal claim rather than fighting against injustice. Accordingly, they did not, or did not need to, act against Moses, the prime authority. On the other hand, Tamar fights against her male authority[618] for depriving her of woman's right.

Being accused of adultery of her own accord so that her case would be *publicized* demonstrates just how ingenious was her idea.[619] Besides, putting this idea into practice means she would be putting herself at risk. In this sense, she is a courageous activist or a scholar-practitioner. The key to understanding such figures is to examine closely how she deals with Judah and turns their transaction to her advantage.

Initially, Judah's own proposal was a transaction bound by an oral agreement — a promise of a kid as payment.[620] Yet it was a matter of greatest importance for Tamar to secure conclusive evidence for legal purposes for the next stage of her plan.

ויט אליה אל־הדרך ויאמר הבה־נא אבוא אליך כי לא ידע כי כלתו הוא ותאמר מה־תתן־לי כי תבוא אלי ויאמר אנכי אשלח גדי־עזים מן־הצאן...

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[618] Jael in Judges 4:17–22, Judith in a deuterocanonical book, and Esther are all active protagonists who are thought to be trickster fighters. Judith and Esther act out of patriotism, whereas Jael's motivation for killing Sisera is unknown.

[619] Claassens, "Resisting Dehumanization," 670.

[620] Samson offers a kid when he visits his wife (Judg. 15:1). See also V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 443.

He went over to her at the road side and he said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" He answered, "I will send a kid from the flock"… (Gen 38:16–17a)

Then Tamar imposes a condition that he gives her a pledge as collateral.[621]

ותאמר אם־תתן ערבון עד שלחך ויאמר מה הערבון אשר אתן־לך ותאמר חתמך ופתילך ...

ומטך אשר בידך ויתן־לה ויבא אליה ותהר לו

But she said, "If you give me a pledge, until you send it." And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your seal, your cord, and your staff that are in your hand." So he gave [them] to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. (vv. 17b–18)

As seen in this dialogue, it is Tamar who holds a lead in this negotiation. To choose what type of pledge is even at her disposal.[622]

Having learned from her previous experience that Judah's verbal promise is untrustworthy,[623] the immediate intention of Tamar is to get her hands on his personal belongings that are visible, substantial and undeniably identifiable.[624] The seal (חתם), cord (פתיל), and staff (מטה) which Tamar unhesitatingly claimed, are personal identity markers as well as emblems of power and authority[625] in the ancient world.[626] As many commentators observe, the seal-cord is highly likely to be a cylinder seal, the use of which was widely spread

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[621] Later, Judah sends to his substitute, Hirah, to bring a kid to get back his pledges, but fails because she was not found there. It is ironic that Judah deceived Tamar on the matter of levirate marriage but he tried to fulfill this second promise made to her, though he could not recognize her.

[622] Demanding a pledge for guarantee appears also in Job 17:3 using the same technical term ערבון. See also the use of verb form for reciprocal exchanging pledge: Neh. 5:3; 2 kings 18:23; Isa. 36:8. ערב as a meaning of 'to secure surety' appears in Pentateuch, only in Genesis in connection with Judah (Gen 38:17–18, 20; 43:9; 44:32).

[623] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 39.

[624] Jione Havea interprets that her demand of pledge is "to break Judah's intention to break his implied vow", Jione Havea, *Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Words of Women,* SemeiaSt 41 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 169–71.

[625] For staff or scepter as the symbol of power, see Isa. 14:5, Num. 17:17 etc.

[626] Fewell and Gunn interpret Tamar's words as mocking Judah by associating 'seal' (*hotam*) to 'father-in-law' (*hotan*), 'cord' (*petil*) to 'simpleton' (*peti*) and 'staff' (*matteh)* to a sexual euphemism. In addition, they argue 'staff' (*matteh)* is a homonym of 'tribe' (Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 40).

from Mesopotamia through the Near East to serve as personal identification or to signalize on clay documents for legitimating delegation and for signing contracts.[627] With regard to Judah's staff, Nahum M. Sarna points out it "must have had some personalized identifying sign."[628]

Tamar's demand of a pledge and specifying the seal-cord and staff well demonstrates her legal knowledge. Possessing these items signifies she has his authority that will be useful to her in the future so that she may identify who is the father of her child(ren) in utero.[629] This means Tamar hoped for her pregnancy from the outset of their sexual encounter. She also knew people would condemn her for adultery and for becoming pregnant with an illegitimate child. Much more plausible is that having Judah respond to this accusation by penalizing her was already part of her plan. The pledge then would prove also that Judah, the paterfamilias who has jurisdiction, is in fact the main culprit.

In this sense, the usage of the possessive suffix is stated four times — *your* seal, *your* cord, *your* staff that are in *your* hand (חתמך ופתילך ומטך אשר בידך) (v. 18), has significant importance. It implies that not anyone else but 'you' (Judah) should be the proprietor of these personal items; they are now in *your* hand, namely, under Judah's authority, but then they are placed in Tamar's hand as provision for the near future. Noteworthy is the use of *hand*, which often means *power* on a metaphorical level in the Hebrew Bible, as we have examined in the Abraham–Sarah–Hagar cycle (Gen 16:6, 9, 12).

Judah's pronouncement of a capital sentence[630] on Tamar who is accused of adultery marks the culmination of his power and authority over her (Gen 38:24). When it comes to the

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[627] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 298; N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, 268; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 444; W. W. Hallo "As the Seal upon Thy Heart," *BRev* 1/1 (1985): 20–7; C. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 53.

[628] N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, 268.

[629] Nelly Furman, "His Story versus Her Story: Male Genealogy and Female Strategy in the Jacob Cycle," in *Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible*, eds., Miri Amihai, George W. Coats, and Anne M. Solomon, Semeia 46 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 141–9 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

[630] See, the code of Hammurabi 110, 157.

method of execution, it has been questioned whether burning an accused adulteress is an appropriate penalty. The standard death penalty known later in Israel for adultery was stoning (Deut 22:21f) or alternatively drowning according to Babylonian decree. Cassuto and Baker argue that burning could be a Canaanite custom; but there is no record to prove it.[631] Hamilton suggests the penalty is "simply an outburst of indignation, a spontaneous reaction, and hardly a reflection of actual juridical enforcement for sins relating to sexual behavior."[632] Emerton rather focuses on Judah's discretionary power:

> It would be rash to assume that an enraged Israelite father-in-law, in the circumstances before the establishment of the monarchy, would have [sic] incapable of ordering the burning of an offending woman, whether or not the punishment was usual for adulteresses at that time in that region.[633]

Since burning as penalty in connection with incest appears in Lev 21:9 and in the Code of Hammurabi #157,[634] one cannot definitely draw a clear line that Judah was so tyrannical that he wielded such absolute power. Rather this penalty might imply that the case of Tamar was considered as severely illicit: a widow who still belongs to her deceased husband's family becomes pregnant by adultery. Hence it is plausible that burning was a sort of exemplary punishment for Judah to show people how he is strictly fair.[635] In addition, I presume burning was the local customary severe punishment: the episode of the Philistines' burning Samson's wife and her father in the house appears especially in connection with Timnah (Judg 15:6). Then it would reflect that Judah, who was part of a mixed population in that area, had mingled, was harmonized with the local residents, and influenced by their way of life.

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[631] With reference to Thalia Gur-Klein, *Sexual Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible*, 152.
[632] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 447.
[633] John. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis 38," 23.
[634] See also Code of Hammurabi #110.
[635] Westermann (*Genesis 37–50*, 54) suggests the possibility burning as "an earlier and more severe punishment for adultery."

Tension that reached a flashpoint with a sentence of death is resolved by the last-minute annulment of it. By presenting Judah's ID markers at the right time, Tamar subverts their power relationship. Indeed, identification and discernment work as major motifs in the narrative. Covering her face with a veil, Tamar does not reveal her identity; Judah gives her his personal items that reveal his identity, but does not ask who she is. What she knows he does not know; he only knows (ידע) her physically. Through the use of the verb נכר (to identify/to discern), Tamar criticizes Judah's lack of discernment, and so urges him be aware of his fault.[636]

הוא מוצאת והיא שלחה אל־חמיה לאמר לאיש אשר־אלה לו אנכי הרה ותאמר הכר־נא למי החתמת
והפתילים והמטה האלה

ויכר יהודה ויאמר צדקה ממני כי־על־כן לא־נתתיה לשלה בני ולא־יסף עוד לדעתה

As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please *discern* (הכר) to whom this seal, these cords and this staff belong." Then Judah *discerned* (ויכר) them and said, "She is more righteous than I (צדקה ממני), because I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know (have sexual intercourse, לדעתה) her again. (vv. 25–26)

Tamar is acknowledged as being more righteous (צדקה) than Judah, the patriarch. Considering that Judah and Tamar have been engaged in conflict around customary law, it is plausible here that צדקה is double entendre that evokes not only 'righteousness' in a moral context but also the meaning of 'justice' in a legal context. As Wenham states "In judicial contexts it often has the sense of innocent, so here Judah declares her innocence and admits his own guilt."[637]

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[636] Shields rightly points out Tamar "holds up a mirror to Judah, forcing him to recognize (הכר, v.25; ויכר, v. 26) not only his cord, signed ring and staff, but also his blindness and self-absorption. In addition, it is she and not one of the male characters who makes sure that Judah's line continues." (Mary E. Shields, "More Righteous Than I," 33). See also, Van Dijk-Hemmes "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy," 150.

[637] G. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 369.

The root צדק in a nonlegal context signifies 'right' in a moral sense. For example, the 'evil' act of Judah's two sons are represented by the expression רע (Gen 38:7, 10), as opposed to צדק. On the other hand, Genesis 18: 23–25 where צדיק and רשע appear for parallel contrast, combine moral sense with forensic sense.

חללה לך מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם־רשע והיה כצדיק כרשע חללה לך השפט כל־הארץ לא יעשה משפט

Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay *the innocent* with *the guilty*, so the innocent should be as the guilty; far be that from thee! Shall not the *judge* of all the earth *do justly*? (Gen 18:25)

Given that the destruction of Sodom is punishment for misdeeds, YHWH's role is a *judge* in the divine court represented by the technical terms שפט and משפט. Thus reading צדיק as 'the innocent' and רשע as 'the guilty' — rather than 'the righteous' and 'the wicked' that many English translations render — makes more sense in context. In a similar vein, Judah's acknowledgement "She is more righteous than I (צדקה ממני)" might be read in a legal context too, that what Tamar did is legally acceptable. The double entendre, then, makes Tamar both legally victorious in the case but also the morally upright one in the story, where Er, Onan, and now Judah are all morally delinquent. In other words, the declaration of Judah says something both about the legal circumstances and the larger moral conduct of all involved.

Noteworthy is that Sarah and Rachel situate their cases in a legal context, too. For example, Sarah uses a legal term שפט בין ... ובין (to judge between…) when calling upon YHWH's arbitration between Abraham and herself (Gen 16:5). Rachel names her first son born through Bilhah "Dan" (דן) derived from דין (to judge). What makes Tamar different from them is this: whereas Sarah and Rachel appeal implicitly to the legal realm, Tamar is explicitly in the legal

realm, and uses the most public of its settings in order to achieve what she wants. Since God is not acting but is instead watching silently from behind the scenes, even though God is the one who killed Er and Onan and is thus responsible for her predicament, Tamar has to put herself in this absurd and risky position in order to make her claim for her right and to win her case.

One may dispute whether it is appropriate to call any action taken by Tamar as 'legal' for there is no formal appeal to law or to legal arbitration. Although no institutionalized court appears in this narrative, it cannot be denied that there is a case, a defendant, and a judge as well as evidence approved and witnessed — either public or individual. It should be observed, too, that the proceedings are represented in the form of a trial process in court, as Westermann notes,

> The information conveyed to Judah has the precise form of accusation laid before a court: "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played harlot!" The second sentence sharpens the accusation: "Further, she is pregnant because of her misconduct!"[638]

While accusation (זנתה תמר כלתך וגם הנה הרה לזנונים) and verdict (הוציאוה ותשרף) are conveyed in v. 24,[639] the immediate following verse implies the defendant's submission of substantial evidence (לאמר לאיש אשר־אלה לו אנכי הרה) and sends her final testimony (והיא שלחה אל־חמיה ותאמר הכר־נא למי החתמת והפתילים והמטה האלה). Such self-defense is provided through a third party (והיא שלחה אל־חמיה לאמר…), as if she formed a defense counsel. In accepting adequate evidence (ויכר יהודה), the judge, Judah in our case, overturns his conviction (ויאמר צדקה ממני כי־על־כן לא־נתתיה לשלה בני) in v. 26 as if the court acquits the accused when there is enough evidence of innocence.

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[638] C. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 54.

[639] Further, he suggests that "v. 24 presupposes a peculiar mixed form of legal administration in accordance with the mixed population" (C. Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, 54).

A noteworthy feature is that the deputation Tamar sent functions as witness; there might have been observers or listeners, too, surrounding Judah. So the whole process cannot avoid public notice. Seen in this light, we may find why Hirah exists in this narrative: he is the main witness who knows that Judah slept with a harlot and left his items with her as his pledge. Viewed in this light, Tamar's conduct in compliance with evidence and witnesses, which resulted in the paterfamilias' decision to withdraw, should be considered legal. The most important point here is that it is Tamar herself who induced this accusation or trial-like proceeding.

Judah's pronouncement צדקה ממני ("She is more righteous than I") implies acquittal. The comparative case 'מ,' however, presupposes that Judah considers he is also righteous[640] but less righteous than she. Then the implication is that neither Judah nor Tamar ran afoul of the law; yet Tamar obtains a more favorable judgment. This indicates that there are two customary laws involved: one is a widow's adultery and the other is one's legitimate harlotry. According to Judah, the death sentence for the former is a fair judgment but at the same time the latter proves her innocence for she supplies evidence. Hence Judah overturns the verdict of her guilt.

On the other hand, Judah's immediate following speech "because I did not give her to my son Shelah" supplements the motive for Tamar's conduct. Fewell and Gunn make the interesting point that Judah "diverts away from the question of his own promiscuity on to the matter of levirate marriage."[641] In any case, in linking her case to the suspension of a levirate marriage, Judah admits reluctantly the earlier misjudged case, namely his failure in duty to keep the levirate marriage for he thought any man who had sexual intercourse with Tamar would die. However, now Judah becomes living proof: he did not die but begets not only one but two children at once through the sexual relationship with Tamar whom he had previously

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[640] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 43.
[641] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 43.

suspected as the cause of his two sons' deaths. In this way, Tamar proves herself in the best possible way that she is not liable for Er and Onan's deaths, even verifying her fertility power.

That Tamar drives Judah to discover his own fault by use of a lawsuit is not entirely alien to biblical narratives. Nathan points to a moral related to David that bears an analogy to Tamar and Judah when he speaks of the parable about the rich man and his poor neighbor (2 Sam. 12:1–14). A mechanism that puts an actual defendant in the position of judge is found in this story: the prophet brings in a certain case to King David; David acts like a judge to pronounce the death penalty on the one who committed an injustice; Nathan discloses that the accused is in fact the judge; David acknowledges his fault without giving an excuse. Both Nathan and Tamar play their cards close to the vest, and at the last minute say "it is your case, you are the defendant," which suggests this might be an efficacious system of convention for a person coming from the position of vulnerability.[642]

At this point, we should mention that both Judah and Tamar were justified but escaped any punishment for the incest between father and daughter-in-law that is strictly forbidden in Leviticus 18:15 and 20:12. In order to explain this singularity, it is probably salutary to bring up Jackson's argument. She opines the peculiar feature of the trickster narratives is that it subverts even the ideal standard in time to the Torah texts that govern the life of Israel,[643] as states:

> Practices such as levirate marriage and the right of the firstborn speak backwards over time to these trickster narratives, righting the wrong in some sense. However, the trickster narratives also speak forward in time to the Torah texts, offering examples of what happens when those charged with upholding the Torah or when those with their own agenda counter

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[642] A woman of Tekoa uses a similar convention: she appeals to King David by bringing a lawsuit case with the insinuation that it is actually a case against the king himself (2 Sam. 14:1–20). Yet the difference is that here David is not a defendant who had committed an injustice.

[643] While acknowledging that the trickster narratives and the body of law are different genres of writing derived from different sources at different times (M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology,"63).

to the Torah subvert its provisions, leaving victims in the wake. Tricksters also speak the practical voice of experience and reality into an ideally constructed (but unattainable) world governed absolutely by rules and regulations. The Torah is given to the Israelites as the standard for behavior, while the trickster tales put that standard to the test. Or the tricksters represent the complicated nature of human existence, which the Torah tries to normalize through containment.[644]

Likewise, Tamar, on the one hand, seeks to stand on her rights of the levirate marriage which is one standard addressed in Deut 25: 5–10. On the other hand, she puts forth another standard addressed in Lev 18:15; 20:12 to the test — prohibited incest between father-in-law and daughter-in-law.[645] We have also case of Lot's daughters who violated the age-old taboo against father–daughter incest.[646] In both stories, the selectively omniscient narrator is likely to be in favor of the female trickster(s), but is reluctant to intrude into scenes with any moral judgment. At the same time, the narrator arbitrarily interferes with the story: he exonerates Lot and Judah of their illicit sexual relationships by putting an emphasis of their unawareness (Gen 19:33, 35; 38:15, 16).

What also seems significant is that the narrator does not ascribe the above-mentioned female conduct to God. When we examine her actions closely, the implementation of Tamar's plan involves a complicated series of primary actions: sexual intercourse with Judah, obtaining Judah's items which can prove his identity, becoming pregnant, being accused of adultery, and notifying Judah the truth at an appropriate time. Tamar needs all this to happen in order to catch Judah in her trap; if any of them fails, her scheme miscarries. Though there are many

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[644] M. Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," 63.

[645] The levirate law itself conflicts with Lev. 18:16 and 20:21, the law prohibiting the cohabitation of a man with his brother's wife. Westbrook suggests since the Levitical prohibition that belongs to the priestly Code does not mention the levirate, it is possible to assume that the priestly circles attempted to abolish the levirate. R. Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*, 86.

[646] See W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 132. For the controversy that arose from the omission of "daughter" from the list of prohibited sexual relationships in Lev 18:6ff, see the preceding chapter.

unexpected variables, her plan meets some favourable conditions: at just that time Judah that desires a sexual relationship with her, he does not recognize her face; he does not carry money to pay for having sex with her, which allows Tamar to demand a pledge.

Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, YHWH is depicted as an invisible judge in a supreme court that upholds justice and protects the weak (Ps 72:1–4; 82: 3-4; Jer 21:12). However, the narrator is entirely silent about YHWH in the second half of the narrative where Tamar acts as a leading character. Thus, from this, we can infer that the narrator sets the boundary between an exception and the ideal standard. He implies that the idea of an illicit relationship was fully conceived by Tamar; it has no bearing on divine instruction. The same holds true for Lot's two daughters. In this respect, their conduct is not given *de jure* recognition but rather a kind of *ex post facto* approval, only upon the matter of perpetuating the family line.[647]

In this way, the implied male-centered narrator, on the one hand, allows a certain level of satire of the patriarchs, but on the other hand, defends them as Israel's respected ancestor. Hence, the denouement of our story highlights Judah's characteristic generosity in that he acknowledges his fault with good grace. In addition, the narrator clarifies the relationship between the two people: Judah did not cohabit with her again (ולא־יסף עוד לדעתה, Gen 38:27); the incest happened only once and under specific circumstances. That both Judah and Tamar had been widowed at the moment of their having this sexual relationship no doubt allowed them both to escape severe moral condemnation or punishment.

Another way to think of this issue is that their sexual intercourse would be not completely illegitimate as criminal circumstances require. In regard to the continuation of line in accordance with the levirate custom, if Shelah is not available, then Judah is actually the source of Er's line, and in that sense his right takes precedence. The cases from Hittite and Assyrian

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[647] In other words, the positive order of the levirate law takes precedence over the negative order of the incest law.

tradition inform us that the father-in-law can assume the role in Levirate marriage when there is no brother of the deceased.[648]

> If a woman is residing in her own father's house, her husband is dead, and she has sons […], or [if he so pleases], he shall give her into the protection of the household of her father-in-law. If her husband and her father-in-law are both dead, and she has no son, she is indeed a widow; she shall go wherever she pleases. (Middle Assyrian Law # 33)[649]

> If a man has a wife, and the man dies, his brother shall take his widow as wife. (If the brothers dies,) his father shall take her. When afterwards his father dies, his (i.e. the father's) brother shall take the woman whom he had. (Hittite law #193)[650]

Verses 26–30 report Tamar's delivery of twin sons. It may be an "implied compensation" for Judah who lost two sons, Er and Onan, as Amit points out.[651] As her name "Tamar" (date palm) implies fertility,[652] she gives birth to not just one but two sons at once, thus transferring the death image imposed on her to the birth of life: superstition is broken, she proves her fertility power. The episode is reminiscent of Rebekah's births — twins' struggle in their mother's womb to be born first — and etymology given to the one of the twin brothers (Gen 25:26), while demonstrating a parallel to Joseph's two sons in terms of the reversed order of the blessing from Jacob (Gen 48:8–20).[653]

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[648] M. Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East,* 297. See also U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 36–7; Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis,* HBM 23 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009), 104–6; Mordechai A. Friedman, "Tamar, a Symbol of Life."

[649] Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, SBLWAW 6, 2nd ed (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 165.

[650] M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 236.

[651] Y. Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins Of Genesis 38," 278; Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 44.

[652] Sara M. Koenig, "Tamar and Tamar: Clothing as Deception and Defiance," 87; Esther Blackman connects Tamar with goddess Inanna, a goddess of abundance and fertility and of a trickster (Esther Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar [Genesis 38] in the History of Jewish Interpretation*, CBETh 71 [Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2013], 40–1).

[653] Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh indicates his role both as a grandfather and a father, similar to Judah's dual role.

As for Perez and Zerah, Tamar's twin sons, the midwife ties a scarlet thread to the hand of the one who was about to come out first; as he draws back, the other emerges as a firstborn, so named "Perez," as the midwife comments, "What a breach [פרץ] you have made for yourself!" (Gen 38:29). This scene may refer to the "breach birth," which is common in twin pregnancies, and is often accompanied by umbilical cord prolapse.[654] The story's depiction itself, however, appears to reflect the birth of cattle rather than human babies,[655] with the custom of tightly tying the new-born calves' umbilical cord from the navel, which thus can be an example of male storytelling.[656]

Within the larger literary context of Genesis, the birth of Perez and Zerah shares "the common motif of fraternal struggle for status" or "strife between siblings" for "birthright, blessing, inheritance, power" as Fewell and Gunn point out[657] as well as divine partiality or preeminence of the younger.[658] As a primogeniture, Judah's line becomes prominent through Perez, as King David of Judea traces his line back to Perez (Ruth 4:12, 18–22; 1 Ch 2:2ff). In this regard, Tamar takes on the role of a significant agent in the narrator' overarching agenda, contributing not only to the flourishing of the descendants of Jacob, the Israelite community, but also to the prospering of the monarchy. Within the narrative of Gen 38, the birth scene forms a dialogue with Tamar's struggle: Perez, the "self-pusher,"[659] reversing the birth order flashes back to Tamar's breach, taking self-initiative to alter her status quo. She challenges and

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[654] "Umbilical Cord Prolapse," Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. November 2014. Retrieved 22 April 2016.

[655] In following her personal comment on this issue.

[656] C. Cluver, GM Gyte, M Sinclair, T. Dowswell, and GJ Hofmeyr, "Interventions for helping to turn term breech babies to head first presentation when using external cephalic version," *CDSR* (2012);(1): CD000184.

[657] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 44; See also V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 453–4.

[658] V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 454.

[659] Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where does Genesis 38 Belong?," *JBL* 96 (1977), 27–44 (here 43).

breaks patriarchal power structures as well as institutional and normative order, and in the long run she *reverses* her verdict, position, fate, and status.[660]

The observation so far demonstrates Judah and Tamar have been engaged in a long legal dispute. While Judah represents oppressive power and authority, Tamar acts as a clever underdog who leads the way into subversion of patriarchal norms. Further, Judah is depicted as a person who is unfair and lacking discernment despite his status as a man of authority:[661] suspecting that Tamar is the cause of his sons' deaths, he does not fulfill his patriarchal duty to keep Levirate marriage, which is a right for a childless widow who, according to the Bible, is a member of a weak and vulnerable social group.

However, Tamar is neither passive nor helpless against the major power; she takes the initiative to protect herself. Not only by using wit and trickery but also by legal stipulation, Tamar resists the unfair authority and succeeds in giving Judah a lesson so as to induce him to confess his former misdeed.[662] Confronting an androcentric dominant norm and breaking it with trickery is often found in the book of Genesis. Yet not many women show such resourceful scholarly behaviors as Tamar does. She is a woman with considerable intellect in regard to her social structure and legal context. Furthermore, she put her life at risk to fight for her own right against injustice. In this sense, she is an active doer. Her prudent long-term planning and preparation and evidence-based stratagem supports this idea. From this perspective, her taking

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[660] Fewell and Gunn, "Tamar and Judah: Genesis 38," 44.

[661] In a larger narrative context, it is noticeable that Judah's persuasion of his brothers to sell Joseph instead to killing the boy happened while Reuben was not with them (37: 29–30). Since Reuben was the firstborn son, Judah's nonconsensual conduct with Reuben, or to the exclusion of him, would have exceeded the authority of his eldest brother. Considering Judah's early behavior, the unfolding stories present how he is being paid back as retributive justice: his authority is challenged by a member of his family, an underdog who is a childless widow.

[662] Jeremiah offers a heuristic interpretation from the perspective of Dalit women in India, linking the story of Tamar to their liberation movement: Tamar is a "rebellion against established authority and custom in a world normally to be considered offensive." According to Jeremiah, Tamar takes two steps: "*realization* of ones' own existential situation" and "*determination* to regain what has been denied." (italics author's) (A. Jeremiah, "Reclaiming 'Her' Right, 150–2).

control of Judah's personal items, which are symbols of his authority, has profound significance. In obtaining them as pledges, Tamar subdues the patriarch's authority and realizes social justice by winning her case at last.

Further, it should be noted that Tamar's employment of trickery is intended not just to restore her own situation. She enhances her reputation and improves her social status far beyond simple vindication of her honour: she does not end in punishing the perpetrator but in perpetuating his lineage. Then Judah is caught in his own trap: once he endangered her potential maternity by making her socially barren but by having a sexual relationship with her, he instead proves her fertility power.

In part two, we have examined how Lot's two daughters and Tamar fought for their right to motherhood, defying and ultimately defeating patriarchal oppression and injustice. In part three, we will investigate the female characters in the HB birth narratives outside of the Genesis: Moses' mother along with a number of daughters (Exodus), Samson's mother (Judges), and Samuel's mother (1Samuel). In the following chapters, we will examine how these women, mothers in particular, play a significant role in determining the future destiny of their child.

Part III Ambition and Manipulation: The Mother's Involvement for the Destiny of the Child

Chapter 7 Daughters' Wise, Cautious, and Cooperative Resistance (the Birth and Rescue of Moses)

While the patriarchal birth narratives are closely linked with the issue of fertility and inheritance, the birth narrative of Moses (Exod 2:1–10) deals with how to rescue a future Israelite leader in spite of the supreme power's decree of male infanticide at a time of sojourning outside Canaan — the Land of Promise. Hence the problem is shifted from infertility to excess of fertility.[663]

Within the larger narrative complex, the patriarchal narratives are concerned with procreation as the means to compose a nation or to expand an ethnic group, while the Moses narrative is concerned that this relatively newly established people — resulting from the fecundity promised by God in Genesis,[664] — should survive among neighbouring people and nations. The birth of Moses is a part of the promise and fulfillment cycle: Exodus chapter 1 hints that the fecund promise of God has been fulfilled; the exposed but rescued child in Exodus 2 will be a leader whom God elects, who then will fulfill the promise of the land. Pharaoh's threat, oppression, and slavery imposed on the Israelites, maximized by the genocide that forms the background to the exposure of Moses at birth, provides unavoidable reason for the Israelites' return to the Promised Land.

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[663] William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 134–5.

[664] Ackerman and Carol Meyers note allusions in Exod 1–2 to the primeval stories in Genesis on the ground of recurring expressions, "fruitful," "multiplied," and "fill" and the like (James S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives,* ed., K.R.R. Gros Louis, J. S. Ackerman, and T. S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 74–119 (74–7); Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus,* Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), 23–32; Carol Meyers, *Exodus,* NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 33; 23–31.

In terms of the birth of an Israelite leader, Moses' birth story is associated with those of Samson (Judg 13) and Samuel (1 Sam 1).[665] In these three birth narratives, the prevailing inheritance issue that governed the patriarchal birth narratives does not appear as a substantial issue. In the patriarchal birth narratives, the question of which son inherits from the father is actually a question of who inherits the land of promise: we have seen that the one who remains in the land has always become the heir, as in the case of Isaac and Jacob. In this light, all twelve sons of Jacob are considered his heirs who would remain in and possess the land of Canaan. From this point, the birth narratives that appear after Genesis are no longer interested in choosing the heir, nor in the joint destiny of father and son.[666] However, importantly for the present thesis, there is not much difference between these two thematic birth narratives in the way that female characters appear as dominant figures. It is the mother of the future hero who contributes to the child's destiny.

Samson and Samuel are consecrated to YHWH by their mothers even before their conception. Our particular interest is that in Moses' case several other women along with the mother participate in determining his destiny: his mother and sister, the daughter of Pharaoh, and her maidservants all cooperate in rescuing him in Exodus 2:1–10, with the midwives taking the lead in Exodus 1:8–22 which forms a prelude to this orchestrated event. One may say a divine providence was at work behind the scenes,[667] yet it is female exertions that not only saved the child's life but also granted him a favourable environment, namely, Pharaoh's royal

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[665] Graham I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, vol.1, ICC (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 175.

[666] Father and son are jointly bound by divine blessings as in the cases of Abraham–Isaac, Isaac–Jacob, Jacob–his sons. The main character switches from father to son. Cf. Ugaritic epic text, Keret (Kirta)–his children, and Dannel–Aqht and Pughat.

[667] Brevard S. Childs points out the fact that although the child is rescued by a "natural cause" rather than divine intervention, it is clear that "the writer sees the mystery of God's providence through the action of the humans involved." See Brevard S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," *JBL* 84 (1965): 109–114 [120]); idem, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary,* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 3. Terence E. Fretheim claims that God works behind the scenes in "unobtrusive" ways though (Fretheim, *Exodus*, 23, 25).

court so that he may learn high culture and knowledge as much as "all the wisdom of the Egyptians."[668] Moses is thereupon qualified for being a national leader later in Exodus.[669]

It is the principal focus in this research that Moses was saved not because he was destined to rescue his people but because female protagonists decided to rescue him. It is noteworthy that any miraculous elements[670] are thoroughly excluded in his birth narrative. Neither annunciation nor divine intervention is found and this makes Moses' story different from that of Samson and Samuel. Moses's qualification to be an envoy of God is not innate but acquired due to the choices and decisions of women. The female's cooperation is sharply opposed to Pharaoh's scheme reported in Exodus 1, which generates the wisdom of the women characters as a counterpart to Pharaoh's folly.

With this women's wisdom as an overarching theme, the following sections will examine firstly Exod 1: 8–22 (the prologue) then Exod 2:1–10 (the birth and rescue-adoption of Moses). The present study attempts to demonstrate (1) how the stories surrounding the birth of Moses present female cooperation as a collective and shrewd response to Pharaoh's self-admiring wisdom; (2) how the women characters shape the destiny of a child as a future national hero, and, in addition, they initiate a plan to save him by elaborately manipulating the stipulations of Pharaoh's edict. Their strategies shall be explained in light of the imbalance of the power relationship between subordinates and dominant elites.

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[668] 1 Kings 5:10 (4:30 in Eng), Acts 7:22; B. S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," 114.

[669] The arbitrariness of God, neglecting or intervening at will without giving a prompt solution, again appears in Exodus. He waits until Moses grows, matures, and realizes his own identity, all the while allowing his people to suffer hard labour, slavery, and affliction. Only after they cry for help, does God "remembers" his covenant (Exod 2:23–25). For a different opinion, see Fretheim, *Exodus*, 48–9.

[670] It is only from theophany, revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 2–3) that wondrous events take place. See further, George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSup 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 43.

7.1 "Let us deal *wisely with them*": some understandings of Pharaoh's scheme in Exod 1: 8–22

Biblical scholars have widely accepted the fact that the story of Moses' birth and rescue–adoption (Exod 2:1–10) cannot stand in isolation from the story of Pharaoh's decree and the midwives' response (Exod 1:8–22), since the latter provides the context of the exposure of Moses. Pharaoh's suppressive policy and male infanticide are necessary for the birth story to make sense.[671] We turn now to a brief storyline of Exodus 1:8–2:10.

Jacob's family clan multiplies in Egypt. Then the new Pharaoh ignores a predecessor's promise made to Joseph, being afraid that the Israelites will outnumber Egyptians, become stronger than they, rebel against Pharaoh, and leave the country. The solution to this problem proposed by Pharaoh is to force the Israelites into slavery with hard labor, then to limit their population growth by killing male children. After this plan fails due to the disobedience[672] of midwives out of their fear of God,[673] the Pharaoh issues a new edict to throw newborn Hebrew sons into the Nile but to save daughters. Meantime a certain man of the house of Levi marries a Levite woman[674] and she gives birth to a son. When the mother sees the child is good (טוב) she hides

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[671] George Coats considers the words in Exod 1:22 to serve as a bridge between two traditions: the midwives' tale (1:15–22) and the birth-adoption tale, while the midwives' tale provides also an additional link between 2:1–10 and the "oppression leitmotif in 1:1–14" (G. W. Coats, *Moses,* 45–6); Exum also points out that the verse 22 sets the Nile for the birth account and provides a logical reason for Moses' exposure (J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live': A Study of Exodus 1–2," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed., A. Brenner, FCB 6 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 37–61 [here 39]).

[672] Called 'resistance' of 'civil disobedience' by Carol Meyers (*Exodus,* 37) and "civil disobedience in defense of a moral cause" according to Sarna (N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* [New York: Schocken Books, 1996], 25).

[673] Their fearing God is likely to be understood that they evaluate moral value to be more important than the sovereign's inhuman order (See further, J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 48–50). Sarna understands this fear in the sense of "norms of moral or ethical behavior," recalling Abraham's reference in Gen 20:11: "Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake." He calls it "the consciousness of the existence of a Higher Power" (N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* 25–6).

[674] Literally, a *Daughter* of Levi (בת־לוי).

him for three months.[675] But then it becomes impossible to hide him any longer, so the mother

places him in an ark, probably a papyrus basket (תבת גמא)[676] caulked with bitumen (mortar)

and pitch, and she places it in the reeds on the shore of the Nile. While the sister of the child,

stationed at a distance, is watching this event, the daughter of Pharaoh comes to the river to

bathe and notices the ark. She sends her maidservant,[677] takes it,[678] and opens it. Realizing it

is a Hebrew boy, the princess has compassion for him. Following his sister's proposal, the

child's biological mother is fetched to nurse him, and the princess promises to pay her wages

for this work. When the child is brought back to the princess after weaning, she adopts and

names him "Moses" (משה) giving the explanation that she drew him out of the water.[679]

Exodus chapter 1, verses 8–22 in particular, serves as a prologue to the birth of Moses.

Pharaoh's threat to the life of Israelites begins with his differentiation between his people

(עמו)[680] and other people, the sons of Israel (עם בני ישראל) (1:9). Interestingly, the story of

Moses' birth (2:1–10) ends in integration of two different people, in that Pharaoh's daughter

adopts one of the sons of Israel as her son, accompanied by her non-discriminatory wage

payment to a Hebrew wet nurse she hires.

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[675] It is not clear in what sense this child was 'good': either he had good appearance or seemed to be healthy. The same term 'good (טוב)' used here as in Gen 1 draws scholarly attention that relates it to the primeval story. Ackerman notes allusions between Exodus 1–2 and Genesis 1–11, particularly mentioning the similar expression and language between Exod 1:7 and Gen 1:28 (J. S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story [Exodus 1–2]," 74–8).

[676] Probably a basket or a small vessel made with papyrus (G. I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18,* 183). The term תבע appears only here in HB except in the flood story.

[677] אמתה; plural in Syr. "her maidservants."

[678] It is not evident who takes the ark (ותקחה, 2:5): either the princess takes it or the maidservant takes it [and brings it to the princess]. See Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 19; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 151; V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 18. G. I. Davies (*Exodus 1–18*, 176) translates, "She saw the box among the reeds and sent her maidservant and she brought it (to her)."

[679] The Hebrew etymology doesn't actually work, which shall be discussed later in this section.

[680] As opposed to God repeatedly saying to Pharaoh by the lips of Moses, "my people" ("Let *my people* go…" שלח את עמי).

Pharaoh conceives of his scheme of decreasing population growth of the Israelites as being clever, as he says "Let us deal *wisely*" (*הבה נתחכמה*).[681]

הבה נתחכמה לו פן־ירבה והיה כי־תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם־הוא על־שנאינו ונלחם־בנו ועלה מן־הארץ
Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they also join our enemies and fight against us and go up out of the land. (v.10)

The expression is invoked emphatically by use of the cohortative plural form (נתחכמה), which urges a collective act. Later, a collective disruption by women thwarts whatever action undertaken by Pharaoh: the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and his own daughter. Every time Pharaoh sets a plan, it meets with failure.[682] He then amends it or issues a new decree, which becomes harsher.

It is interesting that each of Pharaoh's decrees in regard to male infanticide is completed with the additional sentence "if it is a daughter, she shall live" (ואם־בת היא וחיה v.16); "but you shall let every daughter live" (וכל־הבת תחיון v.22), though the wording "killing [every] son" covers that meaning already.[683] In this way, the Pharaoh not only differentiates between his people and the people of Israel, but also between the sons of Israel and the daughters of Israel.[684]

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[681] Scholars have pointed out the incongruence of Pharaoh's oppressive population policy: he is troubled by the Israelites' outgrowing population, but is afraid to let them leave; genocide is not a satisfying solution when his building projects require labour force (G. W. Coats, *Moses*, 46; J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 44).

[682] Jackson reads this story as a comic story: such repeated failure reflects comic characterization of Pharaoh; he is fool and made fun of by midwives and his own daughter (M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of Hebrew Bible* [esp. Ch. 3 "Five Women of Moses' Infancy: Shiphrah and Puah, Moses' Mother and Sister, Pharaoh's Daughter," 67–84], 69).

[683] From these two sentences, Exum notes, "even baby females are associated with life, not death, for they are singled out to be spared from the death edict." J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 46.

[684] Trible rightly points out "In Pharaoh's land, sex determines life and death for Hebrew babies" (P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," in *Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy,* 166–86 [here 166]). See further R. J. Weems, "The Hebrew Women Are Not Like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender, and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1," *Semeia* 59 (1992) 25–34.

Such emphasis might be a wordplay on בני ישראל (Exod 1:1, 7, 9, 12) which is rendered as the *children of Israel* but it literally means the *sons of Israel.* The name of Moses itself is understood to "reflect either the verb *msy* 'to be born,' or the noun *ms, 'child, son.*" in Egyptian.[685] The pair of son (בן) / daughter (בת) serves as a leitmotif,[686] as an innuendo about Pharaoh's worries concerning just the '*sons* of Israel,' בני ישראל, (1:12) rather than '*daughters* of Israel,' בנות ישראל,[687] although both male and female constitute the people (עם) of Israel.[688] Thus, it might not be a coincidence that the story of Moses' birth (Exod 2:1–10) begins with "a man of the house of Levi went and took to wife a 'daughter' of Levi" (וילך איש מבית לוי ויקח את־בת־לוי),[689] and shows six occurrences of בת which is a relatively high frequency. These daughters are key figures in foiling the *wise* (on his own terms) plan of Pharaoh. Further, the later story of Exodus 2:16–22 again involves daughter(s) in Moses' flight to Midian: he encounters seven *daughters* of a Midianite priest (in plural form: בנות v.16; בנתיו v.18) and marries his *daughter,* Zipporah (in singular construct form בתו 2:18).[690]

The story of the midwives alludes to female power. First, these women *per se* impede Pharaoh's plan. They extricate themselves from killing newborn males through witty repartee and by the use of persuasive ways of talking: "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they *are lively* (חיות),[691] and give birth before the midwives come to

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[685] V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus,* 23; see also J. S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)," 94; N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* 32; G. I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18,* 181. Cornelis Houtman suggests that the incongruent Hebrew etymology —calling משה (act. part.) rather than משוי (pass. part.) — explains that the Pharaoh's daughter "has not yet mastered the language." See further Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus,* vol.1, 289.

[686] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 41.

[687] As a counter-term for בני ישראל.

[688] Exum points out בני ישראל in 1:8–14 refers to "Israelites as a people (עם), whom Pharaoh fear precisely for the reason that they have become a people (v. 9)." (J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 41).

[689] Keith Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile: Beginning of the Book of Exodus* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016)*,* 91–2.

[690] See Jopie Siebert-Hommes, "But If She Be a Daughter…She May Live! 'Daughters' and 'Sons' in Exodus 1–2," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, 62–74 (here 72–3)*.*

[691] The wording 'lively' (חיות) is may be used as a *double entendre,* although the precise meaning of this Hebrew word is uncertain, since it also can be translated "animals." By degrading Hebrew women in describing

them" (1:19). The association of the Hebrew women with the verb 'live' (חיה) prefigures their role as lifesavers for the Israelites' future rescuer, as a similar allusion has been made to the Hebrew daughters Pharaoh kept alive. The midwives' wise answer allows them to escape punishment and gain rewards from God: "And because the midwives feared God, He made them houses" (ויהי כי־יראו המילדת את־האלהים ויעש להם בתים, 1:21). It is uncertain what 'made them houses' means,[692] yet there seems to be a kind of phonetic wordplay between *battim* (houses, noun pl. of בית) and *bat* (בת, daughter).

The outcome of the midwives' insubordination gives rise to a new edict from Pharaoh, this time made openly not covertly,[693] which is directed to *all his people* (לכל־עמו): "*Every son* that is born, you shall expose into the Nile" כל־הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו (1:22b).[694] Commentators have suggested that "every son" should be read as "every son born to the Hebrews" in order to get rid of the contextual discrepancy based on other textual evidence (LXX, Sam, Tgs. Onkelos and Ps.-Jonathan). Exum contends that this omission indicates Pharaoh's mistake so as to demonstrate his folly, saying "in his anxiousness to include 'all' (כל: 'all his people,' 'every son,' 'every daughter'), the pharaoh forgets the most important thing of all, to exclude Egyptian male infants."[695] If this was the case, at the pinnacle of his utmost cold-blooded edict — the

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them as being as vigorous as animals, they implicitly show more respect to Egyptian women, thus appeasing Pharaoh's anger.

[692] In many English translations, the term בתים is rendered as 'families' or 'households' (NIV, NKJV,NASB, ISV, RSV), while the KJV and JPS Tanak translate it as "houses" (οἰκίας in LXX). The expression is considered as an idiom indicating "continuation and growth of a family" (G. I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18*, 147) or "founding a lineage" (W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 141) based on similar usages in 1 Sam 25:28; 2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 2:24, 11:38; 2 Sam 7:27 etc.; See also V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus,* 15; G. I. Davies (*Exodus 1–18,* 163) understands the reward is 'large families.' He rejects speculation that the midwives were barren as suggested by *Shadal*, שד"ל (Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto's *Commentary to the Pentateuch*) and Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

[693] It is presumable that Pharaoh had intended to kill Hebrew male children confidentially through the private commission given to the two midwives. In addition, it does not seem feasible that only two midwives can control the delivery of the whole Hebrew population.

[694] J. Siebert-Hommes points out that this time Pharaoh commands whereas he spoke to the midwives (Jopie Siebert-Hommes, "But If She Be a Daughter…," 63).

[695] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 49; Propp states it is not evident why a MT scribe omitted לעברים (W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 143).

annihilation of newborn male children — the Pharaoh forgot to differentiate between his people and the Israelites.[696] This serves as an example of his imbecility and foreshadows that later his hardness of heart will end up in the deaths of Egyptian firstborn sons.

With respect to this decree, Jonathan Cohen argues "we never hear whether the plot to murder the sons took place, or whether indeed the Israelite sons were cast into the Nile."[697] Samuel Loewenstamm also pinpoints the discrepancy of this decree, questioning "The decree is aimed at an entire nation and is not limited in time, but in regard to its purpose it is concerned with the one-time event of the birth of a single child."[698] In fact, the issue of Pharaoh's coerced population control policy is not heard of afterwards, unlike the oppression theme repeatedly mentioned throughout Exodus. We have no idea whether the decree was a one-time event or was temporarily enforced; whether it succeeded controlling the Israelite population.[699]

What draws readers' attention from this setting is the observation that when the controller of power is changed, political policies towards aliens are changed too. The privileged status the Israelites have enjoyed, thanks to Joseph, is not steady; the new Pharaoh, the supreme authority, can be extremely antagonistic to them, as happens in the case we have examined. Thus saving Moses, one male child, is not the solution for the oppression which the entire people of Israel have endured. So long as they sojourn in a foreign country, such brutal genocide might occur again at any time; the next time may perhaps bring a total massacre without distinction of sex or age. Hence, a more fundamental solution would be to leave Egypt and have their own land to live in, that is to establish their own nation in the land of their

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[696] Rashi, in explaining the Gemara on Sotah 12a, assumes that the rabbis understood there was an annunciation of the birth of a savior, not appointing his ethnic identity, and consequently the Pharaoh had to impose the same decree on his people as well.

[697] Jonathan Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story*, SHR 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1993),11.

[698] S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Story of Moses's Birth," 210.

[699] See also J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'"40.

forefathers. The task of bringing them out from Egypt would rest on the shoulders of the surviving child of Exodus chapter 2.

On the premise that the story of birth and rescue of Moses in Exod 2:1–10 should be read in relation to Exod 1:8–22, the following analysis will show in detail how female characters wisely, collectively, and satirically respond to Pharaoh's scheme, as prefigured by the midwives' manipulation. In the following section, these related issues will be explored in detail: women's wisdom against Pharaoh's folly; their cooperation and solidarity in manipulating Pharaoh's speeches and the loophole in the edict. The various aspects of the characters' roles will be focused on, too. Further, for a better understanding of these aspects, James Scott's model of subordinates' strategies of resistance in power relationships will be used.

7.2 "Let us deal wisely with Pharaoh!" (הבה נתחכמה לפרעה): Saving a Child's Life, Changing a Child's Destiny in Exod 2:1–10

In Exodus 2:1–10, the unnamed *daughters* of Israel lead the narrative, which underlines Pharaoh's failure to notice that Israelite women may pose a threat to Egyptian security (Exod 1:8–22) as well as his assumption that "women are more compliant than men," as Weems observes.[700] Indeed, he disregards not only the *daughters* of the Israelites but also his own *daughter* as a threat.[701] The narrative demonstrates how female characters manipulate the situation *wisely,* which is the perfect foil for Pharaoh's hubris. The way women characters take initiative actively and systematically is best understood as satire directed against this autocrat's

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[700] R. J. Weems, "The Hebrew Women Are Not Like the Egyptian Women," 25, 29.
[701] P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 168–9; J. C. Exum "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 52; M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of Hebrew Bible*, 70, 76.

folly epitomized by his speech and decree. This may indicate that the concept of women's wisdom was meant to be identified.

Brevard S. Childs suggested that the story of Moses' birth was closely related to wisdom literature.[702] Presenting the Joseph cycle, the Esther story, and the story of Ahikar as its parallels, he presumes it is a "historicized wisdom tale," though it is not *per se* "wisdom literature in the strict sense of the term."[703] Childs elucidates this hypothesis based on several pieces of evidence: 1) the character of Pharaoh represents a typical figure — a wicked fool deceived by clever midwives; 2) the midwives' 'fear of God' reflects "the religious ideal of the wisdom circles," not to mention their cleverness when confronted with the accusation of Pharaoh; 3) the positive description of a foreigner, the Egyptian princess in this case, is "characteristic of the international flavor of wisdom circles"; 4) God is not directly involved in rescuing the child, which bears a closer parallel to the stories of Joseph than to the Exodus traditions.[704]

James S. Ackerman even points out "the text is relying on readers' knowledge that Egypt was renowned for her court wisdom throughout the ancient world, and that Pharaoh thus represents the epitome of human wisdom."[705] We have noted that Pharaoh deluded himself that he had devised a scheme wise enough to control the growing Israelite population, which was formulated by his speech act, "let us deal *wisely* (הבה נתחכמה) with them, lest they multiply…(1:10)." The use of hitpʿael form of חכם might imply that it is self-admiring wisdom,

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[702] Will Kynes criticizes the category of so-called "wisdom literature": neither the Hebrew Bible, apocryphal books, nor Jewish or Christian traditions show clear evidence that "wisdom" was used as a genre category (Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 75–80). Kynes argues that this category arose only after Johann Bruch's work in 1851, *Weisheitlehre der Hebräer,* and has influenced the entire scholarly world to use "wisdom literature" as if it were a generic category (82–104). He asserts that "The Wisdom Literature category is dead" (245) and wisdom must be understood as a concept (18–22); Cf. Stuart Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature,* ABS (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 85.
[703] B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 13, and idem, "The Birth of Moses," 12.
[704] B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 13 (modified from his earlier work, "The Birth of Moses," 119–22).
[705] J. S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)," 80.

for the hitpʻael usually conveys reflexive actions. The inner biblical occurrence of חכם in hitpʻael conjugation elsewhere appears only in Qoheleth 7:16 as "be wise,"[706] which thus does not affect decisively the meaning of that of Exod 1:10. William H. C. Propp suggests נתחכמה connotes "take counsel together," whereas Stewart Weeks contends that here "the primary sense is of shrewd calculation, with no ethical or professional implication," as in the case of 2 Sam 13:3, since חכם "lacks any really 'technical' sense."[707] Ibn Ezra, the renowned medieval Jewish commentator, interprets it "נבקש דרך חכמה שלא ירבה"(We will ask the wise way that he [the people] will not multiply). Another possible dimension is the tendency for the hitpʻael form to be used to focus on the public demonstration of an act, rather than its inner meaning. We are not sure what specific connotation this verb conveys, yet it seems to be the wording — the use of root חכם — as befitted a Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, famous for "all wisdom" (כל חכמת מצרים 1 Kings 5:10 [4:30 ET]). The new Pharaoh wants to be seen to be wise, which is not the same as being wise. However, upon the grounds that Childs provided, as enumerated above, the Pharaoh's self-considering or self-admiring wisdom turns out to be folly, in sharp contrast to the midwives' smartness which is confirmed by the phrase "the midwives feared God" (1:17, 21) — the typical phraseology associated with wisdom.[708] The statement of personified Wisdom in Prov 8:12–16 might be a good example to put forward when presenting Pharaoh as an antithesis of wisdom.

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[706] Qoheleth 7:23 employs the cohortative form like our phrase, but in qal stem. Cf. Ben Sira 10:26, the deuterocanonical book. Given these parallels are used in the context of "warning against self-realized wisdom," Magai G. Sendi considers them as allusion to the Pharaoh of the exodus tradition (Magdi S. Gendi "Pharaoh as a Character in Exodus 1–2: An Egyptian Perspective," in *Exodus and Deuteronomy,* ed., A. Brenner and G. A. Yee, TatC [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012], 55–66 [here 61–2]).

[707] W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 131; Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, OTM (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 74. Weeks demonstrates the root חכם is employed for a variety of uses: skill of the artisans, skill in government, and wisdom in a forensic sense — the ability to judge (S. Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, 75–6).

[708] Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5;3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17, Is 11:2, 3; 33:6, Ps 34:12; 111:10, 2 Chr 19:9. Especially Ps 111:10, Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33, Isa 11:2, 33:6, and Ps 111:10 with reference to חכם. See also Fretheim's *Exodus*, 32 (in relation to Prov 2:5–15).

I, wisdom (אני־חכמה), dwell in prudence (ערמה), and find out knowledge of discretion (דעת מזמות). The fear of YHWH is hatred of evil (יראת יהוה שנאת רע). Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverse mouth I hate. Counsel (עצה) is mine, and sound wisdom (תושיה); I [am] understanding (אני בינה), power (גבורה) is mine. By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles and nobles, All who judge rightly.

The Pharaoh of our text typifies an autocrat who did not reign by true wisdom. Interestingly, nearly all of the virtues pertinent to this personified wisdom, חכמה, are feminine terms such as גבורה ,בינה ,תושיה ,מזמה ,דעה ,עצה ,ערמה as well as חכמה itself. In a similar vein, what catches our attention is that all the characters in Exodus 1:8–2:10 who outsmart the Pharaoh are female. It is indeed female cooperation and solidarity which is at the core of the wisdom throughout the stories. This is, then, a reaction against the Pharaoh's scheme delivered in the form of collective language, "let us deal *wisely* (הבה נתחכמה)..."

Keith Bodner made an intriguing observation about the allusion in the Pharaoh's speech to the Babel account due to the similar use of language — emphatic singular imperative of הבה with cohortative plural verbs of the first person and פן,[709] as well as the mentioning of the building supplies in Exod 1:14.[710] He argues "the new king is presented in a satirical light through this Babel connection"[711] and "through the allusion to Babel there is a foreshadowing that the hubris of the new king is destined for ignominy."[712] What is intriguing related to the

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[709] ויאמרו איש אל־רעהו הבה נלבנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר
ויאמרו הבה נבנה־לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה־לנו שם פן־נפוץ על־פני כל־הארץ
And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn [them] thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build a city, and a tower whose top [is] in the heavens, and let us make a name, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Gen 11:3–4).

[710] K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile*, 52–3, 66–7. Persuasive speech in regard to a speaker's scheme using the cohortative form is found when Lot's elder daughter conceives a plan. She persuades her younger sister to intoxicate their father and have a sexual relationship with him (נשקה, ונשכבה, נחיה)(Gen 19:32, 34). Unlike Pharaoh, however, her plan is achieved first by herself then her sister on two consecutive nights, and the impregnation of both.

[711] K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile,* 53.

[712] K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile*, 67.

Exodus account is the divine 'collective sabotage.' YHWH puts forward his own plan (Gen 11:7) against human hubris, imitating the form of the proponents' speech (11:3–4)[713] so that it may be perceived as mockery and generate a sense of collective disruption in response to the collective scheme.[714]

Similarly, our exodus stories exhibit a collective and satirical response to the proponent's plan whereby the wording of his original utterance is turned back against him. The readers meet the female sabotage in manipulating the Pharaoh's own speech. For this, not only Exod 1:10 but also the Pharaoh's consequent edicts in 1:13–14, 16, and 22 will be taken into consideration in a broader narrative scope — Exod 2:1–10. It would be helpful to examine the structure of the oppression policy given in Exodus chapter 1.

Principal edict	Dealing wisely with Israelites (1:10) delivered in *direct* speech Cause: fear of Israelites' proliferation and political consolidation against his authority leading to their eventually leaving Egypt			
Verses in sequence	1st edict (1:11)	2nd edict (1: 13–14)	3rd edict (1:16)	4th edict (1:22)
Mode of delivery	narration	narration	decree in *direct* speech	decree in *direct* speech
Oppression policy	afflicting them with forced labour	imposing more rigorous labour on them	killing male child at birth imposed on midwives (let females live)	exposing male child into the Nile (let females live)
Cause	Israelites' proliferation	failure of the 1st edict	————	failure of the 3rd edict
Consequence	Israelites more multiply	————	the midwives disobey; Israelites	————

713 Andrew Giorgetti argues "the stark contrast of the two cohortative phrases with the imperative הבה (vv. 3 and 4) function as a foil to YHWH's decree (also a cohortative) in v. 7"(A. Giorgetti, "The "Mock Building Account" of Genesis 11:1–9: Polemic against Mesopotamian Royal Ideology," *VT* 64–1 [2014]: 1–20 [here 12]).

714 "Come, let us go down, and there confuse (הבה נרדה ונבלה) their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (11:7 RSV) in juxtaposition with vv. 3–4. Here the divine voice is heard in plural form in contrast to vv. 8–9 in which divine *action* is conveyed in a singular form. It seems that YHWH "addresses the council and decrees a cursing" as Giorgetti points out ("The "Mock Building Account" of Genesis 11:1–9," 17).

			multiply and become strong.	

As demonstrated above, Pharaoh's autocratic tyranny increasingly intensifies throughout 4 stages from slavery to genocide (1:11, 13–14, 16, 22), following after the main principle (1:10). Each decree is introduced separately one by one as a result of the failure of a precedent, except the third edict. We are not told of the outcome of the second edict; from what 'killing male child at birth' sprang is unknown. These failures, however, do not mean the abolition of the edicts. The principal or introductory edict in direct speech ("Dealing wisely with Israelites" v.10) covers all four edicts, while the first edict (v.11) is directly attached to it. The first and second edict lack the Pharaoh's direct speech, but they are stated in narration; the third (v.16) and the forth edict (v.22) are delivered again in *direct* speech, and endowed with a fully developed story as its consequence — the collective reaction in their counterplan.[715] The missing reaction after the fourth edict follows in the next chapter, Exod 2:1–10, making a juxtaposition with the story of the midwives (Exod 1:15–21): both accounts share the point of how the female characters manipulate or utilize Pharaoh's words which were delivered in direct speech.

First of all, let us examine in brief the case of the midwives. As we have discussed earlier, the reason they could not kill the newborn Hebrew male infants, according to their excuse, were because they had been born *before* they arrived. That the Hebrew women were vigorous, and so delivered babies before the midwives' arrival yields a plausible implication: given that midwives are having to deal with the entire population of Israelites, they would have a lot of trouble being at every birth even with the best will. This unexpected situation does not satisfy the condition of time and place that Pharaoh stipulated, "When you serve as midwife to the

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[715] Israelites' proliferation despite the oppressive slavery policy for construction (1:11–12) — the first edict — is better understood as the consequence rather than as a subjective reaction, or is not developed as storytelling.

Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live" (Exod 1:16). In accordance with his stipulation, the midwives should observe the *moment* of delivery, serving as midwife (בילדכן את־העבריות) and identifying the baby's gender upon the *birthstool*[716] (וראיתן על־האבנים אם־בן הוא...). That they arrive *after* the delivery, according to their excuse, does not meet the condition which Pharaoh imposed: they are not able to serve as midwives at the moment of delivery; they are able to check the gender of newborn children but not upon the birthstool. The logic is that they cannot kill the male infant, as long as the circumstance does not meet the stipulation of the edict. In this way, the midwives deal wisely with the Pharaoh in showing outward compliance — technical obedience — but inward defiance: the Pharaoh's scheme fails.

Similarly, and strikingly, the female collaboration in 2:1–10 exhibits technical obedience but inward defiance too. On the one hand, they *wisely* deal with the Pharaoh's introductive speech in Exod 1:10, and on the other hand manipulate the last edict in 1:22, "Every son that is born, you shall expose into the Nile; but you shall let every daughter live" (כל־הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל־הבת תחיון). So the *Nile* is set up as the stage, and all the *daughters,* who will let the son *live*, stand on that stage. Now we will investigate how the mother of Moses manipulates loopholes in the edict, since it lacks detailed information in terms of time, place and manner.

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[716] Literally 'two stones' in a dual form, which is generally understood as stones or bricks on which women kneel or sit during childbirth (Hyatt, *Exodus*, 61; Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting, Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*. CM 14 (Groningen: Styx-Publications, 2000),121–2). Fewell and Gunn suggest that "see them upon the birthstool" could also be read "look for the two stones [i.e. testicles]" ("The Way of Women," 91); see also V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 13. Cf. Jer 18:3 על־האבנים as indicating a potter's wheel. Cassuto notes Egyptian creation god Khnum's sitting next to potter's wheel (Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah* [Jerusalem: Magness, 1961], 106). See further, T. S. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible,* 93–4.
Possibly a word play based on phonetic similarity between אבנים and בנים (sons).

Firstly, Pharaoh did not designate a specific time span. It thus appears that the fact that she did not comply with the decree immediately but 'hid the child for three months' (שלשה ירחים ותצפנהו Exod 2:2) is not exactly a violation of the decree. And we are told, she later exposed him in the Nile.

Secondly, Pharaoh did not say literally 'to kill' (מות, הרג) but 'to expose' (שלך, hiph'il), so she does as he said. She *places* (ותשם) the child, in a box, into the Nile. Is there any big difference between 'to expose' (שלך) and 'to place' (שים)? English translations have rendered the verb שלך in 1:22 as "cast, throw" thus limiting our understanding of it to a narrow sense. Given that שלך is a derived form from הלך with the causative element š, HALOT explains that it might be read as 'dispose' or 'expose,' which is value neutral, not necessarily including a negative sense: its specific meaning can be varied depending on the context within which it is used. Morton Cogan argues שלך is a "terminus technicus" for "leave, abandon, expose,"[717] without involving "physical hurling," on the basis of the examples from Ezek 16:5, Gen 21:5, and Jer 38:6. The Akkadian verb *nadû* used in the Sargon legend, the ANE parallel to the birth of Moses, which has the motif of an exposed child supports his contention:[718] "my mother abandoned (*iddanni*) me upon the river." Cogan states,

> The Akk. verb *nadû,* basically "to throw, cast," cannot be rendered so in the present context, as is evident from the careful precaution taken by the mother in preparing a covered "basket

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[717] Morton Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure"; see also S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Story of Moses's Birth," 206 (FN14); Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, vol.1, 274.

[718] I am not going into the comparison to the Sargon legend in depth since that is not the primary issue in this research. For the full discussion, see further Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme – Alttestamentliche Untersuchungen, mit Beiträgen von Bernhard Luther* (Halle/Saale, 1906; Neudruck Darmstadt, 1967 [Wiss. Buchges]); Hugo Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit,* FRLANT 18 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck 8: Ruprecht, 1913), 1–16; B. S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses"; Chayim Cohen, "The Legend of Sargon and the Birth of Moses," *JANESCU* 4 (1972): 46–51; G. W. Coats, Moses, 46–8; S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Story of Moses's Birth," esp. 203–14; N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 29–31; J. Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story,* 6-22; C. Meyers, *Exodus*, 43–4; see also Donald Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen* 14 (1967): 209–28.

of rushes."…She exposes him to his fate. The semantic rage of *nadû,* also known from the Code of Hammurabi to include rejection and abandonment, parallels that of Hebrew השליך.[719]

Cogan points out Pharaoh's order using השליך (*hiphil* form of שלך) represents his wish "to avoid bloodguilt for himself and his people."[720] Then the notion carried in this verb implies that the new born male infants would be exposed to their fate on the Nile: they would end up either living or dead according to their own destiny.[721]

Insofar as the exposure and rescue of a child is a main theme, more attention should be given to the account of Hagar in Genesis 21.[722]

ויכלו המים מן־החמת *ותשלך* את־הילד תחת אחד השיחם

ותלך ותשב לה מנגד הרחק כמטחוי קשת כי אמרה אל־אראה במות הילד ותשב מנגד ותשא את־קלה ותבך

> And the water in the skin was used up, *and she placed* the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down opposite [him] at about the distance of a bowshot, because she said, "Let me not see the death of the child." And she sat opposite [him], and raised her voice and wept. (Gen 21:15–16)

To translate the verb שלך here as 'to cast'(LXX, Vul, KJB, RSV, JPS Tanak, ASV)[723] does not match the context. Hagar's raised voice, as I argued in Chapter 2, "Let me not see the death of the child" and weeping for her son might be a signal appealing for him to be saved when she realized there was nothing she could do for him, which led to divine intervention in the rescue

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[719] M. Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure," 134.

[720] M. Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure," 134–5.

[721] This is similar to the river ordeal, to a certain extent, which is a well-known trial in Mesopotamia (Hammurabi 2, 132): The accused is thrown into river and is acquitted if he (or she) floats whereas the guilty party sinks; cf. the ordeal of the bitter waters (Sotah ritual) in Num 5:11–31.

[722] Cogan has mentioned this usage (Gen 21:15), but not specifically in connection to the case of Moses' mother; see also T. B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story."

[723] Bodner reads it 'to throw' as he points out this verb as common elements between Genesis 21 and Exodus 1–2 in relation to affliction (K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile*, 101); Targum Onkelos renders, "she laid the youth…"

of the child, as happened in the Sargon legend. Hence her act should be understood as 'exposing' or 'disposing' her child to fate rather than casting him out or abandoning him to die. In that case, the place she chose to expose him — "under one of the shrubs" (תחת אחד השיחם) — might have importance as a typical spot for a theophany which recalls the "burning bush (סנה)" in Exod 3:2. In case of the edict of the Pharaoh, it is "into the Nile (היארה)," used in collocation with ה, suffix direction.

Given this semantic analysis of the verb שלך, Moses' mother who 'placed' (שם) the child into the Nile is not violating Pharaoh's order 'to expose' him into the Nile. Rather, 'to place' might cover 'to expose/dispose [in a certain space]' in a broad sense, thus be substitutional. It is also a feasible idea that speaker and listener communicate differently: the Pharaoh might intend that the male infants should be thrown into the river in a narrow sense, but the mother of Moses interprets his decree deliberately in her own way as simply 'placing.'

Such discourse might be understood in the light of the power relationship between subordinates and dominant elites, offered by James C. Scott.[724] When there are asymmetrical power relations, according to Scott, complex features of communication — social actions, practices, and discourses, for example — are observed. Scott states,

> Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a "hidden transcript" that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed.[725]

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[724] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); idem, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Scott's theory of dominance and resistance has been widely used by New Testament scholars. Casey A. Strine applied his model to the Hebrew Bible (Casey A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*, BZAW 436 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013]; idem, "The Study of Involuntary Migration as a Hermeneutical Guide for Reading the Jacob Narrative," *BibInt* 26 (4–5), 2018: 485–98).

[725] J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* xii.

Employing theatrical language, Scott defines "public transcript" as "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate," while "hidden transcript" is discourse that takes place "offstage."[726] The speech gestures, and practices in the hidden transcript "inflect, contradict, or confirm what appears in the public transcript."[727] The subordinate group can continue "everyday forms of resistance" through the hidden transcript — a disguised political action, "beyond direct observation by powerholders," as opposed to the public transcript in the presence of the dominant.[728] In regard to applying the social scientific model to Biblical criticism, I concur with Casey A. Strine who followed Philip Esler's recommendation "to use social scientific models as a heuristic approach, not ignorant of potential lacuna or anachronisms, but focused primarily on the exegetical benefit achieved."[729] Likewise, I would carefully and restrictively use Scott's model only when it helps to shed new light on interpreting our text.

Scott argues that the public transcript of dominance is not only used to awe the subordinates to ensure their "expedient compliance," but also to mask the motives of the powerful in the presence of subordinates. He calls this strategy "euphemization," borrowing Bourdieu's term: "It is used to obscure something that is negatively valued or would prove to be an embarrassment if declared more forthrightly."[730] Pharaoh's decree in direct speech might be interpreted as an example of this euphemization. When he gives commands secretly to the midwives, he does not conceal his cruel plan, and explicitly uses the term 'kill,' (אם־בן מות

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726 J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 2–4.
727 J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 10
728 J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 4; Scott terms this sort of resistance strategies "infrapolitics" (idem, 19–20, 183–201).
729 C. A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 38. For further discussion, see Philip F. Esler "Social-Scientific Models in Biblical Interpretation," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed., P. F. Esler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2006), 3–14.
730 J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 52-4; for further discussion in regard to Bourdieu's euphemization, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 191–7.

הוא והמתן אתו). When it comes to the decree in the presence of subordinates, however, the public transcript is delivered in a euphemistic way: "Every son that is born, you shall expose (תשליכהו) into the Nile. but you shall let every daughter live" (1:22). Thus, he uses "to expose" rather than "to kill" and adds "let every daughter live" as if he is showing magnanimity. In a similar vein, Pharaoh performs his public transcript officially, this time in the presence of the dominant community, namely his own people. He proclaims "Let us deal *wisely* with them"(1:10), rather than "*harshly* with them," to obscure the negative aspects of his scheme.

The consequence, however, is that the euphemized language of Pharaoh's public transcript is imitated and manipulated by the subordinates to subvert his private intentions. As discussed earlier, Moses' mother produces outward conformity by complying with the decree technically as her public transcript, which implies then the act of resistance and defiance of the subordinate.[731] This peculiar feature might be appropriate to Scott's model of subordinates' "cautious resistance and calculated conformity." [732] Scott examines "diverse forms of resistance" of Malay villagers of Sedaka and observes: "the subordinates must act with circumspection" for everyday survival under circumstances they confront."[733] The realities of imbalance in power lead to their "conforming behavior" which seems to be a "grudging, pragmatic adaption to the realities" rather than "normative consent."[734] As they "clothe their resistance in the public language of conformity," due to the power-laden situation, there appears to be a "subtle mixture of outward compliance and tentative resistance," while "direct confrontation" is avoided. [735] "Disguise and concealment" are the subordinates' "survival strategies" so as to "insinuate their resistance."[736] In sum, "the onstage theater of power that

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[731] Exum also has raised the question whether the mother is "like the midwives, ostensibly obeying Pharaoh while in reality defying him" (J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 51).
[732] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 241.
[733] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 246.
[734] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 247.
[735] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 288–9.
[736] J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* 136, 139; *Weapons of the Weak*, 302.

dominates" is maintained, camouflaged by outward conformity, deference, and compliance.[737]

To veil the practice of resistance, the subordinates must calculate prudently their behavior or

manipulate rules, norms, and the system of whoever dominates:[738]

> Like prudent opposition newspaper editors under strict censorship, subordinate groups
> must find ways of getting their message across, while staying somehow within the law.
> This requires an experimental spirit and a capacity to test and exploit all the loopholes,
> ambiguities, silences, and lapses available to them.[739]

What we discover from the proceedings of Moses' mother is not different from subordinates'

strategy involving the defensive behavior Scott presents. As a member of the subordinate class,

she acts with circumspection to clothe her resistance. She manipulates loopholes in the edict

— the public transcript of Pharaoh, the dominant elite, so as to manage to manifest outward

conformity to the edict.

A close examination of Exod 2:3 can teach us her "cautious resistance and calculated

conformity." We will focus on the issue how and where to expose the child, which Pharaoh

does not stipulate, unlike in Exod 1:16 where too detailed stipulation allowed the midwives to

make plausible arguments to thwart his plan. The readers are informed of the mother's hidden

transcript, 'privately saving her son.'

> ולא־יכלה עוד הצפינו ותקח־לו תבת גמא ותחמרה בחמר ובזפת ותשם בה את־הילד ותשם בסוף על־
> שפת היאר
>
> And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of papyrus, and caulked
> it with bitumen and pitch; and she placed the child in it, and placed it in the reeds by the
> bank of the Nile. (Exod 2:3)

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[737] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 273, 278, 281.
[738] J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 273.
[739] J. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* 138.

The series of actions the mother undertakes demonstrates her concern for the child's safety. She makes a basket or vessel (תבת גמא) as if she were building an *ark* (תבה),[740] like in Noah's flood story,[741] and seals it with bitumen and pitch (בחמר ובזפת).[742] The mother's next action is to place (ותשם) the child in it and place (ותשם) the basket in the reeds (בסוף)[743] by the bank of the Nile (על־שפת היאר). Choosing the right and best place to put the waterproof basket is the second safety device for protection. She put it not in the rapid torrent of Nile, but in the reeds by the bank of the Nile (בסוף על־שפת היאר): the text suggests that it is a place one can bathe (לרחץ) in its stream (v. 5). Rashbam points out "she hid it well so that people walking on

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[740] Perhaps it is an Egyptian loanword, *tbt,* 'container' (W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 149). From this Egyptian loan word, Martin Buber draws a hypothesis that the mother literally made the papyrus box "in the shape of one of those shrines wherein pictures of the gods floated on the Nile during festivals, in order to be certain of rescue." He interprets this as symbolic; "He who must immerse himself in the innermost parts of the alien culture in order to withdraw his people from thence is hidden as a child in the seat of the foreign gods" (Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and The Covenant* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958]), 33); Chayim Cohen rejects its connection to the Egyptian term (d̠b3t or dpt), for the latter is never used for boat in Akkadian flood (Chayim Cohen, "Hebrew tbh: Proposed Etymologies," *JANESCU* 4/ 3 [1972]: 37–51); See also J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live'," 54.

[741] See, U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 18–9; J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 54; Bodner connects it to a "temple floating on the waters of destruction" rather than to a boat (K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile*, 96–7).

[742] See Gen 6:4 where the ark is covered with some material כֹּפֶר (English rendering 'pitch') and Gen 11:3 where a solid structure is built using brick and bitumen; ironically, it is the material the Israelites might become skilled at using as a result of harsh labour imposed by Pharaoh.

[743] For further discussion about *yam suf*, see N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 29; G. I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18*, 348; Scholars have noted that the term 'reed' (סוף, *suf*) was intentionally selected to prefigure Moses' later deliverance his people at the Sea of Reeds, ים סוף, *Yam Suf* (Exod 13:18; 15:4, 22), but have paid less attention to the association between גמא (*gome*), the material used to make a basket, and Moses. גמא may refer to the papyrus plants, which are easily found in the Egyptian environment and are widely used for various purposes. The reference to a boat made of papyrus plant appears also in Isaiah 18:2. Papyrus as a writing material was well known (N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* 29) which had been essential for scribal practices and activities. It seems an appropriate characteristic for Moses' scribal features, as the tradition identifies him as a scribe, the law giver, and a recipient of the full Torah scripture in later tradition, which are often presented in a form of "the law of Moses" (Josh 8:31; 23:6; 1 kings 2:3; 2 kings 23:25; Mal 3:22 [4:4 ET], Dan 9:11, 13, Ezr 3:2; 7:6; Neh 8:1, 2 Chr 23:18; 30:16, and 2 kings 21:8 with variation), or "book of Moses" (Ezr 6:18; Neh 13:1; 2Chr 24:4; 35: 12), or in combination of both "the book of the law of Moses" (Josh 8:31; 23:6; 2 kings 14:6; Neh 8:1). Tawny Holm states that the books supposedly written in the Persian era acknowledge Moses more explicitly as the author of the law and the founder of Israel's religious system (Tawny Holm, "Moses in the Prophets and the Writings of the Hebrew Bible," in *Illuminating Moses. A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, ed., Jane Beal, CmSTC 4 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 37–58). Larry J. Swain points out that the image of Moses associated with a scribal figure, the Torah, becomes more noticeable in the post-exilic period (Ezra 7:6, Ben Sirah, and the Book of Jubilee), and that his role increasingly grows in Hellenistic Judaism so far that he is regarded not only as the lawgiver but also as the revealer or interpreter of divine words and the founder of philosophies (Larry J. Swain, "Moses: A Central Figure in the New Testament," in *Illuminating Moses*, 59–80).

the bank of the river could not see the basket, but those bathing in the river could see it."[744] It is presumable that the mother chose a certain place at a certain time on purpose, knowing that Pharaoh's daughter would appear regularly there, though the text is silent.[745] Viewed in this light, Jackson correctly observes:

> Moses' mother does technically obey Pharaoh by abandoning her son to the river. However, Moses' mother "technically obeys": 'with the all-important provision of a papyrus-reed container, carefully waterproofed with "hot tar and pitch.' It is through an act that technically complies with Pharaoh's order that Moses' mother manages to save him.[746]

Moses' mother goes one step further than Hagar. Like Hagar, she exposes her son to fate; however, she takes steps to shape that fate. This is underpinned by the sister's presence, either voluntarily or having been planted by her mother, or rather practiced on prior consultation.[747] The sister stations herself at a distance to watch her newborn brother. One may have the impression that, in an emergency, she would have saved him. According to Cogan, the twice-repeated verb "place" (ותשם) instead of השליך, along with the sister's stationing nearby in Exodus 2:3–4, eliminates "the element of exposure" but indicates "a plan worked out by women for keeping in touch with the infant"; their intent is "something other than exposure."[748]

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[744] Rashbam, *Rashbam's Commentary on Exodus: An Annotated Translation*, tr. and ed. Martin I. Lockshin (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 22; Fewell and Gunn, "The Way of Women," 83

[745] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 53.

[746] M. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of Hebrew Bible*, 75.

[747] U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 19; Cf. Exum states "the text says nothing about mother and sister having worked out a plan beforehand" (J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 55); It has been noticed that the birth of Moses has significant ancient parallels in terms of the motif of exposed child (child of Hurrian sun god adopted by a fisherman [J. Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story*, 20], Heracles, Greek and Roman myth-motif of chest and casting into water or attempt to kill; Oedipus, Romulus and Remus, Cyrus and the like). Then careful attention should be given to the character of the child's sister who is entirely missing in other ANE parallels as well as to the fact that the mother's care and protection of the child is remarkably active.

[748] M. Cogan, "A Technical Term for Exposure," 134; See also, U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 18–9.

This scene is again very similar to that of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, who are faced with death wandering in the desert. It is an ironic reversal that the earlier woman of Egyptian origin is endangered in the desert in a foreign land along with her son due to water shortage, whereas the woman of Israelite origin is forced to make her son die in the water in a foreign land. After having exposed her child, Hagar goes and *sits* "down opposite [him] at about the *distance* of a bowshot" (ותלך ותשב לה מנגד הרחק כמטחוי קשת...) Gen 21:16a). The text explains she does so in order not to see her son's death. In Moses' account, it is not the mother but his sister who *stands* "at a *distance* to know what would be done to him" (ותתצב אחתו *מרחק* לדעה מה־יעשה לו, Exod 2:4), which implies that she involves herself in the matter while watching in person.[749] In Genesis 21, two consequential actions —'to expose' and 'to station oneself at a distance'— are performed by one person, that is, the mother, but are distributed to two persons, mother and sister, in Exodus 2.

The daughter of the Pharaoh then undertakes the role of saviour of the exposed child, which was played by Elohim in Gen 21. In terms of a deliverer of a hero, Pharaoh's daughter is a goddess-like figure. Terence Fretheim notices how her actions are presented in direct parallel to God's activity towards Israel in Exod 2:23–25; 3:7–8: "She 'comes down,', 'sees' the child, 'hears' its cry, takes pity on him, draws him out of the water, and provides for his daily needs"[750] However, not only Pharaoh's daughter but also the child's mother, and his sister share the image and role of saving goddesses. According to the mythical tradition of ANE, goddesses who attend childbirth are often portrayed as midwives,[751] which may impart significant meaning to the role of the midwives in Exod 1.

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[749] K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile,* 101.

[750] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 38. He also contends that the midwives' saving the sons anticipates the passover and parallels God's saving action (12:23–27) (ibid, *Exodus*, 33).

[751] C. Meyers, *Exodus,* 40, M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting,* 171–81.

The most intriguing manipulation or tactic chosen by this family is 'identity change': the adoption by which the child becomes legally Egyptian while being ethnically Hebrew. For this strategy, the subordinate Hebrew females of one family team up with the female of another family who belongs to the dominant elite. Their common denominator is their gender — female. It is Claudia Camp who has researched female initiative using indirect action or trickery in view of their social context, related to personified Wisdom in her book. She argues "the exclusion of women (as of any disenfranchised group) from the established hierarchies of authority and power in a society" led the biblical woman to "utilize subtleties, indirection, and even trickery" to "achieve their goals."[752] Camp notes such indirect means are not solely limited to women; it may be used by any "less-privileged and under-protected members of society" who are "out of power at a given moment."[753]

The asymmetric power structure in our text is complex: there is the male who traditionally has dominated over females in patriarchal societies. Beyond this gender inequality, there are unequal power relations between the dominant and subordinate groups — Egyptians and Hebrew (the sons of Israel). The cooperation between the daughter of Pharaoh and the daughters of Israel creates a synergistic effect. In addition, the sister of Moses plays a significant role as a mediator between these two representatives.

Scholars have noted the sister's sudden appearance despite the impression that Moses was the firstborn of his parents.[754] For this, Trible points out "apart from the preface, nothing in the narrative requires that the son be the firstborn."[755] Since the sister is never described as a 'daughter' but consistently as the 'sister' of the child, it is presumable that she was born from

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[752] C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 124; She takes Rebekah, Tamar, Shiphrah and Puah, Moses' mother and sister, Ruth and Naomi, Michal, the wise woman of Tekoa and Esther for example. For the issue of the relationship between woman and institutional wisdom, see C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 150–4; idem, *Rediscovering Eve*, 80.

[753] C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 124, 127.

[754] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 54.

[755] P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 168.

a different mother.[756] What is noteworthy is that this sister suddenly intrudes onto the stage in which the princess and her maidservants act (vv. 5–6), and directly gives a speech to the princess (v. 7). The text does not convey any description of sequential movement as the sister approaches them; she neither verifies her identity to the princess, nor is restrained by the attendants of the princess; the princess is not surprised at all, but is persuaded quickly by her suggestion.[757] The implication then is that they were already acquainted, or the narrator leaves out redundant detail. At all events, it seems that the sister naturally entered the scene rather than making an abrupt appearance with disturbance.

If this is the case, or at least the plausible case, the presumable situation would be that the sister is not hiding herself but standing visibly in the near location where Pharaoh's daughter bathes.[758]

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ותרד בת־פרעה לרחץ על־היאר

ונערתיה הלכת על־יד היאר

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And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river,

while her young attendants were walking beside by the Nile. (Exod. 2:5a)

It forms a rhyming couplet each ending with a similar adverbial phrase *al-haya'or* (על־היאר) and *al-yad haya'or* (על־יד היאר), thus emphasizing the "Nile" as where the event takes place. But then by a slight variation between על and על־יד, the two subjects — the princess and her

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[756] The text does not make it clear whether she is the daughter of her brother's mother. Moses' father could have married before his marriage to the daughter of Levi — Moses' mother. There are several possibilities: either the first wife passed away leaving children; it is a remarriage for the daughter of Levi and she brought her own from her previous marriage; or this sister is another cowife's daughter since the marriage system is polygamous. Some identify the sister of Moses with Miriam, the sister of Aaron (Exod 15:20–21), but the text does not reveal this. For further discussion, see J. C. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)," 89; Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch*, 109–10, 113–4.

[757] Bodner observes "the sister makes no introduction nor does she officially identify herself as a Hebrew…The sister deftly sidesteps any kind of self-designation, nor does she mention any relational connection to the crying infant. Instead, she directs all her words toward the princess herself with a pithy set of suggestions focused squarely on the emerging relationship between the boy and Pharaoh's daughter." (K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile*, 106); See also V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus,* 21.

[758] Possibly, blended in with the group of her attendants 'beside by the Nile' (2:5).

attendants — are separated in time and space. The use of the participle form הלכת in the second half of the above clause indicates the situation: the princess comes down to (*al*) the Nile while the maidservants are walking beside (*al-yad*) the Nile. Rashbam also noted their separate location in an effort to account for the reason the princess "who was bathing in the river saw" the basket, whilst "her maids who were walking along the river bank could not see it."[759] Their separated location lends credence to the idea that Moses' mother and sister mapped out the calculated scheme: no one but the princess should see the basket. This assumption explains that the whole setting prepared for an ideal place to expose the child is based on the sharing of information between the mother and the child's sister about the princess' habit of bathing there as well as her sympathetic character. In this way, they wisely deal with the decree of Pharaoh.

The elaborate prudent strategy we have discussed so far is somewhat similar to how the trickster figure typically defeats his enemies. Scott explains,

> The trickster is unable, in principle, to win any direct confrontation as he is smaller and weaker than his antagonists. Only by knowing the habits of his enemies, by deceiving them, by taking advantage of their greed, size, gullibility, or haste does he manage to escape their clutches and win victories.[760]

We have remarked on several women characters reflecting the trickster image in earlier chapters. A particularly noticeable comparison is Tamar, with respect to her winning by ingenuity and wit against patriarchal unjust authority within a legal context, as discussed in the previous chapter.[761] A distinct difference between our story and Tamar's case is that the trickster-like stratagem of the former is strongly bound by a common destiny. Tamar initiates

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[759] Rashbam's *Commentary on Exodus*, 22.

[760] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* 162; subordinate groups often make use of trickster tales in order to veil their cultural resistance, idem, 163.

[761] Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the feminine in the book of proverbs*, 127.

it *individually* at the risk of her life and entraps Judah, the prime authority, so that her case and his fault may be publicized. As for Moses' mother and his sister, they demonstrate outward compliance which is cautiously crafted, since communal identity and safety must be taken into careful consideration. It is from this point that the birth narratives hitherto dealt with at a family level take on a new look — a public level: the born child becomes a public leader, and the ultimate objective of this adoption strategy lies in communal benefits.

What attracts our attention is that the mother acts but never speaks. It is the sister who plays a role as a messenger mediating between the mother and the princess.[762] The same character previously called 'his sister' (אחתו) in v. 4 and v. 7 is called in v. 8 'maiden' — 'almah' (עלמה):[763]

ותאמר־לה בת־פרעה לכי ותלך העלמה ותקרא את־אם הילד

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: "Go." And the <u>maiden</u> went and called the child's mother. (Exod 2:8)

It is indeed the only place that the narrative implies her age. From the use of the same term in Genesis 24:43 to indicate Rebekah, we can conjecture that עלמה refers to a young woman who has reached the physical maturity to be married.[764] Hence she is presented not as a little child but as a maiden, mature enough to attain discernment and to make decisions, which makes her character structurally equivalent to the young attendants of the Pharaoh's daughter.[765]

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[762] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 52.

[763] In v. 7, she is still called אחתו, hence the audience can grasp that the speaker is the same one introduced in v. 4. Then, calling the sister עלמה in v. 8 reflects that there is a shift of viewpoint from the audience to Pharaoh's daughter: in the princess's understanding, the girl is not the child's sister but simply a young woman. At the same time, by calling her *almah* rather than *na'arah* or *amah*, the narrator distinguishes her from the princess' maidservants.

[764] G. I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18,* 180; עלמה is used elsewhere in Prov 30:19; Isa 7:14 in singular form, while in Ps 68:26; Songs 1:3; 6:8; 1 Chr 15:29; Ps 9:1; 46:1; 48:15.

[765] In Gen 24:61, Rebekah too is accompanied by 'her young attendants,' נערתיה, the same term used in Exod 2:5a.

Approaching the Pharaoh's daughter with a sensible idea, the sister uses an interrogative sentence ("Shall I~?"), effectively and politely requesting permission from a higher ranking person.

<div dir="rtl">ותאמר אחתו אל־בת־פרעה האלך וקראתי לך אשה מינקת מן העברית ותינק לך את־הילד</div>

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"(v. 7)

Exum highlights her persuasive and eloquent speech, saying "Her careful phrasing, 'shall I call for *you*…to nurse for *you* the child,' provides the idea that the princess keep the infant, and the repetition of 'for you' creates the impression that she makes the proposal for the sake of the princess."[766] Through such "skillfully crafted,"[767] words, the sister accomplishes a successful negotiation.[768] Thanks to her, the biological mother nurses her child until he is weaned. In this respect, Cohen correctly notes that her act is "to restore the mother of Moses to her son."[769]

An implication embedded in the narrative structure that is often overlooked is the juxtaposition of two mothers: the biological mother and the foster mother. The former is called *daughter* of Levi, בת לוי, while the latter is called *daughter* of pharaoh, בת־פרעה. Further, a long series of active verbs in sequential order pertains to each mother as enumerated below.

vv. 2–3 The biological mother/daughter of Levi	vv. 5–6 The foster mother/daughter of Pharaoh
<div dir="rtl">ותהר האשה ותלד בן ותרא אתו כי־טוב הוא ותצפנהו שלשה ירחים: ולא־יכלה עוד הצפינו ותקח־לו תבת גמא ותחמרה בחמר ובזפת ותשם בה את־הילד ותשם בסוף על־שפת היאר:</div>	<div dir="rtl">ותרד בת־פרעה לרחץ על־היאר ונערתיה הלכת על־יד היאר ותרא את־התבה בתוך הסוף ותשלח את־אמתה ותקחה: ותפתח ותראהו את־הילד והנה־נער בכה ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה:</div>
So the woman <u>conceived,</u> and <u>bore</u> a son; and when she <u>saw</u> him that he was good, she <u>hid</u> him for three months. And when she <u>could no longer</u>	And the daughter of Pharaoh <u>came down to bathe</u> in the river, while her young attendants were walking beside by the Nile. She <u>saw</u> the basket

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766 J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 55.
767 P. Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," 168.
768 As for Hannah's negotiation in using her eloquent speech skill, see Chapter 9.
769 J. Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story,* 24.

hide him, she took for him an ark of papyrus, and caulked it with bitumen and pitch; and she placed the child in it, and placed it in the reeds by the bank of the Nile.	among the reeds, and sent her maidservant, and she took it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had compassion on him, and said "This is one of the Hebrews' children.
4 verbs with ו + 5 verbs with ו (+1 inf.)	4 verbs with ו (+ 1 inf.) + 4 verbs with ו

Their actions appear through a number of verbs that allow the storyline to unfold at a quick pace. Just as the daughter of Pharaoh manages her maidservant at her disposal, the actual mother of the child seems to dispatch the child's sister as her spokesman.[770]

Further, the daughter of Pharaoh is in sharp contrast to her father. At the very moment she sees a crying Hebrew baby, she shows her compassion, unlike her father' oppressive policy culminating in male infanticide. She extends to the Hebrew infant the generous courtesy of her adoption, and hires for him a wet nurse who fulfills his immediate need to live.[771] In this regard, Exum considers the daughter of Pharaoh as a "counterfoil to her oppressive father."[772] According to Exum, the motivation of the princess is in line with the midwives as an example of the "righteous gentile":[773] "not duped but simply prompted by the sister's recommendation." And the princess, by her compassion, as described upon her viewing the crying infant (ותחמל), accepts the wet-nurse contract.[774] It is Gale A. Yee who poses an opposite view:

Although many scholars view Pharaoh's daughter positively, she, too, can be a comedic foil that emphasizes Egyptian stupidity from a postcolonial perspective. On the one hand,

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[770] P. Trible, "Difference Among the Distaff: A Reading of Exodus 1.1–2.10," in *Making a Difference: Essays on the Bible and Judaism in Honor of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi*, eds., David J. A. Clines, Kent Harold Richards, and Jacob L. Wright, HBM 49 (London: Sheffield, 2012), 292–306 [here 303]); K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile,* 106–7. For the symmetry between Moses' sister and the princess' maidservant, see W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1– 18*, 153. In Exod. 2:3, 4QExod[b] inserts "and she said to her maidservant (šphth), 'Go.'" between ותשם בה את־ הילד and ותשם בסוף על־שפת היאר, thus allowing Moses' mother to have her own maidservant. Propp (*Exodus 1–18*, 144) interprets it as a midrashic interpolation to make parallel between the mother and Pharaoh's daughter; see also K. Bodner, *An Ark on the Nile,* 101.

[771] Mother's essential duty to take care of the baby is approximately estimated until the child was weaned: eg. Hannah's sending away Samuel after he was weaned.

[772] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 40.

[773] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 59.

[774] J. C. Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live,'" 58.

as the means by which the hero of the exodus survives and flourishes in Pharaoh's own court, she inadvertently becomes the agent that pokes fun at her stupid father, the Pharaoh. Through her role as surrogate mother to Moses, the heart (womb?) of the Egyptian empire is "penetrated."[775]

However, the princess's immediate recognition of the child's Hebrew origin and her compassion consequent upon it (v. 6) clarify that she was aware of the decree of genocide, but nevertheless defies her father consciously and deliberately. Hence it is explicit that her act, in opposition to her simple-minded father, was taken voluntarily. She does not hide what she intends to do: the maidens attending her all bear witness to this adoption (v. 5). The following stories in 2:11–14 attest that it was not secret that Moses was a Hebrew. However, that the wet nurse she hired was in fact his biological mother remains hidden, whether the princess actually knew this fact or not, whereupon the mother becomes protected from the pharaoh's punishment. In all probability, Pharaoh's daughter ridicules her father through partaking in this female's wise program.

Pointing out that finding the Hebrew wet nurse was not the action of Pharaoh's daughter, but of the child's sister, Ackerman provides a negative assessment of her character too. He states,

The princess' one-word response "Go" connotes a feeling of supreme authority, a brusque manner in dealing with underlings, and perhaps some relief in having the problem so quickly resolved. The princess believes she is in complete control of things, but actually she is being controlled by the bright wit of a young girl … the combination of haughty condescension continues in verse 9...[776]

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[775] Gale A. Yee, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Method for Exodus*, ed., T. B. Dozeman, MBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193–233 (221).

[776] J. S. Ackerman, "The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2)," 93.

Ackerman, however, overlooks the fact that daughter of Pharaoh belongs to the ruling class, which explains that it is a natural consequence that her speech act is conveyed in the form of a command (imperative). In addition, her one-word response "Go" rather signifies the verbalized urging of a speedy and prompt execution without a moment's delay. This short and clear command demonstrates her gumption to measure and control the exigent circumstance so that the child may not be detected with his cry. One cannot rule out the possibility that the princess was aware of, or noticed, the girl's family relationship with the child, but acquiesced in this counterplan against her father's. If this was the case, the need for taking swift action is all the more understandable.[777]

The positive character of the daughter of Pharaoh is proved by her wet nurse contract. Unlike her father, who ignores his predecessor's promise, she keeps her word (vv. 9–10): she pays the rightful price of labour to the woman for employing her as a wet nurse, which contrasts with her father's infliction of unfair hard labour on the Israelites. It is likely that she provides "a countermodel to Pharaoh," borrowing Dozeman's expression. Indeed, paying a wage for a wet nurse and naming the child validates the adoption proceeding,[778] which implies the Pharaoh's daughter ensures the child from any further harm: the exposed Hebrew male infant is officially recognized as an Egyptian citizen. Here we see the irony of the situation. By giving up her child, the mother let him live; by giving up her claim to parental rights, she receives him back so as to nurse him. This reminds us of the famous trial of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:16–28, which is also connected with *wisdom* by many commentators.[779] It is the real mother who won the case by giving up her baby and conceding him to a false mother in an effort to save him.

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[777] Cf. Samson's mother who takes swift action. See further Chapter 8.

[778] J. Cohen (*The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story*, 31) states the princess's wet nurse contract follows "a pattern found in Mesopotamian legal texts that relate to the adoption of a foundling"; see also B. S. Childs, "The Birth of Moses," 111–5. Fretheim praises her "compassion, justice, and courage" as "basic human values" (*Exodus*, 39).

[779] Sean E. Cook, *The Solomon Narratives in the Context of the Hebrew Bible Told and Retold*, LHBOTS 638 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 16–79; Amos Frisch, "The Portrait of Solomon in the Book of Kings,"

What should be noted is that Moses' origin and his being adopted was revealed openly from the outset. The adoption does not follow the traditional folkloric model where the foster parent(s) is less prestigious than the original.[780] In our story, the foster mother is the most noble and belongs to the dominant class which is opposed to the birth family. This leads to future tension: Moses was adopted into his people's opponent; he is faced with the need to choose one of his double identities; he lacks the knowledge of slavery, the communal experience his original people have.[781] His role is leading and governing like a ruling class among the Israelites. His original family, Aaron and Miriam, serve in the later stories within larger narratives as the equivalent to a royal family. Imitating and adopting but embellishing the pre-existent mythical or legendary elements, perhaps to give the impression that Moses is identified with Sargon, the narrator makes Moses a king-like leader, and his siblings as a kind of royal family, that is the Levite family. The liberty the Israelites earned was indebted to this Levite family, which grants the appropriateness of inheriting the priesthood.[782] In this aspect, there is continuity between the birth narrative of Moses and the inheritance birth narratives in Genesis.

The eventual goal of the wise strategy — not only saving but also making the child the Egyptian prince — is gained with complete success. The foundling learns high culture in the royal court[783] so as to confront the Pharaoh in the future, and "leave" Egypt with the

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in *Character and Characterization in the Book of Kings*, ed., Keith Bonder and Benjamin J. M. Johnson (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 50–64 (esp. 52–5).

[780] See further Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-analysis, and Other Works — 1937–1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964; German original; *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion*: *Drei Abhandlungen*; Amsterdam: A. de Lange, 1939); Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, *1988*); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Daniel Boyarin, "'An Imagination and Desirable Converse': Moses and Monotheism as Family Romance," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn, BL (London: Routledge, 1997), 184–204; S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Story of Moses's Birth," 215.

[781] Buber (*Moses*, 37–8) points out the importance of his flight by which he experiences also the "degrading form of life" as his brethren has passed.

[782] Such a socio-religious and socio-political context provides a hint as to the time and place of the text's production.

[783] T. B. Dozeman, *Exodus,* ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 84.

"multiplied" Israelites in response to Exod 1:10. That is, Moses' destiny is shaped by hand-in-glove cooperation of the female protagonists across the boundaries of ethnicity and social class.

The anonymity of these female protagonists is the last issue I would like to mention. They are always designated with a title based on their family ties or a social relationship/role, as enumerated hereunder.[784]

Moses' mother: daughter of Levi בת־לוי (v.1), the woman/wife האשה (v.2, 9),

a nursing woman אשה מינקת (v.7), the (male) child's mother אם הילד (v.8)

Moses' sister: his sister אחתו (v. 4, 7), maid/girl העלמה (v.8)

Pharaoh's daughter: בת־פרעה (v. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Pharaoh's daughter's maids: her young women(attendants) נערתיה,

her maidservant אמתה (v.5)

Such a peculiar characteristic manifests itself in all sorts of women represented as mother, daughter or sister, taking part in saving the child — the future deliberator. They can all be designated as בת (daughter) in particular. Then the implication might be that they — the daughters — in collaboration, are mocking the Pharaoh's underestimation of them.

The investigation so far demonstrates how women protagonists actively and dominantly lead the narrative: they take the initiative rather than cry, sit and wait for a rope from the sky. The action they take is wise cooperation, like Leah and Rachel, and Lot's daughters in earlier stories we observed, in reaction to the Pharaoh's oppressive decrees that represent his hubris and folly. The women in our narrative work as clever underdogs who wield their wisdom as a formidable weapon, as Rebekah and Tamar demonstrated.

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[784] See further Adele Reinhartz, '*Why Ask My Name?': Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press , 1998), esp. 104–6.

The midwives and the mother of Moses manipulate the loopholes in Pharaoh's decree that borrows euphemization as mechanism. Further, as a member of a subordinate group, the mother (and sister) strategically clothe their inward defiance by demonstrating outward compliance — a technical obedience. The new-born male child is safely exposed with careful protection and is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. In this sense, it is somewhat unusual solidarity in that it involves someone from the hostile group. This solidarity comes from their shared status as 'daughters' whom Pharaoh underestimated. They move in perfect order not just to save a single male child,[785] but also to make him a member of the Egyptian royal family by adoption, thus proving 'daughters' are every bit as strong as 'sons' or have even more powerful influence. This paves the way for the ultimate survival of the whole people, including all the *daughters* of Israel. Thus, Moses is not a destined hero from his birth, with no divine annunciation or divine intervention to protect him, but is a women-made hero due to their collective manipulations and endeavors. Such a wise counterplan is best understood as a satirical mockery of Pharaoh's earlier speech, "Let us wisely deal~" and as the collective disruption of his scheme.

Women contribute to the survival of the Israelite community, according to the narrator's overarching agenda throughout the birth narratives. As Fretheim points out, "women are here given such a crucial role that Israel's future is made dependent upon their wisdom, courage, and vision."[786] Women emerge as dominant characters once more during a crisis. The narrator deliberately presents women as salvific figures, making them active agents for divine salvation, which is significant communal repertoire.

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[785] As opposed to Exum's argument. See J. C. Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus and Deuteronomy*, 75–87.
[786] Fretheim, *Exodus*, 33.

Chapter 8 Making a Lifelong Nazirite: The Influence of Samson's Mother (the Birth of Samson)

The birth narrative of Samson is in line with those of Moses and Samuel in that the future son becomes a communal leader. The narrator is not interested in determining who will be the heir of these heroes or the issue of the family inheritance. For example, readers are not told about the offspring of Samson at all.

Samson alone of all the judges (שופטים)[787] has a miraculous birth (ch. 13) and a solemn death account (ch. 16). The birth narrative is placed in chapter 13, and seems to stand out as a self-contained unit. It presents quite a long account, consisting of a full package of various motifs pertaining to the birth of Samson: an encounter with the Divine, an angelic annunciation, barren woman, Nazirite consecration, hospitality with meal offering, wondrous signs at sacrifice ritual, human survival after experiencing theophany and the like.[788]

The birth narrative (ch. 13) has been widely recognized as a separate unit from the rest of stories (chs. 14–16) or an addition to them[789] due to its distinctiveness.[790] It is embellished

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[787] I use the term 'judge(s)' here simply as a English rendering of (ים)שופט and not in the usual sense of law and judgment, since Shophet, שופט, encompasses diverse leader figures such as military commander, warrior, executive officer, and prophet, as attested in the book of Judge. Amit rightly considers it as a multi-purpose term, which represents various of types of leader. It is worth noticing what Amit argues concerning its nature: "the judges did not unite the people around them nor was their position inherited by their sons after them. They certainly should not be seen as an organized leadership of a uniform character." Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, trans., Jonathan Chipman, BibInt 38 (Leiden: BRILL, 1999), 68.

[788] Compared to various other HB stories: Abraham and three messengers, the ancestral mothers who are barren, Hagar's encounter with the Divine, Gideon's offering and wondrous events followed by a question of death after his encounter with a deity and the like.

[789] Geogre F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 314; Charles Fox Burney, *The Book of Judges: With Introduction and Notes* (London: Rivington, 1918; LBS. New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1970), 336–8; R. G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, AB 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 256; Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, OTR (London: Routledge, 2002), 43. As for the long history of the scholars' discussions about the formation of this book as well as various scholarly concerns and contributions, see Barry G. Webb's commentary, *The Book of Judges,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 20–54; Trent C. Butler, *Judges,* WBC 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017 [original: Thomas Nelson, 2009]), esp. 80–99.

[790] For example, the Samson cycle lacks the usual pattern of disobedience–oppression–repentance–and delivery, or apostasy, distress, conversion, and salvation according to Rendtorff, which repeats in the book of Judges (Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986], 167–170]. It is questionable whether the Samson cycle is influenced by the Deuteronomic history; this is a topic which the present research does not aim to explore. For the discussion about the hypothesis of a Deuteronomic history proposed by

with religious ideas which are absent in chs. 14–16;[791] the parents (and the man of God) who are the main protagonists almost disappear thereafter; it is only place that refers explicitly to Samson as divinely commissioned as a deliverer.[792] Scholars like Joseph Blenkinsopp, James L. Crenshaw, and J. Cheryl Exum nevertheless pay attention to the thematic unity based on interconnected motifs, considering the coherent flow of the narrative in its entirety.[793] Concurring with them, I consider that the Samson narrative in its present form accords indispensable unity and structure to the whole.[794] The narrative *per se* follows a well-defined epic hero[795] cycle, going through the birth, life, and death of the hero that culminates in a grand finale. Hence this study presupposes ch. 13 as a prelude to the whole Samson narrative.[796]

Niditch's work is significant here.[797] She focuses on the role of women in the stories of Judges as well as of the early kings.[798] She argues that "central in the relationships between

Martin Noth and the composite nature of the Samson cycle (chs. 13–16), see further Gunkel, "Simson," in idem: *Reden und Aufsaetz* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 38–64 (48); Hugo Grossmann, *Die Anfänge Israels,* Von 2. *Mose bis Richter und Ruth. Übersetzt, erklärt und mit Einleitungen versehen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914), 240; Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History,* JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981 [original, 1943]), esp. 42–53;121; J. Blenkinsopp, "Structure and Style in Judges 13–16," 69; Frank M. Cross, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic History," in *Perspectives in Jewish Learning*, ed., J. M. Rosenthal, ACJS 3 (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1968), 9–24; R. G. Boling, *Judges*, 35.

[791] Rather, with mythological or legendary motifs. See C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges*, 337.

[792] In the rest of the stories of Samson, YHWH is silent about this role, despite the repeated expression, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily" (14:6, 19; 15: 14), and his response to Samson (15:18–19; 16:28–30); see also M. Z. Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 43.

[793] J. Blenkinsopp, " Structure and Style in Judges 13–16," 66; James L. Crenshaw, "The Samson Saga: Filial Devotion or Erotic Attachment." *ZAW* 86 (1974): 470–504; J. C. Exum, *Literary Patterns in the Samson Saga: an Investigation of Rhetorical Style in Biblical Prose,* Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 1976); idem, "Promise and Fulfillment: Narrative Art in Judges 13," *JBL* 99 (1980): 43–59.

[794] I do not deny that these stories have been subjected to editorial work and that they are the products of a history of composition and redaction.

[795] S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008)*,* 4, 159, 160; idem, "Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *CBQ* 54 (1990): 608–24.

[796] On this point, I agree with Edward L. Greenstein. He emphasizes how Samson's story interacts within the narrative as a whole, arguing that "nothing may be read as secondary or interpolated, everything must be considered as potentially meaningful" and "as a corollary to considering the story in its final form in the text." Reading the narrative "as it is embedded in turn within the Book of Judges" is important to him (Ed. Greenstein, "The Riddle of Samson," *Proof* 1/3 (1981): 237–60 (here 238).

[797] While conceding redaction history, Niditch does not disregard the book of Judges as a whole and places more emphasis on "the meanings and messages conveyed by style, content, and structure" in the final form of the text at our hands. In addition, she opines that the epic bardic voice, the theologian's voice, and the humanist voice are discernible in the book of Judges as three major voices (S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary,* 8–11).

[798] S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 8.

warriors are women," explaining that "they frequently serve as prizes of war and as valuable items of exchange" (e.g. Michal, Achsah, Jephthah's daughter); certain relationships or bonds between men are created or mediated by women; sometimes they "lead to or reflect enmity rather than accord" (Samson with the Timnite woman and Delilah); the treatment of women triggers civil war (Judg 19); "women are also involved in the process of reconciliation" (Judg 21).[799] Niditch's argument may be applied to the birth narrative too. Samson has relationships with various women (chs. 14–16) while his covenant-like relationship with God is set at the outset (ch. 13) where his mother — the woman — emerges as an outstanding character who serves as a medium between YHWH and the fetus through sanctifying herself according to divine instruction.[800] Further, the birth narrative embeds the Nazirite regulation that compels Samson to keep his hair uncut. This prohibition works as a principal motif to the story plot since it affects Samson's downfall in ch. 16.

Bearing in mind the role of woman in the birth narrative and the interplay between ch. 13 and chs. 14–16[801] within a larger narrative complex, the present study will investigate primarily three issues: 1) how the narrative presents YHWH's predominant preference of woman over man, putting emphasis on the fact that she is unilaterally chosen for the recipient of the divine encounter and the instructions; 2) how the mother manipulates the original message she received and collaborates jointly with the messenger of God; 3) her ultimate role in the book of Judges as an alternative reading.

8.1 A Chosen Mother for a Chosen Hero: Obedient or Manipulative?

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[799] S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary,* 5.
[800] Given vv. 24–25, it can be perceived that she observed the regulations imposed on her.
[801] The Samson cycle covers birth (ch.13), various accounts and achievements in his lifetime (14:1–16:4), and his demise and burial (16:4–16:31).

The birth of Samson is concerned with the divine election of a deliverer at a time of Philistine oppression that lasted forty years.[802] It is considerably the longest of the accounts of foreign oppression mentioned in Judges.[803] This might account for why a distinctive divine intervention occurs this time, compared to other accounts in Judges: ordaining a deliverer even before birth through annunciation and consecration rather than appointing a grown-up individual.[804] The statement from v. 5, he will only *begin* to deliver (יחל להושיע) Israel from the hand of Philistines," presupposes that the Philistines are too strong as opponents to defeat at once.[805]

The divine election is given like a surprise present: there is no cry for help;[806] the messenger of God comes to the woman abruptly with no reason given. Without introducing himself, he cuts to the chase: she is barren but will be pregnant and give birth to a son. Then follow the stipulations laid on her and the son to be born to her, along with a prophecy for the child's future as a Nazirite and deliverer. Coming straight to the point without preliminaries applies to the woman, the recipient, as well. Neither her name nor her origin is heard;[807] there

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[802] As introduced in a typical opening formula in v. 1. Cf. Judg. 2:11, 14; 3:7–8, 12; 4:1–2; 6:1; 10: 6–7. The duration of the foreign oppression was 18 years by Moab and Eklon (3:15); 20 years by Jabin, the king of Cannaan (4:3); 7 years by Midianites (6:1); 18 years by Philistines and the descendants of Ammon (10:8).

[803] Klaas Spronk, *Judges*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 396.

[804] One may question whether, if the oppression was severe, wouldn't it make more sense to choose an adult who is ready to take the lead in the fight rather than waiting until the anointed but unborn child grows up? It is conjecturable that either the circumstances were not so exigent or there was no grown man qualified or prepared to be called for the divine mission.

[805] Y. Amit (*The Book of Judges*, 296) points out "Samson was not destined to solve the political problem. As far as we know, the Philistines continued to impose their fear and terror upon Israel until the reign of David."; It should be noted, however, that the Philistines in the Samson cycle neither oppress nor carry out a military attack on a national level as other enemies do in the book of Judges; rather, their threat is imposed on the individual Samson, while Samson himself also confronts them for personal vindication. Only in Judg. 16 — the last episode in the temple of Dagon — their confrontation is described as a competition between YHWH and the gods of the Philistines (See further Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 275, 288). Forming an adversarial relationship (self-other), for example, by repeatedly referring to the Philistines as "the uncircumcised," may have been intended to prevent the Israelites' potential assimilation into the local environment, which can occur as a result of the settlement process through mixed marriage or cultural exchange, as supported by the Samson and the Philistines episodes (ch. 14, 16).

[806] Which belongs to a typical formula introduced in the preface (2:11–19): Evil in the eyes of YHWH– Delivered into the hands of the enemies–A cry for help–A judge-God's support–Delivered into the hands of Israel (Susan Gillmayr-Bucher, "Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges," *JBL* 128/4 [2009]:687–702, esp. 691–2).

[807] See further Adele Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist," in *Feminist Companion to*

is no reference to Samson's mother wishing for a child; her impregnation is made possible neither as a reward for an offering, nor as a response to the prayer.[808]

In this manner, the encounter with the divine characterizes a unilateral feature of the divine election. The future mother is designated for this task: God selects a certain woman he wants, determines to set apart her child, and imposes certain injunctions with his absolute authority, plan, and command. The woman's outstanding qualifications to be the mother of the chosen and sanctified hero are hinted at in a roundabout way — through giving salience to the stupidity of her husband, Manoah.[809] Given the context, the divine intervention is made in an imperative and absolute manner. Manoah seems to behave inappropriately in questioning too much. Let us examine meticulously the characterization of these two contrasting personages and YHWH's preference for Manoah's wife over him.

Judges, ed., A. Brenner, FCB 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 157–70.

There were several attempts in Jewish antiquity to fill in the missing points concerning the mother of Samson. Rav Hana bar Rava states she was named Tzelelponit (צְלֶלְפּוֹנִית), and his sister was called Nashyan (נָשְׁיָן); another sage says that the judge Ibzan had not invited Manoah to any of the one hundred and twenty feasts for the marriage of his sixty children thinking that "It is not worth inviting him; he is a sterile mule, how will he pay me back? Manoah will never invite me in return, as he has no children."(Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 91a); or "Zelalponit of the tribe of Judah." See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* vol. 6 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–1938, 7 vols, 1998), 204–6 nn. 111–12. According to Ps.-Philo, Manoah's wife is called Eluma, the daughter of Remac. Ps.-Philo modifies the structure the reader is accustomed to or may expect: "Manoah and his wife contended for some time as to who was responsible for their childless union. Finally God heard the prayer of Manoah's wife, and sent to her the angel Phadihel,… who said unto her: "Thou art the barren one…but now…thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and shalt call his name Samson, for he shall be holy unto the Lord" (42–3, 42.1 [in reference to L. Ginzeberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* vol. 6, 205]. This version fills in what the biblical text does not present: the life of the childless parents, the prayer of Manoah's wife, and the etymology of Samson's name. Josephus depicts Manoah as a man of great virtue and the principal of the country, and his wife as a beautiful woman; he entreated God to grant them their own seed and for this they came constantly into suburbs (Josephus, *Ant.* 5. 276).

[808] Exum suggests that the "suppression of information" about her age, name, and "her view of her situation or her circumstances" "serves to underscore her role as a mother" (J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 67). For about Manoah's origin, Amit argues "by adding the unnecessary indefinite article" אחד (a certain/one), the narrator presents him not as a man of considerable status, thus "diminishing his importance" (Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife," 147). Amit views the same phrase in 1 Sam 1:1 also serving to emphasize "the inferior status of the father" since אחד is superfluous for it "does not convey either a number or the anonymity of the subject." (Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife," FN 1; Y. Amit, *The Book of Judge*, 298); Cf. Exod 2:1 וילך איש מבית לוי ויקח את־בת־לוי. According to Zakovitch, the image of Manoah is belittled given that his tribe Dan is mentioned not as a tribe but as a family — משפחת הדני (Danaite family) and his genealogy is absent (Y. Zakovitch, *The Life of Samson,* 23–4). Not only Manoah, but also Dan, the clan he belongs to, appear to be marginal in comparison to other tribes. The text indicates that Dan was caught in the middle of two forces — Judah and Philistia (Judg. 15: 9–20) (B. G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 364).

[809] Richard D. Nelson, *Judges: A Critical and Rhetorical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 234.

The messenger appears before the *woman* twice, while Manoah is *not* with her. The second visit is particularly significant since the messenger appears again just to her, despite Manoah's prayer that he should be sent again to both of *them* ("to us," עוד אלינו). Given that the text clearly states "God heard his call," וישמע האלהים בקול מנוח (v. 9a), the reader anticipates a corresponding divine response. But what is heard in the immediate following phrase is a comic reversal. God chooses exactly the time when Manoah is not with his wife: "and the messenger of God came again into the woman when was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was *not* with her" (v. 9b). This may signify that only half of his petition was accepted.

The encounter between God and Manoah's wife recalls that between God and Hagar. Hagar is also a married woman who is told about her child's future. God[810] visits her on his own initiative as he does with Manoah's wife. It is noticeable that Hagar is also visited twice. Yet unlike Manoah's wife, Hagar was not barren but was already pregnant when she encountered YHWH (Gen 16); the second visit was made after she gave birth to Ishmael (Gen 21). An even stronger parallel is found in the annunciation of Isaac's birth.[811] The absence of information about the chosen mother also appears in the case of Sarah.[812] Sarah is simply introduced as a barren woman without origin: "And Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Gen 11:30 NKJV); "And Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no [children]" (Gen 16:1a); Manoah's wife was barren: "And his wife was barren, and bore not" (ואשתו עקרה ולא ילדה Judg 13:2b). Even after Hagar has already given birth to Ishmael (Gen 17:15–22), for an unknown reason, Sarah is appointed as a mother of one with whom God would establish his covenant after Abraham. The text explicitly says it is a *blessing* to her (Gen 17: 16, וברכתיה, וברכתי אתה). Nevertheless,

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[810] Messenger of God in case of Manoah's wife.
[811] Especially Gen 18:1–15 for it shares similar motifs of hospitality with meal offering, heralding a birth of a child, and Sarah's skeptical attitude.
[812] Cf. Tamar, whose ethnic identity is not mentioned. See Chapter 6.

the recipient of the annunciation is clearly Abraham[813] However, the gender role is reversed in our narrative: the divine messenger initially contacts not Manoah but his wife; the blessing is directly delivered to her.

In Gen 18:1–15, the focal point transfers from Abraham to Sarah, when it turns out she overheard the herald. Similarly, our story unfolds centering around Manoah after he follows his wife to meet the messenger at the second visit. He undertakes a similar role to Sarah as George W. Savran points out:

> In the annunciation stories, for example, Sarah's skeptical response to the promise of a son is clearly stated (Gen. 18.12), and the text employs the unusual technique of 'corrective quotation' to reflect a divine response to this. In the story of Samson's birth, Manoah's wife does not display any overt indication of skepticism, but this role is taken over by Manoah himself, as he raises question after question about the angel's identity and the promise of a son.[814]

Manoah's prayer for sending the man of God again as well as successive inquiries such as asking the name of the messenger imply his suspicions about the identity of the man who delivered the annunciation.[815]

In regard to his wife, the overall impression that the text provides is she remains seemingly obedient to both this divine messenger and her husband. Scholars have appreciated the virtue of Samson's mother considering the following aspects: she is perceptive, thus recognizing the visitor as a divine envoy (v. 6); dutiful, thus reporting immediately to her husband what has

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[813] Both in Gen 17 and 18. As argued earlier, the former one was probably not told to Sarah, hence, the latter one was made with the intention of making Sarah overhear the news (at the door of the tent). For full discussion, see Chapter 2.

[814] George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative,* JSOTSup 420 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 20.

[815] Cf. Moses's encounter with the divine on Mount Sinai and Jacob's at the river Jabbok. For further discussion, see James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 100–3; T. C. Butler, *Judges*, 145–6.See further Adele Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?*

happened to her (vv. 6, 10); theological, thus understanding the meaning or purpose of theophany they have experienced (v.23).[816] Adele Reinhartz adds to these points, saying she "tactfully refrains from interfering or interrupting during Manoah's encounter with the angel."[817] Exum also points out that, although she is more perceptive than Manoah "in sensing something otherworldly about the messenger,… she does not challenge Manoah's position of authority."[818]

The possible motivations behind such conformist behavior can be explained by inference from Manoah's character and the social circumstance. As in the case of Sarah, the recipient's "sense of doubt or disbelief"[819] is to some extent understandable. What is strange is that Manoah does not ask about the substance of the message (vv. 7, 13–14).[820] Rather, he obsesses over the identity of the messenger and "is too stubbornly in search of the tangible," and thus he keeps testing the visitor, as Fewell and Gunn observe.[821] The narrator's intervention in v. 21 supports this idea: "Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD" (אז ידע מנוח כי־מלאך יהוה הוא). It is only after the wondrous event has occurred (v. 21) that Manoah realized he was really a man of YHWH, which can be an example of "doubting Thomas" in HB.[822]

[816] James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), esp. 70.

[817] A. Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist," 164.

[818] J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 67.

[819] G. W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine,* 21.

[820] Immediately after the encounter, Manoah says "Now let your words come true!" עתה יבא דבריך (R. G. Boling, Richard D. Nelson), while others render it as a temporal clause, "now when your words come true…"(J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL [London: SCM Press, 1981]; C. F. Burney). In either case, he does not ask further about the Nazirite stipulation or the fate of the future son. See also, Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 295.

[821] Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," in *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 130.

[822] In terms of preparing a young goat (גדי־עזים) and the offering scene, Gideon could be mentioned, since his narrative has much in common with our story in regard to the sequence of the appearance of the divine messenger, the offering, wondrous signs, recognition, fear together with the mention of a deliverer (Judg 6: 11–24). The core of the story of Gideon, however, is not a birth annunciation but the divine call of Gideon himself as a deliverer, and consequently, a sign (אות) for that commission, which is more related to the call of Moses. Further, unlike Gideon, Manoah does not build an altar, and above all things, he is a secondary figure rather than a prime recipient of the theophany.

Considering such a character, it is natural that he would have a delusion over the infidelity of his wife if she suddenly becomes pregnant.[823] If the visitor were not the messenger of God, Manoah would have suspected his wife of having an affair with him. To allay this suspicion, his wife may have decided to clarify the messenger's visit and, as much as possible, to report the whole story minutely to her husband. Her running in response to the messenger's second visit could have the same effect. In so doing, she might have avoided his suspicion about her potential sexual relationship with that stranger.[824] Hence a hasty report to her husband is more likely to represent the wisdom of her conduct rather than presenting her as a passive and submissive character. Further, according to the social standards that the head of household is the one with most authority, the regulations imposed on her as well as on the future son should be known to Manoah.[825] To raise her son in accordance with the instructions, to keep the Nazirite rules imposed on her future son and herself, Manoah's permission is essential.

Outwardly, Manoah's wife demonstrates compliance to her husband in that she reports to him what happened in detail after the first visit (13:6–7), and that she immediately runs to inform him of the appearance of the messenger (13:10) for the second visit. On the other hand, she insinuates her preeminent role, as evidence by her verbal expression when she reports the emergence of the messenger again. In fact, Manoah's request was employed in the form of the three verbal phrases attaching each the first person plural personal pronoun:

בי אדוני איש האלהים אשר שלחת יבוא־נא עוד אלינו ויורנו מה־נעשה לנער היולד

O, LORD, I pray thee, let the man of God whom thou didst send come again to <u>us</u>, and teach <u>us</u> what <u>we</u> are to do with the boy that will be born. (13:8b RSV)

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[823] Josephus explains that Manoah became jealous and suspicious when his wife informed him in admiration that a handsome and tall young man had appeared to her (Josephus, *Ant.* 5. 276).

[824] As for the connotation of an expression בא אל, see Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife"; A. Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist."

[825] The rabbinical laws state that only the father, not the mother, can vow that a minor son should be a Nazirite (Nazir 4.6 [Mishnah]).

However, his wife repeats "me" twice as opposed to Manoah's stress on "we":[826]

<div dir="rtl">הנה נראה אל<u>י</u> האיש אשר־בא ביום אל<u>י</u></div>

Behold, the man who came to <u>me</u> the [other] day has appeared to <u>me</u>. (13:10b)

She underscores in a furtive manner that it is she who has preference over him, setting aside the question of the need to bring her husband when it seems YHWH intentionally sent his emissary when he was not with her. Had it not been for his wife's hurried report (v. 10), he could never have met the messenger in person. The implication is that God puts his wife ahead of him — to take the lead. Manoah must follow after his wife, as is written "So Manoah arose, and went after his wife." (ויקם וילך מנוח אחרי אשתו v. 11a). This serves as a key phrase that summarizes their relationship in this birth narrative. Manoah needs to follow his wife not only physically but also theologically (13:14, 23, 24).[827]

Most pointedly, she does a subtle manipulation of the divine message. What Savran calls "the unusual technique of 'corrective quotation,'"[828] from the above-mentioned quotation, occurs in our narrative as well. We have examined that the divine voice quotes (Gen 18:13) Sarah's inner speech (Gen 18:12) but omits the unfavorable part to Abraham — his age as a possible obstacle.[829] In our text, it is the woman, not the divine messenger, who quotes the message but leaves out the reference to her disadvantage. Noteworthy is the fact that the woman does not alter the part of the original message she quotes, but repeats it almost verbatim;[830] while concealing some of it. Let us take a close look at the messenger's original

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[826] J. C. Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment," 47.
[827] See further, Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife."
[828] G. W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine,* 20.
[829] For full discussion, see Chapter 2.
[830] Though the order is reversed.

speech (vv. 3–5) in comparison with her quoted speech (v. 7), and the messenger's second

speech that reconfirms it (vv. 13–14).

The original message (vv. 3–5)	The woman's quoted speech (v. 7)
הנה־נא את־עקרה *ולא ילדת* והרית וילדת בן ועתה השמרי נא ואל־תשתי יין ושכר ואל־תאכלי כל־טמא Behold, *you are barren and have not borne*, but you shall conceive and bear a son. And now you must not drink wine or anything intoxicating. And you must not eat anything unclean.	ויאמר לי הנך הרה וילדת בן Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.
	ועתה אל־תשתי יין ושכר ואל־תאכלי כל־טמאה And now you must not drink wine or anything intoxicating. And you must not eat anything unclean.
כי הנך הרה וילדת בן *ומורה לא־יעלה על־ראשו* כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן For behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. And *no razor shall come upon his head* because the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb	כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן *עד־יום מותו* because the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb *until his death*.
והוא יחל להושיע את־ישראל מיד פלשתים *and he will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*.	

She does not reveal that she is barren so that Manoah might not know who is responsible for

their childlessness.[831] Besides, she only gives Manoah a portion of the information about the

child,[832] namely the dietary prohibition and the child's future as a Nazirite. In sum, she

conceals three elements:1) she is barren; 2) no razor shall come upon his head; 3) he will begin

to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. On the other hand, she slightly modifies the

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[831] Y. Zakovitch, *The Life of Samson*, 41.
[832] Pnina Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man. The Story of Samson (Judges 13–16)*, BH 7 (Bern: Peter Lang), 2006, 20.

message by adding עד־יום מותו "until his death," which shall be discussed in detail in the following section.

Interestingly, the messenger, at his second speech, also mentions only the dietary prohibition to Manoah, repeating that she shall keep all that he had previously commanded:

מכל אשר־אמרתי אל־האשה תשמר

מכל אשר־יצא מגפן היין לא תאכל ויין ושכר אל־תשת וכל־טמאה אל־תאכל

כל אשר־צויתיה תשמר

All that I commanded her she shall observe.

Of all that comes from the grapevine she shall not consume. Wine or anything intoxicating she must not drink. And she must not eat anything unclean.

Of all that I said to the woman she shall be mindful. (vv. 13b–14)

Hence these aforementioned three elements are not revealed to Manoah till the end, at least according to these speech discourses.[833] His negative image depicted in the following stories may explain the reason she does not share with Manoah the child's destiny and the prohibition from cutting his hair: he is probably not perceptive enough to understand the larger plan of God.

8.2 "Until his Death": the Mother's Manipulation

The narrative keeps demonstrating that YHWH grants a special privilege to the woman, whereas it depicts Manoah as a person full of suspicion and questions and of obtrusiveness as appeared from his need to reconfirm the messenger's identity (v.11, 17) and his request for a name (v. 18).[834] The messenger's objection to the hospitality[835] also creates a negative image

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[833] K. Spronk, *Judges*, 403

[834] Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife," 148.

[835] Abraham's offer was also accepted, but under different circumstances. Abraham's invitation is clearly related to the duty of hospitality to strangers, not to the annunciation; the annunciation occurs later, and Abraham

about Manoah.[836]   The other side of the coin, however, is that Manoah stands out as being very active and enthusiastic in seeking for divine instruction. Strikingly, this is a unique account in that a father's strong voluntary wish to be involved in a fertility issue is manifested, except for the case where Isaac prays for his barren wife. Yet his interest is thwarted: Manoah wants to know how the child is to be brought up, but he never gets an answer to the question. Instead, he is told about the regulations to be followed by his wife, 'she'; his desire to be a corecipient — 'we' — of the divine plan is rejected.[837]

Manoah's wife, on the other hand, as the sole recipient of the original message, enjoys the privilege of modifying it to her advantage.

The messenger' original speech to the woman	The woman's quotation delivered to Manoah
כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן because the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb. (13:6bβ)	*כי־נזיר אלהים יהיה הנער מן־הבטן עד־יום מות* because the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb *until his death.* (13:7c)

Making her son a Nazirite for life, rather than just for a limited time, allows her to exert influence over him for as long as she lives. Viewed in this light, she reminds us of Rebekah, "a woman with special knowledge, some of which she shares, some of which she keeps to herself," as Fewell and Gunn observe.[838]   In this way, Manoah's wife mediates subjectively between the man of God and Manoah. That is, in monopolizing certain information, she dominates her

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was unaware of it beforehand. In addition, YHWH had already promised him a son in Gen 17:16–19. Manoah's invitation, on the other hand, is made only after he has heard the annunciation.

[836] We do not know whether Manoah intended to imitate Gideon for the sake of gaining a secure sign, a wish attributable to his incredulity, or purely expressed his appreciation to the messenger who heralded good news. However, given the circumstances, Manoah's offer seems to be made extemporaneously. Then it is possible to assume his intention might be to detain the messenger and to earn more time to satisfy his curiosity since he has not received detailed information from the messenger (vv. 12–14).

[837] There are a number of incidents in Samson's later career where we might be inclined to 'blame the parents' for his immaturity and irresponsibility, which shall be discussed in the next section. Manoah might be justified in responding that he did ask how to bring up this obviously exceptional child.

[838] Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," 131.

husband.

In declaring twice that the *woman* shall observe *all* that he commanded (vv.13–14), instead of rebuking her or amending what she hid or added, God—through his messenger — ensures the woman's authority over this issue. In this regard, "Samson who became judge could only be the result of a conspiracy between Yahweh and the boy's mother," as Boling states. Therefore, the divine authority gives prominence to the *woman* (wife/mother) rather than the *man* (husband/father), which is a reversal of the accepted social norm.[839] In this way, the centrality is given to his wife although the story seems to unfold around Manoah,[840] while confining him to the role of biological father for procreation and of paterfamilias.[841]

The reason for such divine partiality may be inferred from the comparison between the two characters. Unlike the over-talkative Manoah, his wife is depicted as a taciturn person. Perceiving that the visitor is the messenger of God (מלאך האלהים) intuitively, she is reticent about asking him questions (v. 6) and holds her tongue throughout the second encounter. Moreover, she demonstrates outstanding theological insight concerning the divinely set up event (13:21–23).[842] This may mean the recipient must have a keen understanding of the messenger's authority in order to receive divine pronouncement and instructions. Given that the herald's message was delivered unilaterally, it is likely that what Manoah needed was to show swift obedience to his authority and commands as quickly as his wife did.

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[839] In calling her repeatedly אשה which means both woman and wife, the subject who is granted the divine encounter is inevitably gendered. Cf. T. J. Schneider argues Manoah makes "a statement of ownership" when he asks the messenger if he is the man who spoke the woman/wife (אשה v. 11). T. J. Schneider, *Judges, Berit Olam* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 200.

[840] R. Alter, "Samson Without Folklore," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed., S. Niditch, SBLSemeiaSt 20 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 47–56 (here h51).

[841] Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife."

[842] She explains to Manoah that they will not die even though they have faced the Divine, for she understands that all these event have occurred by God's providence. For this reason, Exum calls her "a better theologian," whereas Manoah is "a good theologian" (J. C. Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment," 59); see further L. R. Klein, *Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 118–9.

In respect of keeping outward conformity, Samson's mother is similar to the mother of Moses. In addition, while Moses's mother changes her son's destiny in collaboration with the daughter of Pharaoh through adoption, Samson's mother changes the future of her son through her speech act of making him a lifelong Nazirite in collaboration with the messenger of God, by his tacit approval of it.[843] There is, however, a distinct difference between their strategies. Whereas Moses' mother saves, protects, and relinquishes her child for the sake of the whole Israelite community, Samson's mother manipulates the divine information for her own benefit — to gain the upper hand within the family and retain control over her son — possibly for his entire life.

Her influence is implied in naming her son, Samson (13:24). Insofar as the man of God delivers no instruction about name-giving, there is a parallel with the annunciation of Isaac's birth through the three divine messengers. Abraham's naming Isaac, יצחק, from a root denoting "to laugh" may allude to the episode of Sarah's laughter (Gen 21: 1–7).[844] However, Sarah stamps her own interpretation on this name, saying "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me," (Gen 21:6) thus emphasizing divine favor on *herself*.[845] In our text, it is not Manoah but his wife who names the son.[846] It should also be mentioned that she does *not* choose a name that reflects the divine origin or circumstances of the birth of the child, in contrast to other ancestral mothers.[847] Rather, the origin of Samson's name appears to be derived from a solar myth as scholars suggest that either Samson is a

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[843] It is noteworthy that God or his agent is completely absent in the story of Moses' birth and rescue. See Chapter 7.

[844] Also Abraham's laugh in Gen 17:17; P. Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man.*

[845] Her following speech puts stress on her procreative power, as discussed in chapter 2.

[846] J. C. Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment," 57.

[847] In the case of Ishmael, Abraham names him in compliance with YHWH's instruction given to Hagar (Gen 16: 11, 15); after her expulsion, in the second encounter with the divine, Hagar takes full authority over Ishmael.

diminutive form of sun, hence "little sun"[848] or at least has a connection with *shemesh* (שמש, sun).[849]

All things considered, it seems reasonable to interpret the character of Samson's mother as ambiguous. On the one hand, she is arbitrarily singled out to be the mother of a God-chosen hero who is consecrated and destined to be a deliverer. Given that the majority of the message pertains to the consecration of the mother, it is natural to think she also is called to the divine mission.[850] That is, God's election for Samson comes through his mother. While the narrator caricatures Manoah as being excluded from, or at the very least not welcomed into, the divine plan,[851] the narrative highlights the prominence of his wife, who is perceptive and obedient. Given that God blessed the son when he grew up and the Spirit of God stirred him, It seems that the mother kept well to the regulations imposed on her (13:24–25).

On the other hand, she is not that submissive to her husband, or even to God, as we see from her liberal interpretation of the duration of the Nazirite period[852] as well as her making a monopoly of certain information. Moreover, her conduct might be motivated from personal interest rather than higher and noble motives — faith or public benefit. Nevertheless, YHWH's predominant preference for the woman over her husband is well presented in that he approves her manipulation of the divine message. The text's ambiguities allow both positive and negative evaluations of Manoah's wife. The latter, especially as a mother figure, stands out in

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[848] "Samson," in ABD, 5:950–954.

[849] Cf. Josephus links the name to Heb. שמן (fat) in a figurative sense to connote 'rich, 'fertile', or 'robust'; Greenstein interprets Samson as representing the people of Israel by the analogical inference that his name is related to Heb. שם (name). See Ed Greenstein, "The Riddle of Samson."

[850] It would make sense that the dietary restrictions remained in effect at least until the child was weaned.

[851] From this perspective, he is reminiscent of a failed quester or a false (bogus) hero who imitates a hero's footsteps but finishes in failure in a fairy tale, or a type of court jester whose presence in the narrative serves to provide humour and to show how much sharper his wife is (Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*). The humours reflected in Manoah's character reaches to climax when "his skepticism assuaged," as Fewell and Gunn suggest: "But what he now knows he fears" thinking that they would die for they have seen God (13:22) (Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," 130)

[852] In doing so, she inserts her intention deliberately into this unilateral contract as it is a reciprocal contract.

light of the interaction of the birth narrative (Judg 13) with the later stories (Judg 14–16), which we will now examine.

8.3 Ambiguous Mother Figure

The birth narrative (ch. 13) invests Samson with a twofold status: he is a deliverer and a lifelong Nazirite, and the latter is determined by his mother through her speech act (13:7). She furtively manipulates the divine message, adding "until his death," עד־יום מותו, at the end of the quotation. Considering her laconic attitude throughout the story, such an addition draws the reader's attention. This is a momentous expression for by this speech she makes the future son a *lifelong* Nazirite rather than a temporary Nazirite, which serves in the larger narrative context to account for why Samson had not cut his hair all his life (16:17). The outcome of her speech act is ambiguous just as her character is ambiguous.

A positive interpretation in regard to her supplement "until his death" is offered by Reinhartz. She considers Samson's mother as a possessor of foreknowledge: in extending "the Nazirite vow to encompass her son's entire life," she predicts subtly that his death will be "caused by his breaking of the vow,"[853] thus sharing the prophetic role of the messenger.

There would be another positive point: Samson remains a Nazirite dedicated to God until the last moment, thanks to his mother. That is, he will still be the Nazirite of YHWH under any circumstance, even though his hair is shaven; YHWH does not abandon him, though temporarily he has left him.[854] In this perspective, she might be a subjective theologian who

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[853] A. Reinhartz, "Samson's Mother," 163.
[854] This might serve as a reason to interpret Samson as a successful hero; Elie Assis points out "the negative side of Samson does not cause the divine spirit to be removed from him; on the contrary, Samson achieves the goal defined in the narrative of his birth in Ch. 13:5" (Elie Assis, "The Structure and Meaning of the Samson Narratives," in *Samson: Hero or Fool?: The Many Faces of Samson,* eds., Erik Eynikel and Tobias Nicklas, TBN 17 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 1–12 [here 2]).

actively takes part in God's contract with her, and even assists in enabling his promise —"he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines" — to be fulfilled.[855]

The irony is, however, that Samson's violating the rule(s) of the Naziriteship[856] is inevitably linked to his being a lifelong Nazirite as proclaimed by none other than his mother.[857] Hence she is fundamentally responsible for his death. For this reason, Mieke Bal perceives that the mother, on the one hand, possesses superior knowledge over her husband so far as to "predict Samson's fate," but, on the other hand, her knowledge is "fatal."[858] It is her speech act, according to Bal, that demanded Samson's purity by extending the Nazirite vow, which ultimately brings about his downfall: "she kills the hero who is not yet born."[859] Hence, making her son a lifelong Nazirite has a double edge: she contributes to Samson's death while also providing him with 'insurance' or 'warranty' to be a Nazirite for every contingency. We do not know if she serves a prophetic or fatal role, either accidentally or consciously. But even

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[855] Her adding "until his death" might reflect her own interpretation. Considering that the child is a Nazirite "from the womb," it would have been natural for her to believe that he is a Nazirite until death. Then it can be an act of subaudition.

[856] Biblical critiques have pointed out that Samson violated the rules imposed upon a Nazirite before his encounter with Delilah: he came into contact with the carcass of the lion and ate honey out of it (14:5, 8–9); drank an alcoholic beverage at his wedding feast (14:10); and touched the jawbone of a donkey (15:15–17). See J. Blenkinsopp, "Structure and Style in Judges 13–16," 66; J. L. Crenshaw, *Samson*, 84; Dennis T. Olson, "The Book of Judges," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed., L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 721–888 (here 842); Cf. Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges,* 276–77; von Rad views the rules imposed on the mother as also indirectly applying to Samson (with reference to Louis C. Jonker, "Samson in Double Vision : Judges 13–16 from Historical-Critical and Narrative Perspectives," *JNSL* 18 [1992]: 49–66).

[857] Von Rad is often repeated by other scholars as he has a negative view of Samson: he is an example of failed charismatic leader for his life did not accord with God's plan to use him as a consecrated Nazirite; he wastes his charisma bestowed upon him by God"("So zeigen also auch die Simsongeschichten das Scheitern eines Charismatikers und das Bild einer vertanen Gotteskraft.… Simson geht in dem Chaos, das er um sich herum verbreitet hat, selber unter") (von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferung Israels*, Bd 1, EETh 1 [Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 10th ed. 1992; original: 1957], 346). Lillian Klein also contends that Samson is presented as a failed judge as he "betrays the anticipations generated by the annunciation, the birth and the *nazirite* [sic] dedication" (L. R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges,* 117); Amit also views Samson as a disappointing hero (*The Book of Judges*, 266–7, 288). Elie Assis takes a different view. She claims that Samson achieves "the greatest triumph": Although the ending is characterized as a tragedy, "it portrays Samson as a hero, and can no way be the ending to a story that is meant to portray a disappointing, failed judge"(E. Assis, "The Structure and Meaning of the Samson Narratives," 2). Milton viewed Samson as a tragic hero (John Milton, *Samson Agonistes* [London: Oxford University Press, 1957; origin. with the publication of Milton's Paradise Regained, 1671] while Crenshaw and Exum interpret the Samson story as a tragic comedy (J. L. Crenshaw, Samson, 129; J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 19).

[858] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 74.

[859] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 75. In regard to her speech act theory, see further, ibid, 129–68.

if it the former were right, it is still doubtful whether she did it for her son's sake. It is also questionable whether the mother properly understood the meaning and significance of the Nazirite vow and the prophesied role of her son as deliverer.

The later story describes both Samson's mother and father as people who do not understand the divine plan (14:4). Further, we are open to the possibility that her keeping the vow could either indicate her fidelity or her apathy; that she does not mention to Manoah that in future her son is to begin to deliver the Israelites from Philistines might imply her distrust over that issue.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Israelites at her time suffered distress for a long period. Under the influence of Othniel, there had been peace in the land for forty years (3:11); and for eighty years after Ehud's victory (3:30); for forty years during Deborah's leadership (5:31); and again for forty years during Gideon's lifetime (8:28).[860] The significant forty years reemerges when giving the background information for the birth of the last judge, when it introduces not a period of calm but one of oppression. In this context, the promise of salvation the messenger heralded should be welcomed with great joy, and it is all the more natural that it should be shared with Manoah who is none other than the father who begets this deliverer. However, Samson's mother suppresses both the expression of joy and the relevant information.[861] As argued previously, it seems what she is interested is to take advantage of the information she holds exclusively for the sake of her influence.

Having compared Samson's mother to other women protagonists in chapters 14–16, Crenshaw exalts Samson's mother as a woman who stands for "the noblest kind of Israelite

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[860] The duration of forty years — eighty is a double of forty — is symbolic, which may indicate an unspecified long period. For example, forty years of wandering in the wilderness; forty years of Eli's priesthood (1 Sam 4:18). The duration of either oppression or peace disappears from the book after Gideon; for the rest of the judges, only their ruling period is given (12:7, 9, 11, 14), with no reference to "the land had rest for" (ותשקט הארץ) certain years.

[861] She reports him only in regard to the issue of being a Nazirite.

mother" and "the ideal Israelite wife."[862] In a similar vein, Lillian Klein praises her as "a model of Israelite womanhood and an ideal receptacle for a wondrous conception" while Samson's other women are undevoted, dishonest and unreliable.[863] If it is her supposedly submissive character that makes her an ideal Israelite woman, however, she is in fact far from the ideal since she is as manipulative as any of the female characters we have discussed so far.[864] When reading chapter 13 in relation to the later stories in light of intra-textual integrity, Samson's behaviors and characters allow us to assume negative parental influence on him, particularly his mother's, if not explicitly, at least indirectly. If this is the case, did God overestimate his own ability to choose his agency?

Scholars like Cheryl Exum, Claudia Camp, and Gregory Mobley paid particular attention to Samson's liminal character as he often crosses cultural and religious boundaries.[865] Influenced by Mobley's approach, Steven Wilson contends that Samson's transition "from boyhood to manhood" is incomplete.[866] According to him, Samson's immaturity or "failure to come of age" is evidenced by several indicators: "lack of children and unmarried status," impetuousness character, "strong connection to his parents," frequent use of "boy" and "young man," his early age at death, and "lack of solidarity with adult men."[867]

Samson appears to be an immature adult who is still dependent on his parents while at the same time wishing to be independent of them, as his desire for marriage indicates. Significantly, Samson makes his debut by requesting that his parents arrange for a marriage despite their

[862] J. L. Crenshaw, *Samson,* 70.

[863] L. R . Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges,* 120–1.

[864] The mother of Samson manipulates her knowledge—the divine message while Samson's Timnite wife and Delilah manipulate Samson to gain knowledge—his secret. See M. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 37–67; J. C. Exum, *Literary Patterns in the Samson Saga*, 57.

[865] Exum, *Fragmented Woman*, 72–3; Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible*, JSOTSup 320 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 99, 134; Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East*, LHBOTS 453 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

[866] Steven Wilson, "Falling to Come of Age in the Hebrew Bible" in idem, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 129–46 (here 134).

[867] Steven Wilson, "Falling to Come of Age in the Hebrew Bible," 135–40. For Wilson Samson's failure to come of age represents "Israel's political immaturity" (ibid, 146)

opposition to that which is understood as a transitional rite, a *rite de passage*. His killing of a lion takes place at this stage as a sign of his qualification for adulthood as he proves his stoutheartedness and his physical power.[868] This attempt wins only a half success: he kills the lion but he touches and eats an impure thing, the honey from the carcass. Bal considers this conduct "a revolt against his mother" as it was "she who had stipulated the duration of the law."[869] It should be noted that he shares this honey[870] not with the Timnite woman, his future wife, but with his parents, implying his close tie with them. He shares the secret of the origin of the honey not with his parents but only with his wife (16:19), which may be explained as reflecting a transitional state between identifying as a son and a husband.[871] Unfortunately he fails to keep his marriage: the outraged husband goes back to his father's house (14:15–19); does not gain trust from his father-in-law (15:1–2); is preoccupied with revenge without taking any responsibility for the aftermath which, instead of protecting them, ultimately brings forth the death of his wife and father-in-law. In this manner, he does not manage his own family or bear his own children; he remains under the influence of his parents. In addition, without the spirit of God, Samson is nothing more than an ordinary person who is easily defeated by his enemies; the death scene even depicts him as weak as a child who cannot do anything on his own, thus being led by a young boy who held him by the hand (16:26).

Psychoanalytical mother/lover identification may provide some insight into this issue.

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[868] Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 201. According to Mircea Eliade, "the outstanding rite de passage is represented by the puberty initiation, passage from one age group to another." This "initiation usually comprises a threefold revelation: revelation of the sacred, of death, and of sexuality," which suits the event described in Judg 14:5–6 very well. Eliade continues to state "during his training, the child, who did know nothing of these experiences, is reborn to a new, sanctified existence and becomes a man who knows, who has learned the mysteries. So initiation is equivalent to a spiritual maturing" Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans.,Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace& World, Harvest Book, 1959), 184, 188.

[869] M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, 201.

[870] Niditch interprets honey as a "symbol of fertility" and "an appropriate food eaten on the way to form marriage relations." If this is the case, the honey in the carcass of the lion alludes to the failure of his marriage and foreshadows the death of his wife (S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 155–6).

[871] A similar view is taken by P. Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man*, 74–5; M. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 43–4.

Mieke Bal analyzes the story of Samson using psychoanalytic theory of the "the birth trauma and fantasy of rebirth" which are two "contradictory impulses" or "the ambivalence of the fear": "For the phantasma of the return to the womb is also attractive. The fear, then, is applied to the inevitable new separation that is to follow the return."[872] According to Bal, for Samson, the desire for sexual penetration, namely "a return to the mother's womb," coexists with the contradicting fear of it, resulting in the need to "escape from the woman's vagina." In this sense, "a woman is also mother to a man."[873] The expression "sleeping on her lap" (ותישנהו על־ברכיה) like a *child* underpins the idea that Delilah replaces his mother[874] as Fewell notes:

> He transfers his allegiance from his real mother to his substitute lover-mother. Not only does he reveal the secret known only to himself and his mother, but he entrusts himself to Delilah as a child might trust his mother. As he sleeps upon Delilah's laps (some texts read, 'between her knees'), he loses his manly hair and his manly strength.[875]

In relation to this matter, Bal put special emphasis on Samson's answer to Delilah, "from my mother's womb" (16:17), in regard to his Niziriteship, which thus requires his "symbolic rebirth." Hair cutting then is a metaphor for the absolute separation of the mother's womb. Viewed in this light, continues Bal, "Delilah has helped him to be reborn" rather than betraying him in order to break the "close bond between Samson and his own self."[876]

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[872] M. Bal, *Lethal Love,* 57.

[873] M. Bal, *Lethal Love,* 57–60.

[874] Hence his "desire for the sexual penetration" leads to his "symbolic rebirth" (Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love,* 60); Paradoxically, Bal continues, this rebirth causes "imprisonment and powerlessness, shortsightedness, symbolized in his blinding and womanlessness." (M. Bal, *Lethal Love,* 61). In terms of the expression "on/between the knees" (of a woman), see also Gen. 30:3: Rachel says to Jacob, "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her." (M. Bal, *Lethal Love*, 59).

[875] Fewell, "Judges" in *Women's Bible Commentary.* eds., Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, expanded edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox,1998), 73–83 (here 80). Lori Rowlett reads the story of Samson and Delilah in view of S/M play —"a classic bondage game," pointing out "the dominating partner in S/M sometimes plays a parental role" (Lori Rowlett, "Violent Femmes and S/M: Queering Samson and Delilah" in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed., Ken Stone [New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 106–15 [here 110–1]).

[876] M. Bal, *Lethal Love,* 60). Bal claims that because his rebirth resulted in "imprisonment and powerlessness, shortsightedness, symbolized in his blinding and womanlessness," death is his ideal birth. His standing between

There is one additional point in regard to Samson's immature or childish personality.[877] The image of his mother as the puppet master can be related to his motivation for resistance; this may explain why Samson fetishizes relationships with foreign women.[878] Even knowing he is exposed to danger, he cannot stop indulging in women. It should also be mentioned that Samson's being a Nazirite is beyond his will. Our text does not elaborate on the function of the Nazirite. What we know about Naziritehood is mostly dependent on the information in Numbers 6:1–21, which primarily deals with the voluntary Nazirite vow with a fixed duration and the associated ritual laws.[879] Nevertheless, as Amit observes, "the three main obligations incumbent upon the Nazirite" explained in Numbers "all have an echo in our story."[880] Although only a single injunction not to shave hair is imposed on Samson, if his mother is not permitted to drink wine or any intoxicating drink or to eat unclean things while pregnant, all the more so her son because he is the subject to be consecrated as the Nazirite.[881] At any rate, it is presumable that being a Nazirite, at least in our text, is associated with a certain lifestyle that necessitates abstention and seclusion, as is the case for a warrior inspired by divine spirit and ready to fight a holy war.[882] Being bound to these regulations for all his life due to his mother might have been a heavy burden imposed on Samson. In this sense, it is meaningful that the text continuously puts emphasis on his opponents' attempts to 'bind' him and his act of breaking all binding, shutting, and confining devices.[883] And his self-indulgence such as

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two pillars symbolizes a new born child's posture between the mother's thighs. At last, "he chooses the masculine *against* women" [italics author's] (M. Bal, ibid, 61–3).

[877] He is an Achilles type of man who is better at using physical power than his brain and does not differentiate between public and private matters concerning women. According to The Iliad, Achilles withdrew from battle due to a strife between Agamemnon and himself over Briseis, the daughter of Briseus.

[878] Cf. Judg 3:6; Fewell, "Judges," 80.

[879] Cf. Amos 2:11–12; and also from the post-biblical sources. For example, the third Seder Nashim in Mishna has a separate tractate "Nazir" among its seven tractates; both Amit and Niditch regard the Nazirite rules in Numbers as a "priestly formulation" (Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 277; S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 143).

[880] Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges,* 276.

[881] P. Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man,* 50.

[882] P. Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man* 51–2.

[883] I have dealt with this issue on "Rhetoric of Place in the Samson Narrative: Altitudinal and Spatial Characteristics," presented in ISBL conference, Berlin, 2017.

repeated folly, behavior of 'shooting first and thinking later,'[884] and violation of the Nazirite rule can be explained as an expression of resistance.

8.4 Samson's Mother, a Countermodel of Deborah

Having elucidated the allegedly negative influence of mother on son as an alternative reading, now we will turn to her literary function in a much broader context, questioning as how she contributes to the complexity of the book of Judges. The image of a failed mother and a spoiled son, in spite of being divinely chosen, well accords with the era of judges that gradually goes to a "period of anarchy,"[885] which in fact forms a sharp contrast with the great and glorious military success under Deborah's leadership, presented as a most ideal era in the book of Judges.[886] Undoubtedly Deborah is the female character most fully spotlighted elsewhere in the book, not only serving as a judge in a forensic sense but also as a prophetess (Judg 4:4–5). Her role goes beyond that: she leads the Israelites and their military force through Barak, thus playing a leading role as a control tower. It is highly significant that Deborah is admired as "a mother in Israel" (אם בישראל Judg 5:7). Therefore we have two distinct women emerging as dominant characters, representing the mother figure in particular, in chiastic structure: one almost at the beginning and the other at the end of the book; one as an ideal and the other as a negative model.

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[884] Indulgence or credulity in women, revealing his confidential information, and endangering his own people to make trouble between himself and the dominant Philistines for his personal vendetta and the like.

[885] Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges*, 266.

[886] The Deborah-Barak narrative encompassing the Jael–Sisera story describes a revival of the golden age led by Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and later by Joshua. Especially Miriam is referred to as a prophetess (הנביאה Exod 15:20), and so is Deborah (אשה נביאה, Judg 4:4). The song of Deborah (Judg ch. 5) reminds the reader of the songs of triumph of Moses (Exod 15:1–18) and of Miriam (Exod 15:20–21). Such a victory song promotes communal spirit. However, it is the Philistines, the enemies of Israel, who perform a similar type of liturgical victory song and chorus in Judg 16, the last chapter of the Samson cycle.

The comparisons between these two narrative cycles support the contrasting effect. For example, the scene of the appointment of Barak alludes to his status as a secondary figure:[887] Barak is under the shadow of Deborah's charismatic authority and leadership, which recalls Manoah and his wife. Her prophesy in v. 9 "… the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisʹera into the hand of a woman"[888] and its fulfillment — Jael's overwhelming Sisera, the Canaanite general of Jabin's strong army (4:17–22) — suggest the real heroines in this divine war are women. Viewed in this light, Barak forms, to some extent, a juxtaposition with Manoah who should just follow his wife.[889]

It is noticeable that Deborah and Barak's victory is achieved at a communal level in an orderly, systemized manner with an effective division of roles between human heroes. The organizational power brings up the image of social behavior and organization of the honey bee, which is the meaning of the Hebrew word Deborah (דְּבוֹרָה):[890] living in colonies that consist of a single queen, this well-known social insect shows a prominent division of labor, just as Deborah (the judge and prophet), Barak (the military officer) and Jael (a tactical female killer-warrior) cooperate in perfect order.[891] Toward the end of the book, however, the Israelites lose

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[887] Biblical scholars have interpreted Barak's refusal to go to battle if not accompanied by Deborah (v. 8) as revealing his hesitancy and lack of courage. See M. Z. Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 112, R. G. Boling, *Judges*, 96; LXX adds at the end of v. 8 "ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὴν ἡμέραν ἐν ᾗ εὐοδοῖ τὸν ἄγγελον Κύριος μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ" ("for I never know what day the Yahweh envoy will give me success" [R. G. Boling, *Judges*, 96]; "I do not in fact know the day when Yahweh will lead me, with his angel at my side" [J. A. Soggin, *Judges,* 61]; "because I do not know the day in which the Lord will make successful [Vat]/direct [OL] his messenger with me" [S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary,* 63]). Contrariwise, there are opinions advocating for Barak: Niditch states it is not because Barak is cowardly but because "he is wise to know that victory comes with the presence of God's favorite" (Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary,* 65). Similarly, according to Butler, Barak's declaration shows just how he believes "the presence of Deborah" is sufficient enough for him as "evidence of divine presence"(T. C. Butler, *Judges,* 232).
[888] RSV.
[889] Fewell, "Judges," 78. Amit asserts that Barak's function "is restricted to pursuing the defeated army" while Deborah acts as an intermediary between God and human, which enables the reader to learn the real savior is God (Y. Amit, *The Book of Judges,* 214–7).
[890] For Greenstein ("The Riddle of Samson") who views Samson as symbolizing Israel, the honey serves as an allusion to Deborah. In addition, the expression "between Zorah and Eshtaol" (בין צרעה ובין אשתאל, 13:25; 16:31) evokes "between Ramah and Bethel" (בין הרמה ובין בית־אל, 4:5).
[891] It is probable that her abode "between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim" (בין הרמה ובין בית־אל בהר אפרים) is related to "Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim" (הרמתים צופים מהר אפרים) in 1 Sam 1:1. According to Mishnah, when the [second] temple was destroyed, the shamir-worm and Tzufim(Zophim) honey disappeared (מִשֶּׁחָרַב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, בָּטַל הַשָּׁמִיר וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים) (Seder Nashim, Sotah 9.12).

such power of unity along with either an under-strength army or through lack of a systematic operation. After Deborah, a model of perfect and flawless leadership, the focus on the success of God's chosen leader transfers from the victory of God to self-appreciation of human individuals;[892] the military victory run by a judge is accompanied by human follies and hubris.[893] Samson himself manifests such aspects. His infatuation with women leads ultimately to the revelation of his secret and then his betrayal, causing his premature death (14:15–18; 16:4–21). He kills Philistines motivated by personal revenge rather than collective engagement on behalf of Israel; he acts alone, not involved in any organized war or battle on a communal level.[894]

What draws attention is that Samson is presented here not as a hero but as an Israelite version of Sisera who was overpowered by Yael while he was sleeping without fear but attracted with full trust towards the woman (4:17–22).[895] The episode of Sisera and Jael reflects a similar conflation of the mother/child relationship. Fewell, Klein, and Susan Ackerman have noted the maternal imagery, linking it to Delilah's, reflected in Jael's hospitality offering milk rather than water (4:19; 5:25) as well as Sisera's sleeping like a child

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Zophim in Eretz Israel is believed to produce a high quality of *honey* (Babylonian Talmud Gemara 48b; Rambam commentary).

[892] S. Gillmayr-Bucher, "Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges," 695–6.

[893] People attempt to anoint Gideon as a king (8:22); his son Abimelech himself becomes a king of Shechem after having committed a terrible massacre. Gideon is introduced at the beginning of his story as a person far from a brave hero (Judg ch. 6); his cycle ends in describing a negative event — his folly of making of the ephod (8:22–27). These follies are repeated by Jephthah's reckless vow leading to the tragedy of sacrificing his own daughter (11:29–40) followed by fratricidal war between Gilead and Ephraim (12:1–6).

[894] Niditich (*Judges,* 143–4) considers Samson as "a more solitary and explosive social bandit than Gideon or Ehud."; Hence we cannot find leadership from Samson for he does *not lead* his people. After Samson, the situation gets even worse, falling into a sharp decline as appeared in the story of Micah's idol (Chs. 17, 18) and gang-rape and murder of the concubine of the Levite which triggers a civil war that almost terminated one tribe, the Benjaminites (chs. 19, 20).

[895] Yael drove a tent peg (ותתקע את־היתד) into his temple (רקתו) and the peg went down into the ground; so Sisera is fixed to the ground, unable to move (Judg 5:26). Almost the same expression is used in 16: 14 for portraying Delilah's act: "and she thrust with the pin" (ותתקע ביתד) (Translation of Niditich). The association between Samson and the recurring attempts to bind him is, needless to say, apparent; Samson plunders the garments from the people living in Ashkelon, which recalls Judg 5:30.

and lying or falling "between her legs, ravaged"[896] (Judg 4:21; 5:27). Both Delilah and Jael associate sexual power with maternal care in order to gain what they want for their own benefit, and defeat the commander or warrior represented by masculine power.[897] Then it is safe to say that Sisera and Jael can be read as equivalents of Samson and Delilah, thereby inviting the readers to consider the interplay between the well-known mothers in these stories. One can imagine that she would remain as helpless as the mother of Sisera: the mother, who is responsible for her son's death, as previously argued, is even not mentioned when her son dies, whilst Manoah/father, does appear again, although not physically (16:31).[898]

Seen in this light, Samson's mother is a reversal of Deborah, "mother in Israel":[899] she runs counter to the glory and positive effect created by Deborah and may prefigure an even worse mother: the mother of Micah (17:1–6).

As the chaotic stage becomes intensified, not only the communality and the close association between God and his leader in faith disappear,[900] but also the female warrior-like heroes represented by Achsah, the daughter of Caleb (1:11–15), Anat, Deborah and Jael fade into history.[901] In the later part of the book of Judges, female characters either become unnamed, derogated or victimized, as we notice from the woman who killed Abimelech (9:53), the daughter of Jephthah as well as his mother called a harlot (11:1), Manoah's wife (ch. 13), the mother of Micah (17:1–6), the concubine of the Levite (ch. 19), and the women of Shiloh (21: 15–25).

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[896] Fewell, "Judges," 76; L. R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 14; Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 181–6.

[897] For their business-oriented motivation, see Fewell, "Judges," 75–6; 80–2.

[898] The text mentions "his father's whole family" and "the tomb of Manoah, his father" (קבר מנוח אביו).

[899] See further, Fewell, "Judges," 74–6; 81–3.

[900] Butler rightly points out "a growing mood of failure on the human side despite the repeated faithful intervention from the divine side" (T. C. Butler, *Judges*, 99).

[901] Shamgar is called Shamgar ben Anath (Shamgar, son of Anath), the female name; if Anath may or may not be a real person, she might be associated with a warrior Canaanite goddess, implying that this is an epithet of Shamgar, who was a mighty hero like Anath or favored by Anath (S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 59). Still, it is remarkable that his identity follows not a male but a female name not only once but twice (3:31; 5:6).

Therefore our primary question arises again regarding the role of Samson's mother: how should she be understood in line with this above-mentioned perspective, set within the larger narrative framework of the book of Judges? The appearance of the predominant female character again has a profound significance, especially considering that she is the mother of the last judge. Compared to charismatic Deborah and Jael, however, she does not exactly hold a key role: she is veiled, reticent, staying in the background, being content with only manipulation or a hidden influencer.[902]

If we seek the polar opposite of Samson's mother outside the book of Judges, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, certainly fills the bill.[903] Hannah takes her own initiative to solve her infertility by appealing to God and it is her decision to dedicate her son to God in return for the gift of a son. Like Samson's mother, she also devotes *all his life* to YHWH (1 Sam 1:11, 22, 28) but in a different manner. She completely renounces her influence over Samuel by bringing him to the house of YHWH in Shiloh immediately after he is weaned.[904] Then God would have a chance to redeem his failure: he anoints a human-dedicated child as his agent, not from *birth* but from childhood, free from parental control, or more specifically a mother's influence.

So far we have examined how the mother of Samson is unilaterally chosen to meet the divine messenger and receive instructions for a hero God appoints and elects. The woman shows sharp insight into the messenger's authority and swift compliance with divine commands as opposed to Manoah who is skeptical and lacks perception. She is neither passive nor submissive but behaves wisely keeping outward conformity. Further, she is very manipulative in dealing with the divine message: she hides her disadvantage; monopolizes certain information; makes her

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[902] It is Manoah who comes to the fore as a main actor who leads scenes and conversations.

[903] The birth of Samuel shares the motif of the barren wife and consecration with the birth of Samson, which shall be fully discussed in the following chapter.

[904] Cf. also Moses' mother.

future son a lifelong Nazirite on her own initiative. Hence her character is very ambiguous. On the one hand, her prominence and predominates over her husband is highlighted as evidenced by God's approval of her manipulation. Her conduct, on the other hand, is motivated by her own self-interest. We are open to the possibility that, as a mother, she had a negative influence on her son. This suggests a plausible interpretation of her literary function within the larger narrative framework of Judges. The dominant female character emerges right at the end of the book to serve a different role from Deborah and Jael, the earlier warrior-like female heroes, particularly Deborah who is an ideal mother of Israel. This woman's power goes against this model. Under her influence, Samson acts like an immature adult, sometimes rebelling against her. On the other hand, he is obsessed with sexual relationships with (foreign) women, with Delilah in particular, which can be interpreted as a symbolic expression of his desire to be a separate being, independent of his parents.

Chapter 9   Hannah's Early Investment in her Child's Success (the Birth of Samuel)

The final woman character this research journey arrives at regarding the HB birth narratives is Hannah, the mother of Samuel. The Hannah narrative, centering around Samuel's birth, is set at the beginning of the first book of Samuel, from 1:1 to 2:21, which stands out as a self-contained unit. The story unfolds around Samuel's parents, especially Hannah, the mother. This unit might be divided into two smaller blocks: the main story-line is made up primarily of chapter 1 followed by the remainder — 1 Sam 2:1–21. The former concludes with Hannah's fulfilling her vow by dedicating her weanling son, Samuel to YHWH, whilst the latter ends with the fulfilment of Eli's blessing: YHWH allows Hannah additional births. In addition, the storytelling encompasses 1 Sam 2:22ff–3:21 — the story of Samuel's youth and his divine call as part of the larger narrative cycle.

Hannah's vow and fulfillment provided in chapter 1 are the prerequisite for the specific situation of Samuel's presence, separated from his family, at the sanctuary in Shiloh with Eli — the high priest. Moreover, various themes appearing in 1 Sam 1:1–2:21 serve as threads that connect with the remaining stories in the book of Samuel, beyond chapter 3.[905] Robert M. Polzin views the birth of Samuel as foreshadowing the rise of kingship in Israel, arguing that the details of the family story about Samuel's birth are imbued with "sociopolitical overtones": "how and why God agreed to give Hannah a son" corresponds to "how and why God agreed to give Israel a king."[906] Keith Bodner posits a similar view, suggesting that "Hannah's womb opens with the birth of Samuel who in turn will open the door to the birth of the monarchy in Israel" and Hannah's wish for a son alludes to the people's desire to have a king.[907] In sum,

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[905] R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist.* See Eslinger, Lyle M. *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1–12*, BLS 10 (Sheffield: Almond Press), 1985.

[906] R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist,* 25–6.

[907] Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary*, HBM 19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 11–2, 19.

most biblical scholars have agreed that Samuel's birth narrative prefigures the rise of the monarchy. As Antony Campbell points out, "The narrative texts of 1–2 Samuel are involved with events that brought radical change for the people of Israel and their understanding of themselves: the old tribal era was replaced by the centralized government of a monarchy."[908] On the contrary, David Jobling argues that the story of Hannah moves "toward the restoration of judgeship" rather than towards monarchy.[909]

Samuel is "the last major judge who acts as both religious and military leader and who also administers justice for the people" in Fewell's expression.[910] Samuel himself lists his name together with other judges (1 Sam 12:11). Within the wider scope of the narrative plot, the crucial role of Samuel is as a kingmaker, not once but twice in his life, anointing first Saul then David.[911] Samuel's supreme authority to establish a monarchy and install a proper king is ensured by his association with the Shiloh sanctuary, since it enshrines the ark of the covenant — the symbol of YHWH's presence—and functions as the center of the tribal confederation.[912] Samuel's divine election to lead the covenant people is confirmed by the fact that his extraordinary birth and dedication were predetermined at this sacred place through YHWH's implicit consent to Hannah's prayer and vow. We can see the emphasis on ritual worship in the story. Elkanah and Hannah's habitual pilgrimage to Shiloh[913] (1:3, 7, 21) indicates the pious

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[908] Antony F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, FOTL 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27; For the issue of the Deuteronomistic redaction, see Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992); T. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Cynthia Edenburg and Juha Pakkala (eds), *Is Samuel among the Deuteronomists: Current Views on the Place of Samuel in a Deuteronomistic History*, SBLAIL16 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013).

[909] D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 138, 140, 180.

[910] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 129.

[911] For the issue of sociocultural and historical background of the Samuel–Saul–David narrative, see Frank H. Polak, "Conceptions of the Past and Sociocultural Grounding in the Books of Samuel," in *History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures: A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi*, ed., Ian D. Wilson and Diana V. Edelman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 117–32.

[912] K. Bodner, *1 Samuel,* 14.

[913] R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 25; K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 13.

lives of Samuel's parents:[914] they are well qualified to be the parents of the charismatic hero

who will officiate at communal rituals (1 Sam 7:9–10; 11:5; 14:9–10 etc.).[915]

There is also the issue that the legitimacy of the monarch depends on the legitimacy of the

prophet who anoints him — the two are involved with each other.[916] While God anoints

prophets, prophets anoint the kings. When considering Samuel as a forerunner[917] of the

prophets who practiced roles that can put a brake on or intervene in the kingship as the

institutionalized hereditary system, the matter of legitimizing Samuel's authority is a crucial

issue. Therefore it is plausible that Samuel's birth story exists to legitimize his replacement of

Eli's line as well as his absolute authority as a divinely elected leader, and to support the

significant role of prophets in later periods.

A further issue scholars have noted is the discord between Samuel's name and the

explanation given for it (ותקרא את־שמו שמואל כי מיהוה שאלתיו, 1 Sam 1:20). The claim is that

the etymology is more suitable to the king Saul, שאול, and in consequence it is argued that the

original birth tale had been attributed to Saul.[918] Others like Driver and Tsevat suggest that the

explanation for Samuel's name should be understood not as etymology, but as an instance of

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[914] As distinct from Eli's two sons; See further Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 70–7.

[915] The recurring mention of ritual offering from distribution of sacrificial meals (1:4–5) to a detailed list of offering (A three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine) on the occasion of Hannah's bringing weaned Samuel to Eli (1:24–25) might imply the importance of sacrificial rituals. Notably, the decline of both the Elides and of Saul (15:15:10–23) is closely connected to the issue of the wrong sacrificial ritual.

[916] After Samuel, Ahijah, Elijah and Elisha engage in designating or dismissing kings, and Nathan contributes to Solomon's enthronement. Hence Campbell asserts also that the importance of the "prophetic role" is at the core of the Book of Samuel and the rise of Samuel has very important significance "as prophet to all Israel" (A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 35).

[917] Accepting Campbell's idea that "Samuel is the first of a series of forerunners leading to the phenomenon of classical prophecy in Israel" (A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 35).

[918] P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel*: *A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 62–63, 65–66; Morris Jastrow, "The Name of Samuel and the Stem שאל," *JBL* 19 (1900): 82–105 (63–64); Ivar Hylander, *Der literarische Samuel–Saul–Komplex (1. Sam. 1–15) traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell; Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1932), 11-39. Other scholars like Zakovitch ("A Study of Precise and Partial Derivations in Biblical Etymology," *JSOT* 15 [1980]: 31–50), Gordon (*I & II Samuel*), Polzin (*Samuel and the Deuteronomist*), J. P. Fokkelman (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*, vol IV, *Vow and Desire [I Sam. 1-12]* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993]), Campbell (*1 Samuel*), and Bodner (*1 Samuel*) object to this idea.

assonance or phonetic similarity.[919] Concurring with Driver, Amit goes one step further and regards the above assonance between שמואל and שאל to be an editorial technique that is intended to foreshadow a link between Samuel and Saul.[920] In fact the root שאל appears 7 times in 1 Sam 1–2.[921] Given a tendency to integrate this opening with the overarching themes of the book of Samuel, our birth narrative foreshadows not only Samuel's superseding the Elides, the birth of monarchy, and the birth of prophets, but also, by extension, David's replacement of Saul.[922]

The most intriguing aspect of this complex and multifaceted birth narrative of Samuel is that his mother, Hannah, acts as the key person among other characters. The whole narrative unfolds with her at the centre: she takes the initiative, makes a conditional vow and completes a vow, leads conversations, participates in sacrificial worship, and sings a song — or a hymn — of praise and gratitude. For these reasons, Carol Meyer calls this story the "Hannah narrative."[923] Other scholars like Klein and Amit place emphasis on Hannah's prominent voice as a woman.[924]

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[919] Samuel R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel : With an Introduction on Hebrew Palaeography and the Ancient Versions and Facsimiles of Inscriptions and Maps* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 16–7; Matitiahu Tsevat, "Die Namengebung Samuels und die Substitutionstheorie," *ZAW* 99 (1987): 250–4 (253).

[920] Y. Amit, "הוא שאל לה : A Unifying Allusion Some Methods of Literary Editing," *BM* 27 (1982): 238–43 [Hebrew].
    It is interesting that David is also foreshadowed in a similar vein: the whole odd episode about Saul's uncle and the donkeys (1 Sam 10:14–16) is full of the letters דוד. The word is of course in reference to the uncle (*dod*, דּוֹד), but can be a wordplay on the name David (דָּוִד) who will replace Saul, perhaps explaining why this strange figure is so often referred to in that episode.

[921] Nadav Na'aman, "Samuel's Birth Legend and the Sanctuary of Shiloh," *JNSL* 43/1 (2017): 51–61.

[922] Polzin rightly points out that the triumphant tone of the song of Hannah foreshadows King David's victory over Saul. He notes that the vocabulary of Hannah's song is similar to that of Psalm 18, which is regarded as a duplicated version of David's hymn concluding his life in 2 Sam 22. Hence Polzin argues that Hannah's song at initiation and David's hymn at the beginning of the book harmoniously "form a poetic *inclusio* [sic]" in support of the Deuteronomist's voice that flows coherently through the book of Samuel (R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 30–9).

[923] C. Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice": Reclaiming Female Agency," in *Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, ed., A. Brenner, FCB 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 93–104; = "The Hannah Narrative in Feminist Perspective," in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, eds., Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 117–26.

[924] Y. Amith,"'Am I Not More Devoted to You than Ten Sons?'[1 Samuel 1:8]: Male and Female Interpretations," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel*, ed., A. Brenner, FCB 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic

Bearing in mind the aforementioned thematic structure, motifs and expressions, this study will firstly scrutinize more narrowly how Hannah is characterized in this birth narrative (1 Sam 1:1–2:21), focusing on her autonomous and independent character as evidenced by her acts and speeches in comparison with the male characters, particularly her communication skills. Secondly, I will pay attention to the issue that it is none other than the mother who enabled her son's presence at Shiloh. The implication behind the dedication of her son and its meaning as well as the consequences shall be discussed in relation to the larger narrative complex. In addition, I will compare Hannah with the other women characters discussed in prior chapters in light of thematic continuity.

9.1 Men as Failure Model of Communication vs Hannah's Persuasive and Eloquent Speech

A brief summary of 1 Samuel chapter 1 is as follows.

Elkanah, a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim, of the hill-country of Ephraim,[925] has two wives. One is Hannah, who is his more beloved wife but barren, and the other is Peninnah, who has children.[926] Every year Elkanah goes up to the Shiloh sanctuary with his family to offer a sacrifice and to distribute portions of the sacrificial meals to them. Peninnah repeatedly irritates Hannah, "because YHWH had closed Hannah's womb" (1Sam 1:6). One day in Shiloh,

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Press, 1994), 68–76; L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel*, 77–92.

[925] מן־הרמתים צופים מהר אפרים (1:1b). Cf. Menahem Haran considers that Elkanah is of "Bethlehemite stock rather than an 'Ephraimite,'" and the place of his residence is the hill country of Ephraim (Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel An Inquiry Into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1978], 308; For dispute about his origin, see further David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 107.

[926] The text neither explicitly says her children are of Elkanah (ויהי לפננה ילדים, 1:2), nor informs how many they are but simply states "her sons and her daughters" (בניה ובנותיה, 1:4); their names are not given. For more discussions about their marriage, see Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," 136–7; Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke" in *Bible and Theory*: *Essays is Honor of Stephen D. Moore*, eds., K. Jason Coker and Scott S. Elliott (Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2020), 127–35 (here 130).

exhausted by recurring stress, Hannah cries and does not eat. After Elkanah's cold comfort to her, Hannah goes to pray while Eli the priest is sitting on his chair by the door post.[927] She makes a vow in wholehearted prayer: if YHWH grants her a son, she will in return dedicate the son to God for all his life and no razor shall ever come on his head. However, Eli misunderstands Hannah as being drunk and thus scolds her. After hearing her protest, Eli blesses her and wishes for her prayer to be answered. Having shed her grief, Hannah leaves the sanctuary; early in the morning they[928] worship before YHWH and return home. YHWH remembers Hannah: she gives birth to a son and names him Samuel, saying, "because I have asked him of YHWH." In the meantime Hannah does not go up to Shiloh for the yearly sacrifice, telling Elkanah that she will bring her child up there after weaning him. Then Hannah keeps her words. After the weaning, Elkanah and Hannah bring young Samuel to Eli, with a sacrificial offering. Hannah explains the whole story to Eli.

1 Sam 2:1–21 comprises several episodes: the song of Hannah (vv. 1–10), Samuel's remaining in Shiloh ministering to YHWH before Eli (v. 11), the evil conduct of Eli's two sons in dealing with the offering of YHWH (vv. 12–17), Samuel ministering before YHWH (v. 18), Hannah providing him with a little robe each year at the annual sacrifice (v. 19), Eli's blessing that YHWH would grant Hannah more offspring (v. 20), and its fulfillment: she gives birth to three sons and two daughters (v. 21).

Our text introduces four major characters at the very beginning: Elkanah, Hannah, Peninnah, and Eli (vv. 1–3). The presence of Eli along with his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, as priests at Shiloh (v. 3) provides background knowledge. Since the later episode of the misdeeds of

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[927] Of היכל יהוה (1:9) which is rendered often as the tabernacle or temple.
[928] וישכמו. It is uncertain whether the subject indicates Elkanah and all his family members or only Elkanah and Hannah.

these sons (2:12–17) is interwoven with Samuel's birth story, the introductory reference to Hophni and Phinehas indicates that the narrator already has in mind Samuel's future role and fate replacing the Elides.[929] Needless to say, Hannah is the key character in the story: she takes initiative by praying, and acts to place her son at the Shiloh sanctuary through her vow and dedication.

Hannah's initial problem of not having her own children is presented in contrast to Peninnah, her co-wife[930] who has already given birth to children. Peninnah's taunting of Hannah seems to be the prime mover in her taking initiative to resolve her childlessness. Yet Peninnah does not perform any important role in the later plotline; she never speaks in this narrative whereas Hannah is at the center of conversation with other main characters — Elkanah and Eli.[931] At least as depicted in the first part of the narrative, the male characters, Elkanah and Eli are portrayed as lacking two-way communication with Hannah. On the other hand, Hannah's communicative skills and her ability to problem-solve independently stand forth throughout the narrative. Let us examine Hannah's competences more in depth in comparison with these two male characters.

The first relationship to be examined is that with Elkanah, Hannah's husband. Given that the first actions that the narrative introduces are his *habitual* annual pilgrimage (v. 3) and his behaviour in distributing the sacrificial portions (v. 4), it is actually Elkanah who sparks off the confrontation between his two wives. The narrative context suggests that Peninnah's irritating Hannah is associated with Elkanah's *modus operandi*.

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[929] For discussion about the narrator's intention of placing the story of Hophni and Phinehas specifically here, see D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134–5; see also Fewell, "Hannah's Song," 201; idem, "When Hannah Met Luke," 130.

[930] Peninnah is defined as Hannah's צרה in Hebrew, meaning probably a rival, stemming for the root צרר. Yet it is also possible that here it might be used as a technical term that indicates simply a "co-wife." Klein argues, based on the earlier model of the patriarchal birth narratives (Sarah–Hagar; Leah–Rachel), Hannah is a primary wife and Peninnah a secondary: Elkanah took her because Hannah did not succeed in bearing children (L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Bible," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia.* 31 December 1999. Jewish Women's Archive. [Viewed on June 25, 2021] https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/hannah-bible).

[931] Despite various forms of communication between Hannah and Elkanha, Eli, and God, whether one-sided speech, conversation, or prayer, she never speaks to or has any conversation with Peninnah in the narrative.

<div dir="rtl">

ונתן לפננה אשתו ולכל־בניה ובנותיה מנות

ולחנה יתן מנה אחת אפים כי את־חנה אהב

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The above verses (1:4b–5a) are ambiguous: Elkanah used to give portions (מנות) to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters, but/and to Hannah he used to give one 'appāyim[932] portion (מנה אחת אפים) because/although it was Hannah whom he loved more.[933] The difficulty of understanding these verses lies within how we view the nuance of the word אחת (one) followed by אפים, an obscure double form, which is consequently related how we interpret the ki (כי)-clause: כי את־חנה אהב. If we read כי as "because," the plausible context may be that Elkanah probably displayed his partiality towards Hannah by openly giving meaningful portion[s] to her, maybe either a double portion[934] or a portion equal to theirs[935] or one generous portion[936] or a prime part of the meat.[937] Alternatively, if we read כי as "although," Elkanah actually only gave her *a single* portion.[938] In this context, the following sentence, ויהוה סגר רחמה (and YHWH had shut up her womb, v. 5b) may be invoked to provide the cause of his action: since Hannah had no children, Elkanah had to give her only a single portion although he loved her.[939] Then she would have felt more need to have her own child for her future economics.

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[932] The term takes a dual form literally meaning "two noses" or "faces." Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, LBI (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 72. Cf. 1 Sam. 25:23.

[933] Toshio Tsumura reads "two noses (of sheep) as one share," which indicate two heads of sheep. Viewing it in light of the Emar rituals where "the head of the sacrificed animal was treated as a favored part, reserved for the deity," he interprets it marking Elkanah's love and favor towards Hannah (D. T. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel,* 113–4).

[934] NASB; NRSV; JPS Tanak; NKJV; NIV, derived from Peshitta.

[935] P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 51–2.

[936] L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer," 84–5.

[937] KJV derived from the "choice portion" of the Targum (R. P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 73–4); T. D. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel,* 113–4.

[938] Or a single better portion, but not in quantity equal to Peninnah's.

[939] As RSV translates: "and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb."

In either case, Elkanah contributed to his wives' emotional distress. His equal distribution regardless of the number of children[940] or disparity in portion-giving[941] might have driven Peninnah's jealousy of Hannah. On the other hand, the disproportion of giving more portions to Peninnah and one single portion to Hannah, which is a fair distribution from his perspective, might be salt in the wound of her childlessness. Feelings of inferiority easily develop when there is comparison; all the more so because the place and occasion mean that many eyes are on them. As a result, Hannah could feel humiliated because her infertility is being talked about behind her back.[942] Fewell draws our attention to Shiloh as a reminder of the "degradation of women": it is a "holy prison camp for 400 young girls captured from Jabesh-Gilead"[943] and "200 young women had been betrayed by their community and abducted by the (nearly annihilated) male remnant of Benjamin";[944] location of ongoing sexual molestation or exploitation discovered through Hophni and Phinehas' mistreatment (1 Sam 2:22).[945] Thus, concurring with Fewell's observation, Shiloh is a meaningful locus involving (women's) "honor and shame."[946]

That the text emphasizes that Peninah's taunting her at this cultic center occurred not once but was repeated every year (v. 7) implies Elkanah's lack of sensitivity to or empathy for other people's situations and feelings. In other words, Hannah's initial infertility would not have mattered so much if it were not for his particular way of distributing the sacrificial portions. This was maybe not a deliberate slight by Elkanah, but it did serve as an annual reminder. Thinking in this way, Hannah's refusal to go to Shiloh *pro tem* after the birth of Samuel can be

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[940] In the sense that Elkanah gave Hannah one big share equal to Peninnah's.
[941] In the sense that Elkanah gave Hannah double portions or one prime portion.
[942] Appu's tale has a similar background, see Chapter 2.
[943] Fewell, "Hannah's Song," 200.
[944] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 130.
[945] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 130; D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134.
[946] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 130.

understood as her seeking to avoid her traumatic memory — the stress that evokes post-traumatic stress disorder.

Klein notes the fact that "Hannah never shows any envy of Peninnah." Applying René Girard's mimetic theory of desire,[947] she argues that Hannah is eager for a son but refuses to project such mimetic desire onto Peninnah who has children; rather, she "concentrates on her own desire" then "internalizes her pain by weeping and not eating, and by speaking her heart out to one whom she believes will listen."[948] Can Hannah's internalizing behavior be explained by the communication gap she suffers in relationship with Elkanah? The substance of her speeches in vv. 11, 16 is actually the release or explosion of her suppressed emotions. For Hannah, the most acute problem is not her infertility itself, but the situational distress triggered by Elkanah, as mentioned earlier. Hence Hannah's first reaction is rejecting food that not only comes from Elkanah, but also recalls the sacrificial meals (1:7),[949] rather than coming into direct conflict with Peninnah who has provoked her.[950] In this way Hannah demonstrates her resistance to Elkanah and urges him at the same time to sort out the problem. This draws Elkanah's attention but produces a disappointing result.

Indeed, Elkanah exemplifies multifaceted human nature: he loves Hannah but lacks thoughtful consideration or proper comfort. He says, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" (1:8) It

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[947] The mimetic dynamic is represented by the mimetic triangle–subject, model, and object of desire: subject observes a model and learns what to desire. That is because subject envies what the other (model) has but he or she lacks, that object is endowed with value and becomes the object of desire. In sum, People desire what others desire. Human desires are the product of this mimetic process. See René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); For the further study that applied Girard's theory, see J. Cheryl Exum, "Who's Afraid of 'the Endangered Ancestress'?" 91–113.

[948] L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Marginalized Victim or Social Redeemer," 86; In this regard, Hannah is distinguished from Rachel who envied Leah.

[949] The sacrificial meal can be linked to Hophni and Pinehas' injustice of abusing priestly authority in regard to every worshiper's sacrifice (2:13–14); see also D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134.

[950] Quite different from Sarah who afflicted Hagar.

is actually the first speech given by anyone in this narrative.[951] Elkanah seems to show his genuine concern for Hannah, born of affection, but clearly does not understand her emotional burden.[952] His successive three questions and one rhetorical question sound like he is pressing for her answer. Does he really not know the answers to his threefold why? His rhetorical question actually answers his own questions, persuading his wife to accept the answer already set.[953] It is worth noticing the unsatisfactory nature of the male attitude, in the HB birth narratives, in respect to the importance of carrying on the patriarchal family line. Women's precarious position especially demands that they have children who will take care of them in later years.[954] However, men are often uninterested in women's childless situation once they get an heir,[955] as observed by the cases of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, and now Elkanah. As we sensed from his statement, Hannah's childlessness does not bother Elkanah so that he does not interfere.

Given that Hannah does not answer him back but turns directly to God shortly afterwards, it is natural to reckon that Elkanah's attempts at comfort were not soothing but dissatisfying or even hurtful.[956] It is intriguing that Yairah Amit regards Elkanah's words of comfort as "egocentricity" and "high self-esteem" since he himself considers his presence with her better than her having children.[957] Klein goes even further arguing that Elkanah is blaming

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[951] Some scholars argued that it is a double-voiced speech: Hannah's lack of a son and desire for a son pertains to Israelites' lack of a king and desire for a king. See K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 16; R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 23, 26.

[952] Cf. Jacob's reply with anger to Rachel's plea (Gen 30:2).

[953] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel,*13.

[954] For the issue of sons' and daughters' duty of caring and supporting their mothers, see Marten Stol "The care of the elderly in Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian Period," in *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East*, 59–117 (esp. 72–80).

[955] Cf. Lot is even not concerned about perpetuating his family line; even the human race if he believed that all humans would be wiped out except his family.

[956] According to Alter, "The double-edged poignancy of these words is that they at once express Elkanah's deep and solicitous love for Hannah and his inability to understand how inconsolable she feels about her affliction of barrenness." R. Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 4.

[957] Y. Amit, "'Am I Not More Devoted to You than Ten Sons?'" 74–5. Jobling also notes the oddity of his words, saying, "The effort is not impressive one. If you wish to assure someone of your love, the line 'Are you

Hannah.[958] She then responds to him by not responding: silence is her method of expression.[959]

Contrastingly, Hannah reports to God her internal anguish — bitterness of soul (מרת נפש),[960] weeping sorely (בכה תבכה, 1:10).[961] These strong wordings that describe her emotional state indicate that Elkanah stimulated her internal feeling more negatively. Accordingly, instead of relying on or communicating with her husband, Hannah chooses to consult God: YHWH is the one who can solve the problem, not Elkanah. Although she will have to use an incomplete form of conversation — prayer, that is, a sort of monologue — with the invisible God, YHWH is *better* to her *than* her husband for communication. In this way, she works out her own problem for herself without Elkanah's help.

Eli is the second male character who fails to communicate with Hannah. Despite his position as high priest, he does not display keen insight: he misunderstands Hannah's action of prayer and accuses her of drunkenness. That Eli was able to see her lips moving indicates he was situated nearby (v.9). Nevertheless he falls into a bias rather than being an impartial observer. Is the woman who makes personal, long, and soundless prayers (vv. 12–13) to be regarded as drunk? Eli pays attention only to her externals rather than reading her broken heart; he criticizes first before knowing the background. One might presume this reflects somewhat gender-based discrimination.

Whereas Eli is introduced as a person hidebound in prejudice and lacking in perception, Hannah is shown as one who overwhelms the high priest, a person of higher position and status, with great eloquence. Hannah talks, undaunted, in front of him. She protests at his misunderstanding while practicing good manners towards this priest: she calls him by the

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not more to *me* than…?' seems much more promising than 'Am I not more to you…?'!" (D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 131)

[958] L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer," 90.

[959] Klein states Eli failed to make her speak (L. R. Klein, "Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer," 90).

[960] Cf. Naomi's calling herself "bitter," מרא (Ruth 1: 20–1).

[961] The use of infinitive absolute form along with the verb that has the same root intensifies its meaning.

honorific title "my lord" אדני (v. 15), while humbling herself through the self–effacing expression "your servant" אמתך (v. 16).[962] Her explanation is made in a relatively long and fully elaborated manner: she articulates clearly her situation and her thoughts. Thereupon Eli is convinced; Hannah succeeds in correcting his preconception. Hence, he started off with criticism but ends with a blessing, without even knowing the content of Hannah's prayer.[963]

The negative portrayal of Eli in comparison with Hannah becomes even more prominent later in his final scene that involves the birth of his grandson (1Sam 4:11–22). On hearing of the crushing defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, the deaths of his two sons, and the capture of the ark of God, Eli falls backward off his seat beside the gate[964] and dies of a broken neck, as if the narrator is expressing metaphorically his resignation from the glorious position.[965] Eli's caricatured physical appearance — old (זקן), heavy (כבד)[966] (v. 18), and almost blind (עיניו קמה ולא יכול לראות, v. 15b) — along with his tragicomic[967] movement at the moment of the death accords well with his previous image presented in his début on the stage: the high priest who lacks foresight, as well as misunderstanding someone's prayer as a drunken murmur. In addition, the expression "falling from the chair," ויפל מעל־הכסא (4:18) reminds us of his specific posture, "sitting on the chair," ישב על־הכסא (1:9) at his first encounter with Hannah, thus interconnecting two birth-related scenes. Eli's daughter-in-law gives birth to a son but dies

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[962] Hannah shows her respect to Eli in courteous language in v. 18 as well.

[963] Ironically the son who was born partly aided by his blessing replaces his line. See also Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Vow and the 'Popular Religious Groups' of Ancient Israel: A Philological and Sociological Inquiry*, JSOTSup 210 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic press, 1996), 78.

[964] His previous presence in a holy place meets an opposite downfall: in 1 Sam 1:9, Eli was sitting on his chair by the door-post of YHWH's house (על־מזוזת היכל יהוה), but in this scene he is sitting on his chair on the road (ישב על־הכסא [יד כ] יד ק) דרך) and dies beside the gate (יד השער) rather than beside the door-post (מזוזת).

[965] Polzin argues that the narrator's words are double-voiced. Eli's presence sitting on the priestly "chair" (כסא) resonates with a throne, a royal seat (e.g. 1 Kings 16:11). The narrator is making the point through such a royal overtone because the central matter of this book is a kingship (R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 23). See also J. Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis-Kings,* LHBOTS 454 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 135; Mark Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition,* BR (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 32.

[966] It might be also a phonetic pun of 'heavy' (chaved, כבד) and 'glory' (chavod, כבוד 4: 21).

[967] J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 19.

following childbirth,[968] which resonates with the downfall of the Elides. Her tragic delivery and ominous naming of the child Ichabod, meaning "the glory is departed from Israel," is juxtaposed with Hannah's joyful delivery in answer to her prayer and naming her child Samuel, saying "because I have asked him of the LORD." The former stands for God's abandonment of the Elides, whereas the latter for a divine blessing.

Hannah's pregnancy is understood as YHWH's answer to her prayer subject to her conditional vow of dedication on the birth of a son. Her eloquent speech acts as a convincing and persuasive negotiation with God, completed with success. The narrative minutely describes her desperate emotional state and how she pours out (שפך) her heart sincerely to God. For this, various expressions are employed: מרת נפש (bitterness of soul, 1:10),[969] בכה תבכה (wept sore, 1:10), עני אמתך (the affliction of your maidservant, 1:11),[970] קשת־רוח (hard of spirit, 1:15), ואשפך את־נפשי (I poured out my soul, 1:15), רב שיחי וכעסי (the abundance of my anguish and my vexation, 1:16). These intensified expressions of emotion, as enumerated above, through either the narrator's or Hannah' mouth, on the one hand elicit the readers' empathy with her, and on the other hand manifest her verbal communication skills that induce God to respond to her plea.[971] The narrator is also lavish in portraying Hannah's strong faith in or confidence about God's answer: she eats with no worries (1:18)[972] after hearing Eli's blessing.

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[968] The whole episode recalls Rachel's death in childbirth (Gen 35:16–20). In both cases, the comforting words of surrounding women/midwife are not effective and the dying mother gives an ill-sounding name: Benoni ("son of my sorrow") for Rachel's son and Ichabod ("the glory is departed from Israel") for Eli's grandson. However, in Rachel's case, Jacob renames Benoni as Benjamin ("son of the right hand" or "son of the south") and her death is not related to the ruin of the family.

[969] A similar expression is used to Naomi's lamentation of her misfortune (Ruth 1:20).

[970] Cf. Rachel's lamentation on her death in childbirth and the affliction Sarah on Hagar; cf. Exod 3:7 (Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis,* 77–8).

[971] Toshio Tsumura argues that Hannah's frequent calling of the "intimate name of the covenant, Yahweh" underlines her "persona; and intimate relationship" with YHWH (D. T. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel,* 122).

[972] As a reversed action of refusing to eat in v. 7; ותאמר תמצא שפחתך חן בעיניך ותלך האשה לדרכה ותאכל ופניה לא־היו־לה עוד (And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer [sad]." v. 18). ופניה לא־היו־לה עוד is the lectio difficilior; McCarter renders it as "…and no loger wore her [disconsolate] expression"; LXX adds the underlined parts "…and the woman went her way, and came to the [LXX^B her] lodging, and ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was no more sad."(…καὶ ἐπορεύθη ἡ γυνὴ εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτῆς καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ κατάλυμα αὐτῆς καὶ ἔφαγεν μετὰ τοῦ

The narrative's ambiguity, however, should not be overlooked. Eli is portrayed as a reflection of the complex spectrum of human nature, which is not bivalent but multivalent, and thus not entirely bad or entirely good. One may suggest that Hannah's pregnancy and childbirth could be attributed partly to Eli who supported her by his blessing (1:17).[973] That later God allows Hannah more offspring as Eli had wished (2:20–21) may support this idea. Then Eli who presides over the sanctuary, despite the ultimate decline of his priestly dynasty, implicitly takes on a mediating function between God and Hannah,[974] though *not* more than that. In later stories, he expresses affection for Samuel (3:1–9) and criticizes his two sons' wickedness (2:22–25). In terms of intermediator, we have seen that the divine messenger(s) herald(s) the birth of a son in the story of Abraham in Mamre and of Samson's parents.[975] Actually, God did not have to send his messenger to Hannah since she herself went to the center of divinity.[976]

It should be also noted that Hannah went up to Shiloh sanctuary privately and made *inaudible* prayers. She might have decided to share her innermost feelings only with God due to her earlier experience of difficulty communicating about her problem with Elkanah. Even when she explains her situation to Eli (vv. 15–16), she does not disclose what she prayed for; Eli knows the whole story only after she brings Samuel to him. What is even more remarkable is that Eli neither shows concern nor inquires as to the cause of her agony even after hearing her emotional state. Then another assumption may be possible too: Eli, being indifferent to and

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ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς); according to McCarter, perhaps by haplography after לְדַרְכָּהּ to MT Vorlage (P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 55).

[973] It is the only case the priest blesses an individual as Gordon states (R. P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel,* 75); D. J. Wiseman argues that Eli's expression "Go in peace!" may mean a conclusion or assurance that the negotiation was made successful (Donald J. Wiseman, ""Is It Peace?": Covenant and Diplomacy," *VT* 32/3 [1982]: 311-26 [here 324], with reference to D. T. Tsumura , *First Book of Samuel*, 122).

[974] And later also between God and Samuel (1Sam 3:9); Significantly, Eli is mentioned as one who "judged" Israel (והוא שפט את־ישראל ארבעים שנה, 1 Sam 4:18c).

[975] Cf. Gen 19 (Lot's case) not associated with birth annunciation but to an extent is tied to the later birth account of Lot's two daughters.

[976] In our story, a man of God (איש־אלהים) also appears but functions to curse the Elides (2:27–36) rather than to announce pregnancy and a birth of a son. This episode is narrated *after* the birth of Samuel who will eventually take up the place of Elides.

annoyed by Hannah, might have blessed her perfunctorily[977] and grudgingly to encourage her to go away. This idea is supported by Fewell's observation that Eli, dull, dim-sighted, and sedentary, can only care for himself and hardly listens to the concerns of others: he is a person "unwilling to do more" and "unable to do better."[978] No longer hearing a word from God, Eli is "morally incapable of doing the right thing."[979] In any case, neither Elkanah nor Eli display a persuasive way of talking: Elkanah speaks to Hannah as if he were interrogating her, while Eli commands her.

After giving birth to Samuel, Hannah completely takes the lead in the conversation, both with Elkanah (1:22) and Eli (1:26–28). Especially, considering Elkanah's habitual annual worship in Shiloh, Hannah's notification that she will not to go to Shiloh until the child is weaned[980] could be understood as defying the paterfamilias' authority. Nevertheless, Elkanah follows her opinion generously.[981] Moreover, he is not against her decision to dedicate Samuel permanently to God:[982] "Do what seems good in your eyes (עשי הטוב בעיניך)….only may YHWH establish His word." (1:23) First of all, the expression "to do in one's eyes" echoes the repeated refrain in Judges where "each man did what was good in his eyes." Further, it reminds us of Abraham's response to Sarah's complaint due to her conflict with Hagar (Gen 16:6).

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[977] According to Klein, Eli "utters easy platitudes that could apply to any person, any prayer" (L. R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 52).

[978] Fewell, "Hannah's Song" in idem, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 187–226 (here 205).

[979] Fewell, "Hannah's Song," 207.

[980] Bodner proposes that it reflects Hannah's "reluctance to give up" her son: she "delays in son's dedication" (K. Bodner, *1 Samuel,* 23). However, if Samuel was given to the Shiloh sanctuary before he was weaned, finding a wet-nurse and other practical difficulties would arise. Moreover, neither Eli nor his sons seem like the kind of men who would cope well with an unweaned child. Hence it is plausible that Hannah's conduct rather serves to indicate that she did not neglect basic duty as a mother. Or simply Samuel was too young to endure a long trip.

[981] Jobling makes an interesting point related to this issue (D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 133):

At the time of the next annual Shiloh festival — after Samuel is born , but when he can scarcely be more than three months old — Elkanah assumes that the whole family will be going to the festival and that they will take the baby to the shrine to fulfill Hannah's vow. Perhaps this assumption is dictated by a desire to get back as soon possible to the way things were before Samuel arrived !

[982] Or perhaps it would not have been a big deal for him to renounce Samuel for he has already children to succeed him.

However, here Elkanah's speech[983] leads to a peaceful and positive partnership in support of his wife. Hannah might have used Elkanah's love to manipulate him in order to complete her vow that she had taken upon herself without his consent.

Hannah's independence is highlighted when she brings up Samuel to Eli. It is Hannah who explains the story to him in person rather than making Elkanah, the paterfamilias, speak for her. Carol Meyers correctly observes Hannah's "dialogic centrality,"[984] while analyzing the accounts of speech recorded in 1 Sam 1:

> Hannah is the only character in that chapter to be part of each of these dialogic episodes: six times she is the speaker (to God, Eli, Samuel and Elkanah) and four times she is addressed by another (twice by Elkanah and twice by Eli).[985]

By assigning Hannah as the subject, according to Meyers, and also the addressee of diverse speeches, the narrator gives salience to her "distinctive role" in the stories.[986] Meyers also emphasizes Hannah's "integral role in the sacrificial process." LXX[987] has a longer version which seems to lay stress on Elkanah's existence: Hannah goes up to Shiloh *with him* together, and Samuel is with *both* parents;[988] *they* bring the offerings but the principal agent of sacrificing is Elkanah.[989] Yet MT puts more focus on Hannah as the main actor:

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[983] Cf. Keith Bodner suggests it may be an enigmatic speech implying a negative notion; his speech is double-voiced possibly representing God's voice to his people on demanding a king (K. Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 16, 24).

[984] C. Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice," 100.

[985] C. Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice," 99.

[986] "Hannah is the only character in that chapter to be part of each of these dialogic episodes: six times she is the speaker (to God, Eli, Samuel and Elkanah) and four times she is addressed by another (twice by Elkanah and twice by Eli)" (C. Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice," 99–100). Hannah's song throughout ten verses (1 Sam 2: 1–10) underpins such "dialogic centrality."

[987] And also 4QSam[a]. See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 56–7.

[988] καὶ <u>ἀνέβη μετ' αὐτοῦ</u> εἰς Σηλωμ ἐν μόσχῳ τριετίζοντι καὶ ἄρτοις καὶ οιφι σεμιδάλεως καὶ νεβελ οἴνου καὶ <u>εἰσῆλθεν</u> εἰς οἶκον κυρίου ἐν Σηλωμ καὶ <u>τὸ παιδάριον μετ' αὐτῶν</u> καὶ <u>προσήγαγον</u> ἐνώπιον κυρίου (And <u>she went up with him</u> to Selom with a calf of three years old, and loaves, and an ephah of fine flour, and a bottle of wine: and she entered into the house of the Lord in Selom, and the child with <u>them</u>. 1 Sam 1:24); see further, Samuel R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 21; Carol Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice," 100; P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 56–7.

[989] καὶ <u>προσήγαγον</u> ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ <u>ἔσφαξεν ὁ πατὴρ</u> αὐτοῦ τὴν θυσίαν ἣν <u>ἐποίει</u> ἐξ ἡμερῶν εἰς ἡμέρας τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ <u>προσήγαγεν</u> τὸ παιδάριον καὶ <u>ἔσφαξεν</u> τὸν μόσχον καὶ <u>προσήγαγεν Αννα ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ παιδαρίου</u> πρὸς Ηλι

And when she had weaned him, <u>she took him up</u> (ותעלהו) with her, along with a three-year-

old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine; and <u>she brought him</u> (ותבאהו) to the house

of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then <u>they slew</u> (וישחטו) the bull, and <u>they</u>

<u>brought</u> (ויביאו) the child to Eli. (1 Sam 24–25 RSV)

The uses of the plural subjects for the verbs of v. 25 underpin the idea that Hannah participated

in this cultic ritual. Meyers understands that the MT version is more appropriate for Hannah's

prominence in the narrative. She continues, "Hannah's autonomy in making a vow at Shiloh is

authenticated by the fact that pilgrimages and concomitant votive acts are two of the most

characteristic religious acts of women as observed in ethnographic research."[990]

Another plausible assumption beyond Meyers' opinion might be the narrator's emphasis

on the solidarity of Hannah and Elkanah, despite his initial failure to understand her: once

things get under way it all goes smoothly, in contrast to most other birth narratives where a

lack of unity is often found among married couples. For example, when associated with

offering or sacrificing events, Manoah alone undertakes the task;[991] his wife does not inform

her husband fully as to the terms of the annunciation. It is Abraham alone who is under the

spotlight in greeting the visitors; Sarah is marginalized by cooking and overhearing behind the

stage.[992] On the other hand, the main agent in the sacrifice in our narrative, at least according

to the MT, is the woman.[993] In addition, both husband and wife harmoniously share the

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And <u>they went</u> before the Lord and <u>his father slew</u> his offering which <u>he offered</u> from year to year to the Lord; and <u>he brought</u> near the child, and <u>he slew</u> the calf; and <u>Anna the mother of the child went</u> to Heli (1 Sam 1:25).

[990] C. Meyers, "Hannah and Her Sacrifice," 102–3.

[991] Manoah might be an inversed case since the narrator tries to exclude him from the divine project, making him as a foil for his wife. Contrastively, Elkanah demonstrates far more pious character, believing in YHWH's intervention, and willing to trust Hannah's faith. Notwithstanding his earlier failure of understanding her emotional burden, the narrator seems to attempt to incorporate the father figure into the divine plan as well within a larger framework.

[992] Elsewhere in other birth narratives, there are often discords between husband and wife, for example, Rachel versus Jacob, Rebekah versus Isaac; or the father figure is almost absent in Moses' birth narrative.

[993] In doing so, the narrator sheds a positive light on Hannah as one who not only keeps promises but also returns God's favor by presenting sacrifices.

religious activities — vow and sacrifice. In this regard, "*his* vow" (נדרו) in v. 21[994] may serve a role in bridging Elkanah and Hannah: Hannah does not act arbitrarily but her vow is supported by Elkanah. According to the laws in Numbers 30:1–16 that provide parameters to understand the scope of a woman's vow, a husband can annul his wife's vow on the day he heard of it.[995] Elkanah, by doing nothing on hearing Hannah's vow, tacitly reinforces her pledge.[996] This may throw a sidelight on her competence in obtaining effectively consent and cooperation from her husband and, by extension, modifying his earlier behavior.

Whereas male characters are represented as a model of failed communication, Hannah, by her own efforts, elicits agreement with her plan from Elkanah and blessing from Eli through her skillful, convincing, and eloquent speech. She makes her own decisions independently and leads them to listen to her and follow what she suggests. That Hannah is her own mistress is particularly noticeable considering it was a male-centered patriarchal society. Moreover, God is no exception in relation to her. On the strength of the honest expression of her emotion in prayer and a drastic proposal, Hannah achieves what she desires — a son. We will discuss the issue of her vow and dedication further in the next section.

9.2 Mother's Ambition and Renunciation

Many biblical scholars have focused on the positive and active aspect of Hannah based on her sincere attempt to resolve her childlessness and fulfillment of her vow. Hence she was highly esteemed as either a woman of faith or a devoted and ideal Israelite mother. Indeed, the second

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[994] See further J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 61–4.
[995] So can a father annul his unmarried daughter's vow (Num 30:4–6 [Eng 3–5]) .
[996] Although it is not certain to what degree the passages in Numbers at the legal level are applicable to our cases at the literary level. See also D. Toshio Tsumura , *First Book of Samuel*, 129.

half of the narrative deals elaborately with how she keeps her word[997] and brings her weaned child to the Shiloh sanctuary, culminating with her song of thanksgiving.[998] Outwardly Hannah's vow of dedication and its fulfillment appear to be motivated by pure piety. However, the issue is more complex than that. This section offers a counter-reading that may challenge the aforementioned dominant readings, raising the questions: In what context has Hannah placed her child in Shiloh? Who benefits from this living dedication? How has the mother's renunciation of the young child affected him?

The Bible as well as extra-biblical sources report various stories of divine oaths made by male main characters such as Keret in the Ugaritic epic,[999] Jacob,[1000] and Jephthah. As a woman character in particular, Hannah is prominent as one who has an elaborate story

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[997] Hannah's remembering and fulfilling her vow echoes her having asked God to remember and not to forget her (וזכרתני ולא־תשכח את־אמתך, 1:11).

[998] Often compared to Mary's Magnificat. For further discussion see, Joan E. Cook, *Hannah's Desire, God's Design: Early Interpretation of the Story of Hannah*, JSOTSup 282 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 102–6; Walter Brueggemann, *Great Prayers of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 24–35.

[999] In the context of a childless situation–extinction of dynasty, the Ugaritic Epic narrative Keret can be noted: his seven wives had died without granting him an heir. The depiction of Keret's *weeping* and the following actions of sacrificial offerings according to El's instructions (CAT 1.14: II 12–26; III 55–IV 8) are reminiscent of Hannah. In compliance with El's instructions in his dream vision, Keret sent out an expedition to fetch Huraya as a bride who would grant him numerous offspring. On his journey of three days, when passing by a shrine of Asherah, the consort of El, Keret makes a vow to goddess Asherah that he would present excessive gold and silver–"double her [probably Huraya's price or weight] in silver, and triple in gold" (CAT 1.14: IV 34–43), if his mission would succeed. Yet Keret forgets his vow therefore Asherah afflicts him with illness. William F. Albright, "A Vow to Asherah in the Keret Epic," *BASOR* 94 (1944): 30–1; Marjo C. A. Korpel, "Asherah outside Israel," in *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah,* ed. Bob Becking (et al), Biblical Seminar 77 (London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 127–50 (here 137). For further detail about the epic narrative of Keret, see Simon B. Parker (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, SBLWAW 9 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 9–48; William W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, eds., *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, vol. 1 of COS, 333–43; Marjo C. A. Korpel, "Asherah outside Israel," 137; R. S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch,* esp. 61–82.

[1000] After the dream revelation at Bethel, Jacob makes a vow (Gen 28:10–22) to God that he would offer a full tenth and make the place he has set up for a pillar as the house of God in return for protection. However, Jacob seemed to forget his vow or delayed its fulfillment; although he could have fulfilled his vow immediately after his return, he did not. Only after God recalls his vow does he carry it out (Gen 35:1–15). The arrangement of God's awakening to his vow just after the rape of Dinah and the resultant revenge of her brothers—the *Shechem massacre*—may cause readers to presume that the tragedy is owing to Jacob's nonfulfillment of his vow. For more comparative studies between the Jacob narrative and the Ugaritic epic of Keret and Aqhat, see R. S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch,* 61–7, 69, 73–81.

Koowon Kim regards the Hannah narrative as the incubation type-scene that has appeared in ANE literature, while comparing it to Ugaritic Keret and Aqhat narratives (Koowon Kim, *Incubation as a Type-Scene in the Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories: A Form-Critical and Narratological Study of KTU 1.14 I-1.15 III, 1.17 I-II, and 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11*, VTSup 145 [Leiden: Brill, 2011]).

involving a vow. In the sense that the vow-maker offers his or her own child upon condition that God grants the wish, Hannah is analogous to Jephthah. He is representative of a biblical character who kept his vow but in a negative sense. Jephthah's desire for victory in battle drives him to make a reckless and indefinite vow entailing human sacrifice and an unspecified and unpredictable victim. His vow, probably having been made abruptly, is fulfilled reluctantly, as it incurs the death of his own daughter (Judg 11:29–40).[1001] However, Hannah's vow is definite: she wishes for a son and offers that same son. Interestingly, her object of desire and object of the votive offering are same.

Moreover, Hannah designates precisely a *son*[1002] — not an ordinary son but a privileged son marked out by her vow of dedication.[1003] To segregate Samuel from his father's house indicates that Hannah avoids a potential competition over inheritance between Peninnah's children and her son. The conflict around family inheritance is absent even after Hannah has more offspring. Therefore we can infer that leaving offspring is not Hannah's primary interest; rather, she desires a special son through whom she earns her revenge for her feelings of inferiority which were fueled by Elkanah's distribution of the sacrificial offering and the resultant taunting of Peninnah.

Given the intrusion of the misdeeds of Hophni and Phinehas in a public matter into Hannah's story as well as the fact that Hannah is presented as "one of Israel's poets and singers," thus "in the company of Miriam and Deborah, women who also sang triumph-songs and were

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[1001] Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 72–101; Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is not voluntary but in obedience to the divine order, which does not lead to the real death of Isaac but is replaced by an animal sacrifice (Gen 22:1–19).

[1002] Rachel uses a term בנים (Gen 30:1)that may mean any children, not necessarily a male child; Sarah does not utter that she desires a son but her expression אבנה ממנה ("I shall be built up through her", Gen 16:2) may imply such a desire, if it can be considered as a denominative verb from בֵּן (son).

[1003] The details of her plan how to dedicate him is revealed only after Samuel was born (v. 22). At any rate, making her weanling son grow under the tutelage of the high priest at the religious center is equivalent to ensuring him a promising future.

leaders in Israel,"[1004] Jobling shifts Hannah's desire from being confined to the realm of "private need" to the "public sphere."[1005] He points out that Hannah's vow "opens up another possibility, that what she wants is a son *in the service of YHWH,* a son being prepared for a position of leadership in Israel."[1006] Having witnessed "the rottenness of the priestly regime" and being aware of "sexual exploitation," says Jobling, Hannah may have responded "only by doing what is right in her own eyes": her dedication of her son can be interpreted as a way of protesting the religious, political corruption and "intervening in the appalling situation there" while desiring "fundamental system change" (for the benefit of women).[1007]

Notably, it is a *living* dedication, so the 'life' of the child is a crucial issue, as supported by her recurrent utterances associated with life, "all the days of his *life*" (כל־ימי חייו 1:11), "as long as he *lives*" (כל־הימים אשר היה, 1:28). In this regard, there is an interesting contrast between Hannah's dedication and Samson's mother's: Samson's mother marks his lifelong dedication by referring to his death ("until his *death,*" Judg 13:7), whereas Hannah does by speaking of Samuel's whole *life.* In addition, Hannah's insistence on keeping her child until he is weaned has a close affinity with the preservation of life since nursing is indeed a life-giving act as a minimal duty imposed upon mother. Viewed in this light, Hannah's emphasis on her dedication of Samuel for *all his life* signifies his secure position at Shiloh sanctuary as long as possible. This can be interpreted as a continual warrant for his future as well as for her status as a mother of the social and religious influencer.

Socio-economic aspects may help to elucidate her unusual conduct of such a vow and dedication. Shiloh was a considerably important religious center that has, in textual terms, a

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[1004] Jobling also makes a point that this leads her dedication to be understood as "an act of leadership on a par with the defeat of the Canaanites or even with the crossing of the Sea!" D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 136.

[1005] D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 135–6; 180.

[1006] (Italics author's). D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 132.

[1007] D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 134–5; 180.

particular significance as the home of the ark for Israel's tribal confederacy.[1008] As Mark Leuchter points out, Samuel's authority is closely "associated with the legacy of the Shiloh sanctuary."[1009] Indeed, Shiloh is mentioned not once but twice when Samuel is confirmed as YHWH's prophet over all Israel (3:19–4:1).[1010]

ויסף יהוה להראה בשלה כי־נגלה יהוה אל־שמואל בשלו בדבר יהוה

And YHWH continued to appear at Shiloh for YHWH revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh through the word of YHWH. (1 Sam 3:21)

Conceivably there might be other options but she chose a very specific location, the Shiloh sanctuary,[1011] and none other than the high priest there. Jobling rightly points out that "Hannah prays close to where Eli the chief priest is standing, and he takes notice of her. Perhaps she intends him to."[1012]

Therefore Hannah's sending Samuel to Shiloh under the tutelage of the high priest immediately after weaning amounts to a mother's provision of the opportunity for her son to

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[1008] Cf. Bethel is said to keep the Ark of the Covenant according to Judg 20:27; Moshe Weinfeld suggests that "Shiloh was renowned for its ancient priesthood descending from Egypt," pointing out that the Egyptian "name of Pinhas, son of Eleazar officiating in Shiloh (Josh 22:13, 30–31)" supports this assumption. (Moshe Weinfeld, *The Place of the Law in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VTSup 10 [Leiden: Brill,2004] 19–31).

[1009] Mark Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition,* 47.

[1010] Otherwise to accentuate Samuel's prominence in connection with 1 Sam 3:1; even in Shiloh where vision and theophany were rare under Eli's leadership, he receives the divine call. However, we should not overlook the fact that Shiloh sanctuary is described as YHWH's house (בית־יהוה, 1:7, 24; 3:15). In other words, if Samuel had not been in Shiloh–YHWH's house, he wouldn't have experienced the theophany; see also, M. Leuchter, *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition*, 34.

[1011] See Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 131. It is worth noticing that Na'aman proposed a wordplay between "Hannah's request of [sic] a child from YHWH" and the place of Šilo: -ō, a suffix common to toponym is probably attached to *qitl* formation of š'l (שאל). Na'aman rejects the idea that Samuel's birth story originally belonging to Saul. since Saul has no connection with Shiloh. Nevertheless he opines the frequent appearance of the root שאל in 1 Sam 1–2 should not be disregarded. He takes a stand that the interplay between Samuel and Saul as Amit insists ("הוא שאל לה") is open to possibilities. Considering Samuel's later position at Shiloh strengthening his substantial authority, advent of kinship of monarchy, and his role of anointing Saul, then David over Saul, I admit both Na'aman and Amit's view: שאל on the one hand might put emphasis on Shiloh "the place of oracular inquiry," and on the other hand, it interacts with Saul, the first king of the monarchy. See further, N. Na'aman, "Samuel's Birth Legend and the Sanctuary of Shiloh."

[1012] D. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 132. In a sense that a woman is approaching a man of power, Hannah is analogous to Abigail (1Sam 25).

be offered a place for some sort of religious education or training[1013] at the earliest stage —

the prerogative of a very select group of people. This can be likened to quickly climbing the

career ladder without a solo effort. In this sense, Hannah's 'vow' might be a very smart device

or an effective excuse so that Eli cannot refuse to admit Samuel into this religious center.[1014]

If this dedication is understood on a private level, Hannah may achieve social honour and

prestige through her son's advancement in life, giving her a sense of superiority over Peninnah,

who had mocked her childlessness. In addition, given that Hannah is permanently cut off from

a certain prestige because she has not provided Elkanah with the firstborn male child, her only

other option for such social prestige is for Samuel to have another means of social stature.

Moreover, to have a successful son means to ensure greater financial security in her old age. If

her implicit intention is "political protest" on a public level, Samuel, "ensconced in the most

important cultic center in the tribal confederacy," may learn as quickly as possible all the

necessary lessons to be a leader, to "become the alternative to the corrupt priestly house of Eli,"

as Fewell claims.[1015] Her ambition, whether worldly or communal, to let her son reach the

highest social position is implicit in the language she uses: "and he shall *abide there forever*"

(כל־הימים אשר היה ,v. 22bβ); "as long as he lives he is *lent*[1016] to YHWH." (וישב שם עד־עולם

הוא שאול ליהוה ,v. 28aβ).[1017] In short, Samuel is a deposit for her long-term investment, which

reflects the fact that Hannah made a very shrewd deal with God.

[1013] It is a reasonable assumption given that Shiloh was a sanctuary, the center for cultic activities and pilgrimage.

[1014] A worthy mention is Joan Cook who notes Hannah makes her request "in a *public* place and time" [italic mine] (Joan E. Cook, *Hannah's Desire, God's Design,* 120).

[1015] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 130–1.

[1016] JPS translates clearly indicates that Hannah 'lends' him to the Lord.

[1017] Followed by the narrator's comment "and *he* worshipped YHWH *there*" (וישתחו שם ליהוה, v. 28b), according to MT text (So NIV KJV, NASB, JPS 1917) ; "*they* worshipped…" (JPS 2nd ed., NKJV, RSV, REB, Pesh., Vug.) See T. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel,* 134; P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 57–8. On the LXX textual variants in 1:28b and 2:11a, see Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel,* 22–3.

In regard to Hannah's renunciation of her child, the narrative presents a textual ambivalence: on the one hand, it praises explicitly a mother's self-sacrifice; on the other hand, it criticizes it, in a relatively implicit way, for producing Samuel's lack of any suitable parental role model. Let us first deal with the former aspect, which sheds light on the positive aspect of Hannah's relinquishment of a mother's rights.

Once Hannah sends Samuel to Shiloh, she distances herself from child-rearing and education. Instead, Eli acts in *loco parentis*,[1018] and ultimately God takes responsibility as his father. The expression "and the child Samuel *grew before YHWH*" (ויגדל הנער שמואל עם־יהוה 1 Sam 2:21b) underscores that YHWH, not his parents, is the principal agent of his education. Therefore the substantial issue of the call of Samuel is that he grew up at the sanctuary in Shiloh regulated by divine rearing, while physically and mentally separated from his family.

From God's perspective, we might argue that he learned from the previous failure: Samson whom God elected and sanctified before birth was in all probability ruined by his parental upbringing as discussed in the preceding chapter. So this time he makes an attempt at reversal: God is coerced into adopting a child — one whom not he himself but the mother voluntarily, at *her* will, sanctified before birth; only after he is certain that the child grew up secluded religiously, free of parental control and influences, does God call him (1 Sam 3:1–14). The repetitive use of נער (lad/boy) alone or with the verb גדל (ויגדל הנער, the boy grew up) supports this assumption (1 Sam 1:24; 2:11, 21, 26; 3:1, 19).[1019] The result is presented in the

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[1018] In 1 Sam 3:6, Eli calls Samuel "my son" (בני).

[1019] Although we do not precisely know about the age of נער. Cf. Gen 21:17–20 indicating Ishmael, Gen 22:12 for Isaac, Gen 25:27 for Esau and Jacob, Gen 37:2; 41:12 for Joseph; Gen 43:8; 44:30–34 for Benjamin; Gen 48:16 for Ephraim and Manasseh; Exod 2:6 for Moses; 13:5, 7–8, 12, 24 for unborn Samson. See further Serge Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1–8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives,* BZAW 342 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 63–4, 68; S. Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77–95. Wilson opines "1 Sam 3 narrates the transition of the boy Samuel into the man Samuel" (S. Wilson, ibid, 91). If this is the case, the episode of the call of Samson is comparable to Samson's tearing the lion–a rite de passage that he undergoes in order to become an adult, upon the spirit of God, as explained earlier in chapter 8.

concluding remarks in 1 Sam 3:19–4:1: Samuel is evaluated very positively as an extraordinary prophet over all Israel. Viewed in this light, God implements Hannah's will. The narrator's statement that Hannah brings Samuel a little robe (1 Sam 2:19) at her annual visit with Elkanah to Shiloh, might have been made to exonerate her from potential charges of orphaning her son or neglecting parental duties: she offered — at the very least — ongoing support, thus not breaking completely the parent–son bond.

Yet at the same time, there is a criticism of a subtext questioning if Hannah is really an ideal mother. Has Samuel ever wished to live and grow up without a family? Wouldn't he have actually yearned for a mother's affection? For this discussion, the double-edged nature of Hannah's nursing her own child until he is weaned (1 Sam 1:22–24) should be taken into consideration. On the one hand, Hannah's conduct can be understood to form a close bond between mother and son, thus stressing her performing a mother's minimal duty as I pointed out earlier. On the other hand, considering that an average period of breastfeeding for Israelite women is estimated to have been around three years,[1020] sending away such a young child reflects she did not concern herself with the importance of the emotional nurturing of her child;[1021] otherwise she reckoned that the benefits outweighed the costs. It is worth noting that

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[1020] C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve,* 151; Mayer I. Gruber, "Breast-Feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia," *JANESCU* 19 (1989): 61–83; H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 191–242, esp. 202, 237, 415, 543. The educational instruction made by scribe *Any* in the Ancient Egyptian Literature which dates from the Twenty-First or Twenty-Second dynasty reports "Her breast in your mouth for three years." (Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Reading*, vol. 2 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976; 2nd ed. 2006], 135–46 [141]).

[1021] While scholars reason Hannah might have nursed Samuel for two to three years, Meyer Gruber argues the actual nursing period lasted for a very long time on the assumption that a child at a very early age couldn't have been sent and presented to the temple service (Mayer I. Gruber, "Breast-Feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia, 66–7). However, Gruber's speculation is not very convincing since there is no implication at all in the text that the nursing was prolonged. Rather, we should take into consideration the period Hannah remained barren prior to the delivery of Samuel as well as her five childbirths after Samuel. This is based on woman's usual reproductive cycle and the fact that woman's ovulation is generally suppressed while fully breastfeeding, although there are exceptional cases. Thus with lactational amenorrhea (absence of menstruation) and the temporary postnatal infertility, it is more plausible that Samuel was suckled for a normal period length up to three years.

this can be compared to Moses, whose mother renounced him and then became involved as his wet-nurse until he was weaned, with the question: Did Moses want to be Pharaoh's grandson?

Coming back to the subject, how should we interpret this move — from home to Shiloh sanctuary, absent mother and father? It is certainly not the most nurturing environment for child's attachment and emotional development. Eli, Samuel's guardian, is more like to take a grandfatherly role. Additionally, it is unlikely that Eli's sons would have welcomed the presence of a possible rival. Nevertheless, owing to her undue ambition — in other words, excessive investment in her child's future, which today is a sort of "parachute kid"[1022] — Hannah might have deprived Samuel of an ordinary childhood under the protection of his own parents.[1023] This may give rise to a serious blemish on his career: Samuel tries to create a new hereditary office by his treatment of his own sons, Joel and Abijah, which ended in failure due to their wrongdoings (1 Sam 8:1–3), being precisely analogous to the case of Eli's two wicked sons (1 Sam 12:3–5).[1024] In this sense, Samuel shares with Samson the fact that he was not adequately parented[1025] — Hannah renounced responsibility so his model of parenting comes from Eli — not the best example. Hence Hannah's decision to renounce her young child might

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[1022] A child of wealthy East Asian parents who is left in the United States to attend school while his or her parents live abroad.

[1023] Interestingly, the aforementioned Egyptian wisdom literature, "The Instruction of Any" (FN 846) introduces mother's ongoing care after nursing as follows (See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, 141):

> Double the food your mother gave you,
> Support her as she supported you;
> She had a heavy load in you,
> But she did not abandon you.
> When you were born after your months,
> She was yet yoked <to you>,
> Her breast in your moth for three years.
> As you grew and your excrement disgusted,
> She was not disgusted, saying: "What shall I do!"
> When she sent you to school,
> And you were taught to write,
> She kept watching over you daily,
> With Bread and beer in her house.

[1024] Joel and Abijah served as judges in Beersheba while Hophni and Phinehas served as priests in Shiloh.

[1025] For a full discussion, see chapter 8.

have a negative effect on his value formation. Moreover, the way his biological father is presented in the narrative reinforces this idea: Elkanah seems to figure in his son's upbringing even less than does his mother.

The ambiguous hermeneutical nature behind Hannah's vow and dedication — mother's sacrifice or dereliction of duty — may be related to the struggle between charisma and heredity as the marks of leadership in Israel. Samuel is a charismatic leader ordained by God, as shown by his extraordinary birth story[1026] in which his mother confirms the divine providence by placing her son "at God's disposal for life."[1027] Ironically, however, Samuel attempts to establish his own dynasty on a hereditary basis.[1028] This eventually provides the elders with reasons to set up a king over Israelites, making Samuel reluctantly comply with their request. Although Samuel replaced the Elides due to the indictment of priesthood caused by the hereditary succession of religious power, he follows the same bad practices as Eli — his "mentor and surrogate father."[1029] In this regard, his mother is partly to blame for Samuel's imitating Eli as a role model; he was taken from his real father, Elkanah, because of her ambition. Notably, the narrative reflects the complexity of human relationship. Every character is complex. They demonstrate the intertwining of moral good and evil: they are not completely terrible but they are not without problems.

In the next section, we shall examine Hannah through the lens of the long linear birth narratives we have discussed thus far, comparing her to diverse women characters in terms of their sharing motifs and themes.

[1026] Along with the following story of the Divine call.
[1027] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel,* 3.
[1028] Interestingly, we do not hear that YHWH blames Samuel for this.
[1029] G. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 141.

9.3 Comparative Analysis of Hannah in Light of Thematic Continuity of the Previous Birth Narratives

It is worth noticing that almost all the motifs which have appeared in the previous birth narratives are aggregated into our story that marks the grand finale of the series of the birth narratives: the rivalry relationship (Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel), a barren wife (Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, Manoah's wife), prayer to God for an offspring (Rebekah through Isaac), favorite wife (Rachel), lack of perception caused by alcohol (Noah, Judah[1030]), mother's renouncing a child (Moses' mother) and weaning a child (Moses' mother), consecration of a child (Samson), dietary injunction (Samson) are all employed in one narrative. Fully mobilizing these motifs, the narrator presents an elaborate story, and allows readers to see how this resonates with earlier stories.[1031]

For example, the rival relationship — which is a significant motif in patriarchal birth narratives[1032] — reemerges here. However, it does not develop into a family dispute over succession but into a dispute over *national* leadership and the problems of the hereditary system. It is not his ancestry that determines Samuel's role in the temple and his prophetic powers, unlike Eli and Eli's sons. The point is not a rivalry between two competing lineages, but between different models of succession and competing power claims between temple, prophet, judge and king.[1033]

[1030] Indirectly in reference to annual sheepshearing festival.
[1031] Notably ending in reconciliation between husband and wife.
[1032] The conflicts between cowives (Sarah–Hagar, Leah–Rachel), brothers (Esau–Jacob) or married couple (Rebekah–Isaac) often involve the issue of inheritance–heir, as discussed in previous chapters.
[1033] It is true there are parallels and contrasts between Elides and Samuel, but we don't hear of any direct conflict, even if we might suppose that Eli's sons could have been suspicious or jealous of the place of Samuel as a newcomer in the temple.

As a beloved barren wife among two co-wives, Hannah bears close comparison with Rachel. Both accounts employ the expression "[God's] remembering" in connection with pregnancy and childbirth:

… וידע אלקנה את־חנה אשתו <u>ויזכרה יהוה</u>…ויהי לתקפות הימים ותהר חנה ותלד בן…

…and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife and YHWH *remembered* her…and it came to be at the turn of the days[1034] and Hannah conceived, and bore a son… (1 Sam 1: 19b–20a)

<u>ויזכר אלהים את־רחל</u>וישמע אליה אלהים ויפתח את־רחמה

Then God *remembered* Rachel and he listened to her and opened her womb.(Gen 30:22)

In Hannah's case, God "closes her womb," as is repeated twice in v. 5b (ויהוה <u>סגר רחמה</u>) and v. 6b (כי־<u>סגר</u> יהוה בעד <u>רחמה</u>), whereas a contrasting action attributed to God, in Rachel's case, is expressed as seen above: he "opens her womb" (ויפתח את־רחמה). Hence the narrator makes it clear in both cases that it is divine intervention — either YHWH or Elohim — that made their childbearing impossible or possible.[1035] However, unlike Rachel, who uses surrogacy and adoption or tries to enlist the help of therapeutic —magical/medicinal — plants, Hannah, in desiring to have her *own* son, does not accept alternative plans but cries out to God directly. Moreover, Rachel involves Jacob, jealous of Leah's having sons, urging him to give her children (Gen 30:1–2).[1036] Yet Hannah neither expresses jealousy of Peninnah's reproductive ability nor asks for help from her husband.

[1034] English translation for ויהי לתקפות הימים is of A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

[1035] In 1 Sam 2:21, Hebrew verb פקד (כי פקד יהוה את־חנה ותהר ותלד…) is used, which resonates with Sarah's pregnancy and childbirth in Gen 21:1–2 (… ויהוה פקד את־שרה… ותהר ותלד שרה).

[1036] To take any initiation for her. See further Chapter 4.

Isaac, in the case of Rebekah, is a representative husband who is involved in resolving the infertility problem:[1037] he prays for his wife to have offspring.[1038] On the other hand, Hannah seeks God in her *own* prayer at Shiloh sanctuary. In this regard, Hannah's conduct is comparable to Rebekah's divination. Once Isaac's entreaty for her was accepted, it is for Rebekah herself to decide to consult how to deal with the struggling twin embryos (Gen 25:19–26).[1039] Hence both Rebekah and Hannah actively take part in cultic mediation to resolve their present issue.

When it comes to the issue of the dedication of a sanctified hero before the birth, we find a close affinity with Samson's case. Due to the fact that both accounts share the same formula "no razor shall come upon his head," מורה לא־יעלה על־ראשו, not a few scholars consider Samuel a Nazirite too. However, the biblical text does not refer Samuel as a Nazirite (נזיר).[1040] Except in 1 Sam 1:11, neither razor nor hair is mentioned in relation to Samuel.[1041] Both mothers make their sons a lifelong divine leader by speech acts, yet what makes Samson a divinely chosen deliverer is God's unilateral command; God himself stipulates conditions for it. In our narrative, it is Hannah who reaches out for divine aid; not God but Hannah sets a stipulation. There is one more crucial difference between the two accounts in the larger narrative complex: the two mothers go in complete opposite directions in terms of their exertion

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[1037] Since Isaac had only one wife, he could be a cause of their childlessness, unless a secondary wife succeeded to give birth from him.

[1038] Probably believing she is the source of the problem; the reader is informed only by the narrator's voice that she is barren. The text does not say Rebekah requested him to pray for her.

[1039] For the issue of woman's divination, see further E. J. Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature,* 94–104.

[1040] T. Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel,* 118. See further M. Tsevat, "Was Samuel a Nazirite?" in *"Shaʿarei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed., Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 199–204.

[1041] Hence there are debates over Samuel's status, even in the later rabbinical literature, as to whether he should be regarded as a Nazirite or not (Nazir 4.6; 9.5 [Mishnah]). For further discussion on this issue, see P. Galpaz-Feller, *Samson: The Hero and the Man*, 46–50. It is probable that Hannah's vow not to cut her future son's hair is a narrative device to juxtapose Samuel with Samson so as to emphasize that Samuel is certainly a consecrated and divinely chosen leader as Samson is. Otherwise this reference may expose Hannah's ambition to make her son a national hero like Samson.

of influence on their sons. Although God appoints and elects Samson as a Nazirite deliverer, it is his mother who extends the Nazirite vow. In the preceding chapter, I suggested that that Samson may have remained an immature adult strongly tied to his parents; he rebels against them and tries to free himself from any restriction and bondage including his mother's influence. If this is the case, Hannah serves as a counter-model of the mother of Samson. She completely renounces her influence on Samuel; he is not fettered by parental meddling but assigned to the secluded house of God at Shiloh for divine rearing. Unfortunately, this results in his taking Eli as a role model in the absence of his own father. Eli's inadequacies, however, are not Hannah's fault.

A mother's investment in her child is indeed one of the prominent characteristics in the HB birth narratives. Sarah expels Hagar and Ishmael for the benefit of her own son, Isaac. Tamar takes initiative to have children particularly by Judah, a powerful and influential patriarch, and makes every effort so that her children will be recognized. Rebekah is also prominent for her ambition: like Tamar, she is also described as a person with initiative and drive. Rebekah acts with subjectivity to benefit her favorite son: she sets strategies in order to ensure that Isaac's blessings are bestowed upon Jacob and does not hesitate to scheme to deceive her husband, controls Jacob to follow her agenda, and is willing to send him away.

A mother's renunciation of her *child* for the benefit of his life is found in the case of Hagar, faced with imminent death from not having water in the desert (Gen 21:14–21). Placing Ishmael under the bush can be construed as a mother's desperate renunciation of her child-leaving the child's fate entirely up to God.[1042] As argued earlier, she does not leave her son carelessly anywhere but deposits him at a typical spot for a theophany: the bush. Then concomitant actions — raising her voice and weeping — follow as signs of her continuing

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[1042] As argued in chapter 7 in comparison with Moses' mother who places the child into the Nile.

appeal to God; she monitors her son with care from a short distance (Gen 21:17). In the same vein, Moses' mother draws our attention too. She also deposits her son on the river bank of the Nile, leaving him to his fate while also actively intervening in that fate; being fully ready and prepared for protection of the child. Regarding Moses' mother, we can note twofold renunciations: one is her placing him into the Nile; the other is that she hands Moses over to the Pharaoh's daughter through adoption, while herself remaining his foster mother.[1043] The latter renunciation shares much in common with that of Hannah. Both Moses' mother and Hannah relinquish their mother's right to someone else, while still nursing the child: Moses' mother does this by giving him up for adoption and Hannah does it by her vow of dedication.

A mother's renunciation of her child signifies self-sacrifice, given that mothers in the ancient world need sons, and sons with secure livelihoods, to ensure that they have protection and support in their old age, especially if their husbands have died. Both Moses' mother and Hannah voluntarily choose to send their sons away so that they may provide their sons with the optimum cultural and educational environment: Pharaoh's court is the most prestigious place and Pharaoh's daughter is one of the most influential persons in her time, which are analogues to the Shiloh sanctuary and Eli, the high priest in Hannah's time. Nevertheless, they present different types of motivation. Moses' mother, as a member of a subordinate people, relinquishes her son in the circumstances of a collective crisis: programmatic male infanticide. Consequently, communal benefits — the survival of the whole Israelite people — are her main motivations. Hannah's motivation is ambiguous. It could have stemmed from personal ambition — a sort of psychological payoff through her son's success — a desire for achievements, power, economic and old-age security, fame, and prestige and the like,[1044] or it could have been motivated by a desire to change, for communal benefit, the current corrupted

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[1043] For a full discussion, see chapter 7.

[1044] In addition, a father figure is almost absent in the Moses' birth narrative, whereas Elkanah, along with Eli, a surrogate father, plays an important role in Samuel's birth narrative.

priestly system through her son dedicated at that religious centre, or both. What is remarkable is that God approves her ambition or desire, through which the divine will is accomplished. In other words, Hannah sets God in motion, causing God to act on her initiative: in response to her will, God makes Samuel a charismatic leader.

Aside from the above-mentioned elements found between Moses and Samuel at birth, they share a lot of similarities in plot line. Both grow up under favorable conditions, thanks to their mothers, experience a divine call and become a charismatic leader at a national level. In terms of characterization, both are portrayed as combining the roles of prophet and theocratic leader.[1045] Moses, accepted into a royal family although not by blood lineage, does not succeed Pharaoh, yet rules the people of Israel like a king. Interestingly, the Aaronite priesthood traces its legitimacy back to its association with Moses through the Exodus tradition.[1046] Samuel, although not from a priestly family,[1047] acts like a priest; he himself attempts to set up a hereditary system through his sons (1 Sam 8:1) but fails. Instead, he establishes a monarchy, becoming a kingmaker and wielding authority even over the king. Therefore it would appear quite plausible that the literary allusions between the two figures are deliberate.

One cannot deny that Moses and Samuel are the most idealized charismatic leaders chosen by God in the Hebrew Bible, since they hold absolute power, gaining religious, military, and political achievements. The narrative substructure, however, implies that both are chosen and then abandoned. The arbitrariness of God as a logic of leadership emerges once more. God shows but does not allow Moses to step into the promised land. He dies and is buried neither in Egypt nor in the land of Canaan but in Moab — a foreign land (Deut 34:1–8). Likewise, Samuel ends up being a very unsympathetic figure: he lives to see people's longing for a king

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[1045] Eslinger even calls Samuel the new Moses (L. M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis,* 77–8).

[1046] R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament,* 310–1 (FN 59); Suzanne Boorer, *The Vision of the Priestly Narrative: Its Genre and Hermeneutics of Time,* AIL 27 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 336–8.

[1047] At least according to the MT text of 1 Samuel; Cf. 1 Chronicles 6:7–13 grant him a Levite lineage.

rather than himself and his family. Anointing with his own hand someone who would replace him might have been a bitter experience. After all, God does not build him a sure house or eternal priesthood (1 Sam 2:35). Hence both Moses and Samuel seem to be discarded after they have been used to the maximum by God, especially in a transition period. These old and exhausted leaders have no choice but to be replaced by fresh and younger figures: Moses by Joshua; Samuel by Saul or David — "institutionalized leadership."[1048] King Saul is no exception to this rule of the mischievous God.[1049] After tasting the glory of being elected as the first king, he is rejected at once without even being allowed a chance to make up for his mistake. Is God particularly hostile to and harsh on Saul, or may it rather be Samuel who acts capriciously toward him in the name of God, imitating the way of God?

The image of the wheel of fortune on which one rises and falls is embedded in the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10).[1050] Taken at face value, Hannah gloats over her enemies[1051] in the context of the overthrow of dynasties and of the entire social order. Yet this song may also be foreshadowing the instability of the new order that will be set up, reminding the reader of the pattern of the rise and fall of dynasties of not only kingship but also of priesthood. The lives described here are a sort of endless Möbius strip: once the 'lowly' have been put in the place of the 'mighty' and vice versa, what is to stop the next phase of reversal? Once in power, the previously oppressed are only too likely to become the new oppressors.

If we look at the issue from a different angle, the song imputes to God the twists and turns of the fate of humans.[1052] He plays between death and life (v. 6), poverty and wealth (v. 7),

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[1048] A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 27.

[1049] For more on the tragic figure of Saul, see D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*, JSOTSup 14 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980); J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[1050] Given that Hannah is characterized as the ideal mother of the great prophet and the song has a notion of victory, it recalls the victory song of Deborah (Judg 5), the prophetess called "mother in Israel." See also J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 40.

[1051] Presumably those who mocked at her childlessness including Peninnah.

[1052] W. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 16–21; R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 30–9.

and poor and noble (v.8) on his chessboard. In sum, the reversal of fortunes depends on God's own whims; the only recourse for humans is to be "his faithful ones" (v. 9).[1053] This is in line with the later stories in the book of Samuel where God anoints and reverses the anointing of king Saul, which thus justifies subversion of a royal dynasty on the pretext of God's will. The Israelites' first king fails to turn over his throne to his son; David replaces the Saulide dynasty as a result of a collaboration between YHWH and Samuel. In ascribing this song to Hannah, she is perceived to understand the concept of divine justice and divine mercy. In this sense, Hannah is characterized as a theologian.[1054]

So far, we have explored how Hannah takes the lead to resolve her problem on her own, as other women in the HB birth narratives do, and how she takes initiative to be a mother and to grant her son the privilege held by few elites to settle in the best religious center of the day at the earliest age. There are multiple layers of interpretations for her vow and dedication, whether it was undertaken for personal ambition or communal benefits, raising the possibility of negative consequences of her renunciation. Nevertheless, the overarching narrator's agenda assigns her a significant prophetic role as suggested by her song which conveys profound theological insight. She is presented as a contributor to the birth of the charismatic leader, who is revered as Israel's greatest prophet. And, once again, it is a woman who takes the initiative for change during a transitional period, a time of "chaos and corruption" as the social and political context of "the backdrop of Hannah's situation."[1055] As scholars like Fewell and

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[1053] Hence the cause of Moses being forbidden to enter the promised land is explained as his disobedience (Num 20:10–13). Likewise, it stands to reason that Samuel is not able to found his own dynasty due to his moral responsibility for wickedness of his two sons.

[1054] Reminding us of the mother of Samson, who understands the meaning of the divine encounter, or of Tamar, in terms of knowledge and perception, who is described as having intellectual capability for legal rights and customary law.

[1055] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 129.

Jobling note, Hannah, with great subjectivity, is at the center of human initiative.[1056] She is more interested in raising a communal leader than in making her own son an heir to her husband's family. Her competence shines through when utilizing the religious vow effectively. In doing so, she is involved in shaping her son's future while also shaping divine implementation. On this issue, Fewell is worth quoting:

> Hannah's intervention in her socially prescribed story becomes the impetus for God's doing a new thing in Israel, reestablishing a line of communication with the people through Samuel, pronouncing judgment on Eli's house, and wreaking havoc on Israel's enemies. Moreover, she "lends" to God her son Samuel to help accomplish what God seemingly cannot do on his own.[1057]

She boldly lends her son to God, and God should repay this lender by carrying out her wishes. Therefore, Hannah not only dominates male characters but also unpins God's chess pieces, which were immobile for a long time.

[1056] As opposed to Eslinger who puts emphasis on the divine initiative that was embedded in YHWH intervening to close Hannah's womb (L. M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis*, 71–2; 92).

[1057] Fewell, "When Hannah Met Luke," 131.

Chapter 10   Birth and Destiny: The Characteristic Structure and Social Context of Female Dominance in the Birth Narratives of the Hebrew Bible

Throughout my exploration of the birth narratives in the Hebrew Bible, I have uncovered characteristics of the female protagonists who are dominant and challenging, acting with subjectivity on their own initiative to promote their aims and pursue their desires, not to mention these are the stories of women. I have provided a different perspective, new ideological insights, and counter or alternative readings that overturn previous major interpretations, especially against stereotypical gender ideologies.

Proceeding from what has been so far examined in the previous chapters, we observe several coherent features of female characterization in these narratives. It should be mentioned first that women in the HB birth narratives are eager to be mothers. Yet the desire for motherhood is not necessarily motivated by keeping the patriarchal lineage but rather by women's social and economic interests. Pregnancy and childbirth are regarded as not only a woman's duty but also her right. In male-dominant societies, becoming a mother is the best way for a woman to secure her life in old age; having children is also the best way to ensure her position in a patrilocal marriage system.

Nevertheless, quite a few men actually do not care about women's future childlessness after they get an heir (Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah) or they may even hinder their potential motherhood (Lot, Judah). In the patriarchal birth narratives, it is women who are more concerned with the issue of fertility and procreation, the family inheritance, and perpetuation of the family line than are their husbands or the paterfamilias. Women take the initiative to solve the problem of infertility,[1058] make their best efforts to secure the safety of their children, and determine the

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[1058] Family conflicts often arise from the fact that often only one son is selected amongst family peers. These conflicts are of a wide variety in compliance with particular family structures: polycoity, monogamy, and sororal polygyny (According to the classification presented by Steinberg's *Kinship and the Marriage in Genesis*).

heir while facilitating a peaceful separation between potential rivals or often renouncing their

maternal rights for the sake of a child, the community, or herself.

It is worth noting that there is a thematic shift between the birth narratives in Genesis and

those outside of Genesis. It is from Moses that the birth narratives — that have so far been

dealt with at a family level — take on a new look — and are seen from a public level. This

transition constitutes the logic behind the artful design of the birth narrative — the overarching

framework that extends from the patriarchs who paved the way for the birth of the covenant

people to Moses, Samson, and finally to Samuel, whose presence represents divinely chosen

charismatic leadership.[1059] As we have observed, mothers are actively involved in determining

the child's future destiny (Moses, Samuel) or in maintaining the special status or privilege for

all their lives (Samson, Samuel).

In the process of following their ambition either for communal benefit or for personal

interests, women often confront the dominant androcentric norms.[1060] They actively resist this

oppressive power and do not allow the unfair authorities to prevail. Sarah criticizes Abraham

who marginalized her, while Hagar becomes a matriarch, not remaining anyone's wife.

Rebekah deceives and defeats Isaac. Leah and Rachel defy their father,[1061] trade their husband

as a sexual object, and take the lead in making the family's new start. Lot's daughters

counterattack their father by taking sexual initiative and dominating the household for a fresh

start. Tamar gives a moral lesson to her father-in-law, defying his authority. Israelite and

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[1059] The concept of divine election affects the transition in birth narratives. This cycle begins with YHWH's call of Abraham, yet the narrative does not explain why he is chosen. Likewise, the heir of Abraham's line is neither greater than his competitors nor passes any special test to gain his position. Rather, it is due to the preference of a parent — mother in particular. And YHWH approves it. The principle of election also governs the birth narratives of Moses, Samson and Samuel. They are great specifically due to their selection by the divine call, which endows them with unconditional, absolute authority. Significantly all their mothers contribute to their destiny to be beneficiary of a God-given mission as possessors of permanent leadership. It is worth noticing that both Moses – precisely, Aaron his brother– and Samuel are related to the hereditary priesthood which reminds us of the theme of inheritance that connects between generations in the patriarchal birth narratives.

[1060] As we have seen, men are often portrayed as passive, subordinate but at the same time female-oppressive characters.

[1061] Rachel defies also Jacob.

Egyptian daughters collaborate to resist and mock Pharaoh who underestimated daughters' power, in *wisely* repaying his words. Samson's mother overpowers Manoah who tried to exert control over her. Hannah determines on her own, acting autonomously, and obtains what she wants not only from her husband but also from the high priest; she even participates in sacrificial worship as the main agent. Most importantly, she persuades God to implement her wishes.

We may therefore conclude that female dominance and male subordination is a distinctive and coherent feature in the birth narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, the common thread running through the women in our narratives is that they are very resourceful in using or manipulating the existing social structures, norms, and religious practises that surround them to achieve their objectives: the marriage system, adoption system, divine oracle, menstrual taboo, sexual power or attraction, customary law and legal context, religious vow, and so forth.

God approves these strategies, and furthermore makes the best of their ambitions and desires as important agents of the divine will,[1062] even if their plans may have unintended consequences and they may not always exercise their influence in the most effective way. This leads to the important theological implication — the constant divine authorization of women's ambition.

Given the overarching themes, as explained above, it seems natural to wonder about the contexts that produced these stories. The characteristic and consistent depictions of gender, class, and ethnicity[1063] of the HB birth narratives may serve particular purposes for their target audience at a specific time and place. The fact that multivalent voices and multidimensional character representations are prevailing aspects of the storytelling, as I have repeatedly

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[1062] In the establishment of the Covenant people, the salvation of his chosen people, the election of charismatic leaders and the like.

[1063] E. g., ethnic ambivalence reflected in the stories of Hagar, Lot's daughters, and of Tamar.

underscored, imply the co-existence of diverse, dynamic, or conflicting social ideologies of that period such as ethnic ambivalence between inclusivism and exclusivism.[1064]

When employing a socio-narratological approach,[1065] the birth narratives, or so-called founding myths, are understood to have as their aim the construction of a communal identity through national origin and cultural heritage. These are socially constructed narratives that are intended to promote solidarity and instill theological or cultural values. It is worth noting that Fewell and Heard assert that "Genesis creates a world of itinerancy where its characters are constantly on the move, migrating freely or under coercion, finding themselves exiles, wanderers, and strangers with tenuous conceptions of 'home,'"[1066] and thus propose the post-exilic community of Yehud as the most plausible candidate — in terms of location and timeframe — for the production of these stories in their final form. This assumption is supported not only by "recurring plot motifs of expulsion and exile," but also by the idea of "fluid social heterogeneity," and "a sense of communal vulnerability," and others.[1067]

The results of my project add more pieces to this jigsaw puzzle. Because the HB birth narratives are integrated into a coherent flow in conversation with one another and they all happen to be from the biblical texts of Genesis through Exodus, Judges and 1 Samuel, the discussion of "chronotope" (time-space)[1068] in relation to Persian Yehud may be applied not only to Genesis but also, by extension, to this genre of storytelling throughout Enneateuch. In

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[1064] M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 291.

[1065] David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *HT* (May 1986): 117–31 (esp. 128); D. Herman, *Story Logic*; A. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe*, 81–2. See Chapter 1.

[1066] Fewell and Heard, "The Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World" in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative,* ed., D. N. Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016),109–24 (here 109–10).

[1067] Fewell and Heard, "The Genesis of Identity in the Biblical World," 110.

[1068] The term Bakhtin defines as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 84). Boer observes that "the chronotope comes into play when an author creates new fictional worlds. Yet those worlds must relate in some way to the actual world in which the author happens to live. The intersection between actual and fictional worlds happens by means of the chronotope" (R. Boer, "Introduction: Bakhtin, Genre and Biblical Studies," in idem*, Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, 2).

support of this, the lack of an elaborated birth story for any king[1069] may also serve as a clue to the situation of the community at that time — its non-monarchical existence.

The narrative focalization on women reflects their situations and perspectives too. Solidarity may have been a critical issue for Yehud's elite in wrestling with social issues and integrating various social groups in order to recover Judean settlements and the economy and to prepare for a potential foreign invasion by improving national power. In addition, the key point may have been the legitimization of the ruling power's authority, both of which are related to the issue of extracting taxes and tributes[1070] as well as the activities of constructing the temple and the city walls.

The overarching narrative agenda representing women as contributors to the development of nationhood implies that women were finally regarded as significant human resources. There are two aspects to consider in this regard. Firstly, women's roles in procreation have become much more important with the need for population growth to produce a workforce and the development of settlements,[1071] which is bolstered by the constant narrative depiction of a strong desire for motherhood. Second, the proactive, autonomous, and pioneering image of women implies the improvement of women's socioeconomic status. Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, report on the situation of women being included in community actions. The complaint and appeal of the social groups regarding problems caused by crop failure are depicted as collective actions of people with their *wives* (Neh 5:1). The congregation to which the scroll of Moses' teaching was read consisted of both men and women,[1072] that is, to the *entire* people

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[1069] I do not consider Solomon's birth report (2 Sam 11-12) to be a birth narrative because his birth is not central to the story and is not shaped as a form of narrative.

[1070] Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period. A Social and Demographic Study.* JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 281; Peter Altmann, *Economics in Persian-Period Biblical Texts: Their Interactions with Economic Developments in the Persian Period and Earlier Biblical Traditions*, FAT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016). 184.

[1071] Oded Lipschitz, "The Rural Economy of Judah during the Persian Period and the Settlement History of the District System" in *The Economy of Ancient Judah in Its Historical Context*, eds., M. L. Miller, E. B. Zvi, and G. N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 237–64.

[1072] Bob Becking, Ezra-Nehemiah. HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 246. Cf. Neh 10:28.

(כל־העם)[1073] who could all listen with *understanding* (לפני הקהל מאיש ועד־אשה וכל מבין לשמע),

thereby confirming women's intellectual capability (Neh 8:1–3). Further, Nehemiah 3:12

demonstrates women's contribution to the restoration of the wall, referring to Shallum and his

daughters.

Christine Roy Yoder suggests a wide range of economic roles and responsibilities of

women in the Achaemenid economy:

> Women at Elephantine went about the marketplaces buying, selling, and bartering various
> goods. At Dor, women engaged in a thriving textile industry. Some women assisted with
> the family business, managing properties, conducting transactions, and serving as parties
> to the purchase and sale of slaves and land. Others made loans of cash and goods, benefiting
> from favorable interest rates. Non-royal women worked in a variety of professions at
> different ranks and degrees of specialization. Shelomith, for example, had an official
> capacity in the administrative affairs of Yehud. Other women were supervisors (araššap)
> of workgroups, receiving generous rations of grain, wine, and (occasionally) meat for their
> efforts. There were also work forces composed predominantly of women and children
> (pašap and harrinup). Royal women were renowned, in particular, for their vast estates.
> They managed such properties directly and through subordinates, authorizing transactions
> with their own seals, ordering the movement of commodities, employing and issuing
> rations to workers, and paying taxes to the crown. They could also lease and sub-divide
> their properties for profit. In short, "women's work" in the Persian period was multifaceted
> and appears to have permeated all sectors of the royal economy.[1074]

The increasing number of women's economic activities may have prompted a group agenda to

emphasize their economic potential and support.[1075] The recurring portrayal of women's

interests in socioeconomic position, security, and family patrimony in the narratives that were

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[1073] Observe the repetition of "the entire people" (כל־העם) in Neh 8:5, 11, 12. Cf. Ezra 10:1.
[1074] Christine Roy Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31*, BZAW 30 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 113.
[1075] Lipschitz, "The Rural Economy of Judah during the Persian Period and the Settlement History of the District System."

under scrutiny well accords with this, in line with the increased importance of material culture and commercialization of that period.[1076]

As previously stated, the narrator in the HB birth narratives presents women as contributing to the fulfillment of the divine covenant, which serves as the theological foundation for group identity formation and living principles,[1077] as well as to the production of YHWH-approved national leaders. The implied narrative agenda could be to encourage women's roles in community reconstruction and rehabilitation by utilizing the traditional birth stories as a poetic device. The key point in supporting this argument is that these female characters exert control over the situation, particularly during a new move — migration, return, generational renewal, or transitional stage — that corresponds to Achaemenid Yehud's historical circumstances.

What draws our attention is the tension between traditional male-centered ideology and women-oriented ideology, which is probably motivated by the tendency to emphasize women as accepted social members, thereby promoting female participation in society. Women have been marginalized or subordinated in a male-centered world. But here they are fully and justly spotlighted, and as a result they dominate our stories and in many cases actually overpower the deeds of men; however, as the findings of this study show, there are other voices to protect the patriarchal system or defend male pride.

The familial and social resistance as well as the reversal of accepted gender roles embedded in these women's actions, may suggest the image of women that is desired by the community of this new era: women who are strong and competent with a tough spirit, not being

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[1076] C. E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period,* 43; P. Altmann, *Economics in Persian-Period Biblical Texts,* esp. 159–87.

[1077] According to John W. Wright, "the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem emerges as the central social and economic institution for the redistribution of wealth among the Jews in the fourth century." Therefore, a theological basis would have been required to support this. See John W. Wright, "'Those Doing the Work for the Service in the House of the Lord': 1 Chronicles 23:6–24:31 and the Sociohistorical Context of the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period" in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth* Century B.C.E. (Winona Lake Ind. 2007), 361–84 (here 366). Cf. Neh 9: 7ff.

submissive or obedient to major authority, so that they fight for their rights and goals. On the other hand, the tension embodied in the confrontation of women and men can reflect the internal conflicts and upheavals in the society between diverse groups: the immigrant (returnees)[1078] and remainees, various priestly groups, imperial elites, Persian overlords, local societies or experts, wealthy aristocrats, village peasants, and debt-slaves.[1079] It is also plausible that the depiction of men frequently playing oppressive roles in relation to women, exerting unfair force, has political undertones: it could be interpreted as an innuendo towards external Persian authority, evading possible censorship. This assumption may provide an insight into the question of why women feature so prominently as ingenious underdogs challenging patriarchal authority and acting with such agency to the detriment of men. I will present two theories as possible explanations.

To begin, Susan Niditch's theory is helpful. According to Niditch, the reason for the frequent use of trickster figures found in the tale of the ancestral heroes is that "Israel has had a peculiar self-image as the underdog and the trickster."[1080] In the HB birth narratives, women are likely to be perceived as Israel's self-image, the underdogs, whereas men represent the strong top dogs, based on women's precarious position that has resulted from gender hierarchy within Israelite societies. Hence, in the story of Moses' mother, when the power asymmetry limited within the group extends outside the group, and Israel is subordinate, the Pharaoh — the most powerful dominant non-Israelite male — takes over the oppressive authority formerly held by Israelite men; the Israelite father disappears from the narrative. Women are prominent

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[1078] The lineage or genealogy is an important issue for them to claim the land. Cf. Ezra 2:59, 62; Neh 7:5, 64. See further Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 23.

[1079] R. A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea*, 22–32. Cf. Neh 5:7, 17; 6:17; 13:16, 23–24; Ezra 1:5; 3:12; 6:21; 9:1–2. According to Altman, "the particular situation of Neo-Bablyonian and Achaemenid periods allowed for non-elites to rise through entrepreneurial actions to an elite status , accompanied by close relations with especially state officials. Among these merchants, at least in Sippar, were also a number of foreigners, including Judeans" (P. Altmann, *Economics in Persian-Period Biblical Texts*, 119).

[1080] S. Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, Introduction, xv.

in the employment of trickery, knowledge, and wisdom as weapons to fight powerful authorities, while displaying outward conforming behaviour in shrewd calculation, which are typical trickster characteristics. Women, as the underdogs, mirrored in Israel's self-image,[1081] can defy and ridicule, and eventually overpower and defeat the top dogs, projecting the possibility of overturning an asymmetric power structure in their real world. In relation to this matter, it is worth considering John Anderson's work on *Jacob and the Divine Trickster* where he points out that "YHWH engages in deception in the Jacob cycle in order to advance the ancestral promise."[1082] Endorsing his remark, I would like to add: in fact, the "theological portrait of God"[1083] as a divine trickster is much more pervasive in our female figures than in a single male figure.[1084]

Howard Eilberg Schwartz's observation is the second theory I would like to mention, which continues the discussion of the self/other issue but in terms of religious symbols. According to Schwartz, while "images of male deities may authorize male domination," they also generate tension or conflicts for men: "men are also 'others' with respect to a male God." [1085] Considering that the masculine God is "a kind of male beauty image, an image of male perfection against which men measure themselves and in terms of which they fall short" as Schwartz suggests,[1086] it seems reasonable that male characters in our narratives fall so woefully deficient since YHWH, as the "other" of human masculine, should strive to prove he is a more

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[1081] This perspective challenges Exum's consideration of the patriarchs/men as "personifications of Israel," representing "Israel's self," while the matriarchs/women represent 'other.' Due to this idea, Exum argues that despite women's "importance in the line of descent" and their contribution to the establishment of "Israel's separateness and identity as a people, the (m)other's place in these stories of origins must be undermined" J. C. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOT Sup 163 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 96, 110, 147.

[1082] J. E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster,* 171.

[1083] J. E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster,* 188.

[1084] Jacob cycle in Anderson's work.

[1085] Howard Eilberg Schwartz, *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 16, 19–20.

[1086] H. E. Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 17.

perfect man than any of the patriarchs. The divine masculine father should compete rivalry with human masculine father particularly in terms of reproduction and fatherhood:[1087]

> The human male's ability to reproduce is dependent upon the will or participation of the deity. TO be sure, the human husband contributes the seed. But this alone does not guarantee pregnancy. In numerous instances in the Hebrew Bible, the pregnancy of a woman is a sign of God's favor. The human husband must wait until his wife is blessed by God. In this sense, the virility of the human male is put at risk by representations of divine masculinity.[1088]

And women, as we have seen in the HB birth narratives, collaborate with God in challenging and subverting male hegemony, at least when it involves issues of procreation.

The last point that invites our attention is YHWH's character. The character of a monotheistic God incorporates many aspects that are distributed among many gods in other polytheistic religions. Though God is conceptualized as "male," the roles of a female god must be projected onto the attributes of one and performed by one god. So YHWH's character is multifaceted, and the human characters who imitate it are also multifaceted. "Mischievous YHWH" is the key to understanding the theological, social, existential quandaries underlying the text.

The theological concept of people chosen by God is pivotal for the formation of communal group identity in order to integrate, survive, advance, and prosper, particularly as a political underdog surrounded by threatening powerful ethnic groups or nations. This causes people to rely on the everlasting divine covenant as a source of true hope: YHWH's promises and blessing will be certainly fulfilled. However, they are confronted with a stark or contradictory

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[1087] Amit also points out that HB birth narratives have a tendency to minimize the significance of the father figure, which is filled by YHWH (Y. Amit, "Manoah Promptly Followed His Wife," 154–6).
[1088] H. E. Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 17.

reality: they succeeded in returning to the promised land, but the situation is no longer the same; it is now desolate, declining, and devoid of its former glory.

YHWH may be steadfast but is not fast to respond. His promise appears to be partially fulfilled. Is his promise being postponed or forgotten? The ambivalent feeling towards God is thus embodied in his character, who alternates between being trustworthy and unreliable. Instead of questioning their misfortunes and doubting God's will, a theological, compromising agenda is offered: it is YHWH's prerogative to choose and favour who will be blessed, to call for his agencies, and to weigh human fate.[1089] God's arbitrariness resonates with the patriarchs' behaviours in particular: Isaac's unequal distribution of blessing in favour of Esau; Jacob's partiality for Joseph and Rachel, and for Ephraim over Menasseh.[1090]

The quandary, on the other hand, calls attention to a potential issue of YHWH's delaying of promises, his silence, and indifference, as he frequently did or is still doing in both storytelling and in reality. In that case, his people must take initiative to solve the problems on their own, as female characterization demonstrates. This is also a way to awaken God and have him take action on behalf of his people in order to achieve the birth of the new community and for it to survive and come to fruition.

It is to be hoped that this study will contribute to the opening up of a fresh perspective and provide the possibility of various interpretations for female characters. What remains to be determined by future research by other scholars is, for example, more meticulous examinations and a satisfactory explanation of women's roles and putatively enhanced status in late postexilic communities in light of wider socio-political and cultural-religious approaches.

[1089] As is manifested in Hannah's song.
[1090] And Perez over Zerah. For the issue of Rebekah's partiality for Jacob, see chapter 3.

Clearly, more research is needed to illuminate the diversity of readings of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, beyond this specific genre of the birth narratives. There may be other dominant readings which would be waiting for reinterpretation, hopefully inspired by this project. The present study may establish a stepping stone for developing further interpretations of not only female figures but also male figures against traditional gender norms, especially in response to the rise of masculinity studies.[1091]

[1091] Ovidiu Creangă (ed.), *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond,* BMW 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010); Susan E. Haddox, "Masculinities Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades," *CBR* 14/2 (2016): 176–206; Ovidiu Creangă (ed.), *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, HBM 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019).

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