Women in the Hebrew Bible: misunderstanding and the tyranny of tradition

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WOMEN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE:

MISUNDERSTANDING AND THE TYRANNY OF TRADITION

by

Dana A. Johnston

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Senior Scholars Program

COLBY COLLEGE
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ABSTRACT

WOMEN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE:

MISUNDERSTANDING AND THE TYRANNY OF TRADITION

by Dana A. Johnston

This thesis is the culmination of hours of thought and study on the apparent supremacy of the male and the subjugation of the female in the cultures reflected in the Hebrew Bible. After a brief introduction we examine the narratives of Creation and Fall in Gen. 1-3. We are able to conclude that subjugation and supremacy are marks of the Fall—they are to be protested against, not condoned.

We then examine various elements of the fallen society. Among these elements we find traces of a previous matrilineal society, presumed by J (ca. 950 B.C.E.) and familiar to E (ca. 850-750 B.C.E.). By the time of P (ca. 550-450 B.C.E.) the system appears to no longer be extant. An examination of the law codes suggests that they take into account increased economic and social strains—woman's freedom becomes somewhat more limited by these developments. The social status of women is examined next in the areas of marriage, motherhood, and freedom of action (both within the household and beyond). There is exhibited in the literature an apparent necessity that a woman be both wife and mother. The woman who was not both wife and mother had a lowered status in society, but she who was both wife and mother
had her actions somewhat limited by the nature of her roles.

We examined last the religious status of women. They were certainly members and participants in the cult although their function in roles of leadership was severely limited. They were never priests although they did serve as prophetesses and took Nazirite vows.

We conclude that the culture reflected in the Hebrew Bible was, out of necessity, "sexist" before it was patriarchal—the "sexism" of the Hebrew Bible resulted from tradition and custom. A sex-linked division of labor was established in the pre-history of Israel. Although it was necessary for such a division of labor to exist early on it is not necessary that it remain unchanging throughout all time. The text of the Hebrew Bible exhibits the fluidity of religion in Israel. Despite the ability of the religion to adapt to new situations the ancient Hebrews allowed, probably unconsciously, a division of labor to continue along sex-linked lines.

We are mistaken if we think that the Hebrew Bible is sexist because it was patriarchal; rather, it is patriarchal because of a division of labor that was sexist—it took into account, however necessarily, the sex of the individual. A proper understanding of the Hebrew Bible sets its "sexism" into a proper perspective and will contribute to the freeing of modern women from the tyranny of tradition.
Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The New English Bible with the Apocrypha, Old Testament Section and Apocrypha Section, Copyright 1961; New Testament Section, Copyright 1970 by The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press.
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PREFACE

This thesis is the culmination of hours of thought and study on the apparent supremacy of the male and the subjugation of the female in the context of the Hebrew Bible. I trust that it will be accepted as it is offered--not as infallible in a field where there is but One infallible, but rather as an examination of weltschmerz in a tradition which promises comfort.

I would like to extend sincere appreciation to the administration of Colby College and the officials of the Senior Scholars Committee for granting me the time for this project--time which was made available through freedom from structured course loads. Appreciation is also due to Jane Moss and Yeager Hudson who have served not only as readers for this thesis but also as active and guiding advisors.

Special thanks are offered to Thomas R.W. Longstaff who has shared with me his time, his knowledge, and his support. His keen perception of Semitic thought has been an invaluable aid in my work; his friendship has been appreciated.

Dana A. Johnston
Colby College
May, 1981
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christian Liberty was first published in November, 1520. This influential work by the great theologian Martin Luther clarified his new evangelical theology for his ever-increasing following. In this work Luther asserts that,

...although we should boldly resist those teachers of tradition and sharply censure the laws of the popes by means of which they plunder the people of God, yet we must spare the timid multitude whom those impious tyrants hold captive by means of these laws until they are set free. "Therefore fight strenuously against the wolves, but for the sheep and not also against the sheep. This you will do if you inveigh against the laws and the lawgivers and at the same time observe the laws with the weak so that they will not be offended until they also recognize tyranny and understand their freedom. If you wish to use your freedom, do so in secret, as Paul says, Rom. 14 (:22), "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God"; but take care not to use your freedom in the sight of the weak. On the other hand, use your freedom constantly and consistently in the sight of and despite the tyrants and the stubborn so that they also may learn that they are impious, that their laws are of no avail for righteousness, and that they had no right to set them up.¹

So also shall we rise up against tradition itself!

Tradition teaches that women deserve, indeed that women have earned for themselves, a "non-position" in the Church. Tertullian taught that woman was evil; he said of the woman:

You are the devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, Man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die.  

Some may dismiss this misogynist comment from a respected theologian, others may attribute the remark to the early period in which Tertullian wrote and the patriarchal culture which was then dominant, and still others tend to agree with him! Regardless of how we view comments such as Tertullian's above, we have long been subject to the influences of this very same thought pattern. Woman is evil; Christian and non-Christian alike know and easily recite the story of Eve, the serpent, and the apple. Eve was evil; so also is she now in the minds of many.

Women are no longer willing to occupy the lower rungs of life. They have experienced growing freedom in the profane world with positions of great responsibility and are now clamoring for more responsibilities in the Church; man is not yet willing to give in, nor are some women. The world of the sacred remains a battlefield—a battlefield of the sexes and, yet, not of the sexes. Many men have become feminists, men who have contributed much scholarship to the discipline of feminist theology. Yet, many women remain firm in their be-

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liefs--beliefs which call for the continued subjugation of the female sex.

Men and women have come together to fight a tyrant not unlike that of Luther's--sexist theology and the results thereof. They have been set free and are willing to fight for the sheep. Theirs is a fight aimed at freeing the sheep from the pen they are in, a pen created by a religion which misunderstands the implications which its Holy Scriptures hold for it. Their goal is to explain, and thus do away with, the tyranny of tradition that hovers like a dark Spirit over the realm of the sacred--over the realm of the Church. This paper is written in the hopes that it may aid in the education of the wolves and the freeing of the sheep; it is an effort to explain the position which women held in the patriarchal culture as reflected in the Hebrew Bible. It is meant as a resource to help others understand that tradition need not be tyrannical.

The goal is indeed a worthy one, but how do you fight over 3,000 years of tradition? Is the headstart which tradition has insurmountable? The advances that have been made in the profane world deny this; they speak in a manner that says, "Go ahead!"--indeed, we shall go ahead.

Dr. Carol Martin, a guest lecturer at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary, has given a definition of a feminist theologian. According to Dr. Martin: (i) The person must be a theologian
in that s/he lets the Scriptures speak as they desire, not as s/he thinks they should. (ii) S/he must be a feminist. (iii) S/he must participate in society. A further explanation of Dr. Martin's guidelines is called for.\footnote{Dr. Martin gave this talk as part of a Conference on the Ministry held at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School/ Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary in November, 1980. The author is grateful to Colby College for allowing him monies from the Clarence R. Johnson Conference Fund so as to make his presence at the conference possible.}

The three parts of the guideline are as one; without the other part(s) any one or two are inadequate. Some feminist extremists have been led to argue that all who participate in a sexist society are themselves sexist. Dr. Martin disagrees; she feels that the feminist who withdraws from society and refuses to participate is, in fact, non-feminist. A feminist is one who is willing to participate in society as it exists, to understand it as it is, and to work toward making it be the way it can and should be. This is clearly impossible to do from a withdrawn state.

Participation in sexist society carries with it certain qualifications. One must question all sexist actions. Were they sexist in intent or were they sexist due to the tyranny of tradition? The latter form of sexism may be dealt with through education; the former will probably haunt us until the end of time as we now know it. According to Dr. Martin, we should concentrate our efforts in the direction of the men and women who are sexist due to traditions which they accept as truth, due to the traditions to which they have been sub-
jected. Our efforts should take the form of education; both the lamb and the wolf need to be taught of the tyranny of tradition.

To be a feminist theologian one must include within the sphere of questioning the nature of sexist theology and participation through education must include an effort to better help the sheep understand the tyranny of tradition as it exists in theological perceptions. So also should the feminist theologian work toward correcting the Church's perception of the position which women should occupy in the sacred elements of society; they are, by Luther's definition and Dr. Martin's guidelines, both wolf and sheep until they fully understand that women are not a subordinate sex, a second sex.

Our purpose in writing this paper is to raise questions in the minds of all who read it and, wherever possible, to offer what seems to be the likeliest solution. We may not always offer only one solution; some questions have no clear answer. This paper is our attempt to deal with sexism in the literature of the Hebrew Bible; is the Hebrew Bible the story of a religion oppressive to women? Is it a model by which we should shape our relationships—male to female and, indeed, male over female? Does patriarchy have God on its side? Are divine intentions to be seen as being consonant with patriarchal realities?

G. Ernest Wright suggested that the tyranny of tradition is perpetuated not because of the language in the Bible
but rather through "prejudices instilled by our overliteral reading of the Bible." Wright went on to imply, correctly, that many biblical passages have long been misunderstood, corrupted, and misused by scholar, clergy, and layman alike. Out of Wright's discussion two questions became clear. Is our current understanding, our current perception, of God's intentions a fair and just understanding? Also, is the woman to be understood as a non-entity in the Hebrew Bible?

Wright bemoaned the fact that many scholars and clergy have resorted to an overliteral reading of the Scriptures when the question of the ordination of women has been raised. Although many churches have since accepted the ordination of women as being of God's will, the tyranny of tradition prevails. When the wolves of the church accept the ordination of women into the ministry, the battle is just begun. The "overliteralness" of which Wright talks does not easily leave the minds of the laity. The tyranny of tradition remains a problem—-it remains in the many hostile faces that confront the woman each Sunday morning (as is the case whenever she faces her 'flock') and in the waiting that is associated with the call to the pastorate of a church, a call that never comes.

The problem remains in the pew with the laity who

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4 This material comes from a lecture given by Dr. Wright in January of 1974 at Bangor Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine ("The Creation of Man and Woman: Israel's Male-Centered Theological Language." The tape is available from the audio-visual library of the seminary.)
readily accept and believe and, subsequently, are led astray. Also, a number of clergy fit into this same category. They have neither the time nor the tools to understand many theological issues. They believe what they are told. Many commentaries give an overliteral interpretation of the Bible and it is this tradition which invades the pulpit and the pew. The overliteral tradition found in the Church allows the laity and clergy to "understand fully" that which is before them in black and white (and red).

The conflicts in a study such as this are many. The dynamics involved bring together scholars, laymen, and clergy. All think that they are correct--why believe in something if you do not accept it as truth? My understanding of the situation is stated above but I will summarize it here as I borrow the imagery taken from Luther.

The scholars, laymen, and clergy who still suffer under the tyranny of tradition are penned in by it; they are sheep cut off from the world. Those who further perpetuate the tyranny of tradition are wolves, loose and free to roam on the outskirts of the tyrannical pen. Feminist theologians are at work to disassemble the pen, piece-by-piece if need be. The educational efforts of the feminist theologians will, we hope, eventually allow the wolves to aid in the disassembling of the pen.

Our effort at educating the wolves consists of an examination of but one part of the tradition of the Church--the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). Phyllis Trible suggests,
and correctly so, that "the intentionality of biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both men and women." 5

It is our purpose in this study to examine the biblical faith in the context of the biblical religion. Many people have long assumed that the culture of the Hebrew Bible was patriarchal and that, resultantly, it was sexist. They argue on this basis that the contents of the Hebrew Bible are not of importance for us today.

We would like to argue that the Hebrew Bible is of importance for today's world. Yet, we must distinguish between "faith" and "religion" in order to do so; we must seek to distinguish between human perceptions of divine intentions and cultural realities.

It is our suggestion that the cultures reflected in the Hebrew Bible were, out of necessity, "sexist" before they were patriarchal. Indeed, we would like to argue that the pre-history of Israel witnessed a matrilineal society, a society which became patriarchal and, eventually, patrilineal.


Is the Hebrew Bible concerned with salvation? The nature of Ms. Trible's "salvation" has been questioned. If one views salvation in the soteriological sense then, although the Christian may differ, "salvation" is not necessarily part of the literature. Yet, if yeshuah (=deliverance) is understood to be God's care for the safety of his people in the midst of many troubles then salvation is a vital element of the faith as it is reflected in the Hebrew Bible. This deliverance is clearly for both the male and the female. Then again, Ms. Trible's writings reflect her Christian faith so...
Of importance to our understanding of this shift are the following topics: a move from a semi-nomadic to an agricultural orientation, the division of labor, the emphasis on unity, the family, the city, monotheism, superstition and uncleanness.

We intend, then, to consider the impact which the culture and environment of the Hebrew Bible had in causing biblical religion to diverge from biblical faith. Our's is a misunderstanding which has long fueled a tyranny of tradition, a tradition of weltschmerz in the context of literature that promises comfort. We shall seek to correct our misunderstanding so that tradition in the Hebrew Bible will no longer be tyranny for women.

We must keep several points in mind as we move on to the literature of the Hebrew Bible. We must bear in mind that the records of antiquity are almost exclusively the works of men. Much is said about women but little is said by them. Therefore, one must proceed with caution in an examination of literature which is slanted in this way. It is in this light that we may partially understand the relatively small number of passages which concern themselves directly with women as opposed to the large number which concern themselves with men.

The descriptions offered in the Hebrew Bible of the role of women in the society are the perceptions of men; we have no real idea how women would have portrayed their functions. Yet, any great respect accorded the woman must also be seen as
coming from the pen of a patriarchal writer. This is of interest to remember.

Norah Lofts writes that,

To the humanitarian the test of the degree of civilization reached by any community of people is not its measure of material progress, the magnificence of its buildings, the extent of its conquests, the cleanliness of its water supply, but the amount of consideration shown to its weaker members and amongst these weaker members all women must, willy-nilly, rank themselves at one time or another. 6

Today’s society differs vastly from that of the biblical periods. Technological advances over the years have created many new and diverse occupations, occupations which require little if any physical exertion. These contemporary jobs are appropriate for both male and female. The jobs of the biblical periods were not so unisex in nature. A major differentiation of labor occurred between the sexes. Strength was necessary to function in many aspects of the pre-biblical life. This factor had its importance later on with the development of the Israelite cult.

The woman was weaker than the man in such a society due to the inferiority of her equipment of muscle. Also, any woman who bears a child is in a physically weakened state for a certain period of time; her out of house activities become very limited. So also, technological simplicity was a limiting factor in early Israelite culture. One needs only to turn to a less-developed-country (LDC) in our present time to grasp

what differences the lack of technology may hold for the division of labor. We will develop this point throughout the text and then return to it in the end.

Systematization can be called an attempt to master a complicated situation. It can be compared with canonization. Canons are adopted under political pressures. Dogmas are also formulated in a time of crisis, in defence against emnity and hostility, and for protection against temptation.?

The student of the Hebrew Bible must always seek to understand the situation which prompted an author to write. What was his purpose in writing? What elements of his environment and society may have affected him?

Many of the passages in the Hebrew Bible purport to refer only to men. This may be understood in the light of the fact that men were generally expected to be those who took the initiative. Yet, women are to be understood as being implicitly included in a number of traditionally male-centered references. When the author wrote it seemed natural to refer only to men and the male instance of the event. This is often understood as ruling out women whereas the nonmention is, in fact, omission and tradition—not a statement of fact. For the literalists this is, indeed, an aid in perpetuating the tyranny of tradition.

As a final statement of introduction we would like to say that this paper is very broad in scope. Its goal is

rather far reaching and can be grasped only if some areas are
touched upon but lightly. To attempt to go into great depths
in all facets of this study would greatly limit its scope and,
thus, cripple its purpose. In a few places more than one an-
swer is offered. This is, in our mind, acceptable in that our
purpose is to create questions where there were none—to invite
the scholar, the clergy, and the layperson to rethink and re-
define their beliefs if necessary.

"Depatriarchalizing" is a term which has caught on in
the field of feminist theology. Yet, it is a term which im-
plies difficulty. Depatriarchalizing involves a restatement
of material that has, in the past, been examined thoroughly.
Many scholars are set in their understandings of the Hebrew
Bible; for them depatriarchalizing is not a possibility.

Depatriarchalizing is a discipline which is, in our
mind, not an exact science. Not all that is said can be justi-
fied hermeneutically. As depatriarchalizers we attempt to
use key verses to set the tone of a passage; we then use the
understanding gained from these verses to show that the re-
mainung verses need not be understood in a patriarchal manner--
the woman does not always need to be the poor soul in the
tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Many verses may be interpreted
in different lights. To always see them as patriarchal and
therefore sexist is not legitimate. Depatriarchalizing in-
volves distinguishing between the biblical faith and the out-
ward manifestations of the faith. The religion must be under-
stood in the context of the patriarchal culture. Simply, the depatriarchalizer allows the true intent of the biblical faith to shine through by setting the biblical religion in its proper light. Our effort follows.
CHAPTER II

MYTH, CREATION, AND FALL:

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The literature which comprises the Hebrew Bible is sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Unfortunately, this material remains very much a mystery to many of these same people. While this is understandable it is not necessary; the literature is complex and often appears to be contradictory but it may be understood.

The Hebrew Bible has long been cited as a major factor contributing to the current degradation and subjugation of women in the Christian Church; so also has it been in Judaism and Islam. Tradition, as it exists in this sense, is a negative influence on any religion. Patriarchy has God on its side only if we are willing to equate patriarchal realities with man's perception of divine intentions. Mary Daly is not willing to equate the two; she writes:

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a Father ruling "his" people, then it is in the nature of things and according to divine
plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. 8

It is clear here that Daly is not offering her perception of theology and its marriage with sexism but rather her perception of the situation as it exists in the Church today. In the minds of the laity God=Father; this is as basic as 1+1=2. Indeed, if God=Father then society, according to Daly, should remain as it is and women should serve men in the future as they have in the past. But perhaps the Father intends something other than this for "his" children.

What if the question is restated? What if God≠Father? What if the tradition which has become common, the patriarchal reign, has done so through oppression? What if patriarchy does not have God on its side? What if...

These questions are more complex than they may at first appear. Yet, they must be asked. Controversy surrounds the entire topic of women in the Church, a wavering controversy born of mistaken theologies. These mistaken theologies have built a base that is long and wide, a base which supports the tyranny of tradition. The base has not yet begun to crumble, but it has been shaken. No longer is sexism acceptable to many scholars, clergy, or laypeople. The base has only recently started to be shaken; if it is to crumble the tyranny of tradition must be questioned and understood.

Our purpose is to discover "truth" as it exists in the Hebrew Bible. Many have sought this truth in extra-bibical sources and in sociological analysis, analyses which often forget the character of those analyzed. Many feminists have felt it necessary to deny the legitimacy of the Scriptures in order to elevate the woman to a position of which she is worthy. This is not necessary; Phyllis Trible is correct when she argues that depatriarchalizing is not something we have to bring to the Hebrew Bible. Rather, it is "a hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it." 9

One area of the Hebrew Bible that needs to be exposed is that of the Creation and Fall narratives. So also must we expose the proper relation of myth to the literature of these narratives; we must set myth free from the bonds of tradition. Many understand myth to be fable and fancy--the product of a vivid imagination and, therefore, not true. We would disagree with popular conception of myth--it is a conception which furthers the tyranny of tradition. Our crucial first step will be to examine the relationship of myth to the Creation and Fall narratives. As the beginning of this process we will seek to define "myth" as the historian of religion does.

MYTH

In the latter part of the nineteenth century a woman named Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote a book called The Woman’s Bible. As the following passage shows, Ms. Stanton understood myth to be fable or fancy, the product of a vivid imagination. She wrote that:

The real difficulty in woman's case is that the whole foundation of the Christian religion rests on her temptation and man's fall, hence the necessity of a Redeemer and a plan of Salvation. As the chief cause of this dire calamity, woman's degradation and subordination were made a necessity. If, however, we accept Darwinian theory, that the race has been a gradual from the lower to a higher form of life, and that the story of the Fall is a myth, we can exonerate the snake, emancipate the woman, and reconstruct a more rational religion for the nineteenth century, and thus escape all the perplexities of the Jewish mythology as of no more importance than those of the Greek, Persian, and Egyptian.10

During the course of my studies it has become clear that Ms. Stanton's views regarding myth are incorrect. This in no way reflects on her abilities as a scholar; indeed, for the period in which she wrote she was very able. Yet, today's understanding of myth challenges the old ideas that myth is fantasy, legend, and fairy tale. For Stanton, myth was to be understood in a literal fashion and therefore, fairy tale. A literal reading showed the "absurdity" of all myths; they obviously were not true. Once again, the tyranny of tradition took the form of an overliteral reading of the Scriptures and,

in fact, of all mythology.

We would like to undertake the task of reinterpreting Gen. 3 for Ms. Stanton in the light or a correct understanding of myth and the complexities that accompany it. We propose to do this through a synthesis of a number of scholars' perceptions of the relationship of myth and religion. We will then shift from myth in general to myth in particular--to myth in the Creation and Fall narratives of Genesis. This is necessary to interpret correctly the events of the Garden.

In the past myths have been associated with fable, invention, and fiction. But, Mircea Eliade argued that we must seek to understand myth as it was understood in the archaic societies. A myth is a story where truth is conveyed symbolically. It is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, and significant. We are acquainted with myths as sacred tradition, exemplary model, and primordial revelation.

Jung tells us that myths are natural phenomena which grow out of the mind more or less uniformly in all places. For Claude Levi-Strauss this uniformity is also of great interest. The names and faces change but the import is the same.

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Charles Long argues against a view that, influenced by social evolutionism, refers to myth as the fanciful imagination of the human mind and, resultantly, as the opposite of the world of reality. Long understands myth to be true for those who live by it; for them myth is a story about reality. It is near impossible to understand the reality and the being of a people unless we first understand the relationship they have to their myths.

Eliade feels that to understand myths and reactions to them is to see them as human phenomena—phenomena of culture and not as a pathological outbreak of instinctual behavior, bestiality, or sheer childishness. 14

Prior to its subjection to intellectual analysis, myth was "alive" for many people of the world; it supplied models for human behavior and, thus, gave meaning and value to their lives. The Greeks, starting with Xenophanes about 500 B.C.E., went on to empty mythos of all religious and metaphysical meaning; "mythos" came to mean "that which cannot exist." The Judeo-Christian tradition has affixed a stamp of "falsehood" and "illusion" to whatever is not justified by their sacred literature. Thus, myth has come to be understood as being that which was practiced in later Greece, Egypt, and Rome. The "less popular" mythologies remained, for the most part, alive for those who professed them as truth.

If we agree with scholars like Eliade and Long, how

14 Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 3.
are we to confront those like Ms. Stanton? That is to say, "In what sense may we argue that myths are true?".

If we take as given that myths are not true in the literal sense of the word we must next ask--"Must we equate truth with literalness?". Granted that myths contain characters "impossible" to comprehend, is there another more viable understanding that we may bring to truth in myth?

Eliade defined the creation myth in a way which he deemed most adequate only because it was the most embracing of all definitions available. He wrote that, "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the beginnings." Indeed, creation myths relate to us how, through the deeds of supernatural beings, reality came into existence, whether it be the whole of reality (the cosmos) or just a small part (an oasis). Myth, then, is often an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, how it began to be.

Another scholar, Marie Louise Von Franz, has studied the areas of myth and reality from a psychological perspective. She writes:

Wherever known reality stops, where we touch the unknown, there we project an archetypal image.

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15 Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 5.
16 Myths also relate to "real time" as can be seen in the popular American myths of the Great Pumpkin, the log cabin to the White House, and George Washington's cherry tree. Yet, we are here concerned especially with the creation myths of the past and these do relate to primordial time.
Creation myths represent unconscious and preconscious processes which describe not the origin of our cosmos, but the origin of man's conscious awareness of the world.\textsuperscript{18}

We cannot speak about any kind of reality except in its form as a content of our consciousness. The only reality we can talk about is the reality of which we are aware.\textsuperscript{19}

Ms. Von Franz clearly states that we can talk knowledgeably only about the image of reality in our own field of consciousness; if others argue different views we cannot argue that they are incorrect. The opposing view does not fit our current temporal disposition. We must seek to understand each myth in its own context; it is only then that we may know the "truth" of the myth.

Long tends to agree with Ms. Von Franz; he feels that mythical thinking is not concerned primarily with logic, but in the same instance it is neither illogical or prelogical. Mythical thought, for Long, is that which represents man's initial confrontation with the power in life. We must strive to understand myth in this context. Myths do not attempt to work out a rational explanation of deity.

In myth expression is being given to man's reaction to life as a source of power and being. The myth deals with handling the 'Something Other' and points to the definite manner in which the world is available for man. The word and content of myth are revelations of power.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18}Von Franz, \textit{Creation Myths}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{19}Von Franz, \textit{Creation Myths}, p. 10.

The myth is a symbolic ordering which makes clear how the world is present for man. Pettazzoni is clear in his intent when he writes that:

The myth is true and cannot but be true because it is the charter of the tribe's life, the foundation of a world which cannot continue without that myth. On the other hand, the myth cannot continue without this world, of which it forms an organic part, as the explanation of its beginnings, as its original raison d'être, its prologue in heaven.21

Lévi-Strauss takes us to an even deeper understanding of the complexity of myth. For him myth is not only truth but it is a logical truth—comparable to the scientific truths of today. Lévi-Strauss writes that, "The kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied."22 He uses two axes to illustrate his point; one is made of steel, the other of stone. Both may be equally well constructed but the steel differs from the stone.

Long clarifies this theory when he argues that religious experience and mythic apprehension represent an existential mode of grasping the world. In the myth, the world is understood as it exists in a particular manner for mankind. This type of apprehension reflects mankind's qualifications and apprehensions of the world. The historical conditions provide the means through which the religious sentiment, that

22 Sebeok, Myth: A Symposium, p. 106.
is myth, expresses itself but the historical conditions do not create by themselves the religious sentiment.

In order to see the validity of the above statement one needs only to compare two cultures, the one being agricultural in nature and the other being pastoral/nomadic. In the agricultural community the Earth Mother and Sky Father form of mythology is prevalent. This is, of course, due to the need for fertility for the crops, a fertility which the union of the gods could supply. With the pastoral/nomadic culture the deity becomes a powerful sky god or lord of the animals. The meaning of plentitude and wholeness remain despite the differences in culture; myth is not entirely dependent on the historical situation. "Historical conditions provide the means through which expression is given to that dimension of human existence which is more than history." 

The past decades have seen a move away from the view that historians of religion use only purely conceptual and evolutionistic categories in their analyses. This is due in no small part to the efforts of scholars like Otto, Wach, van der Leeuw, Eliade, and Long. One hopes that this new understanding of myth and its complexities will aid theologians as they examine myth in the biblical context. It is not to be denied; it is to be understood.

23While the Earth Mother and Sky Father mythology is the most common form in agricultural communities the reverse is also found. An example would be the sky goddess NUT with the male air god SHU and the male earth god GEB as portrayed in the Book of the Dead—Egypt, 10th. c. B.C.E.

24Long, Alpha, p. 20.
If myth is an expression of man's cosmic awareness and myth is truth, then how are we to understand the serpent, Eve, and the fruit? For Ms. Stanton it was impossible to regard myth as truth. To do so would have been to defeat her cause; if the mythical account of the Fall in Gen. 3 is 'truth' then snakes shall crawl on their bellies and women shall have men as their masters for all time. After all, is that not what the Scriptures say?

It is our understanding that the biblical material in Gen. 1-3 does not argue for the subjugation of the female to the male but rather only to God. In fact, the biblical authors envisioned a society radically different from the tradition which has been handed down by the Church Fathers. It is time to advance in our understanding of this literature; many advances have been made but there is still far to go. We turn now to the first (canonically) creation narrative in the Hebrew Bible in an effort to further our understanding so as to aid in the defeat of the wolves and the freeing of the sheep.

**CREATION: GENESIS 1:1-2:4a**

The Creation narrative found in Gen. 1:1-2:4a is credited to the Priestly Writers—the P source. The material from the P source (550-450 B.C.E.) comes from a period later than the material from the Yahwist Writers (the J source—ca. 950 B.C.E.) which includes the Creation narrative found in Gen. 2:4b-25.
The literature of the J source will be discussed immediately after the P material.

The purpose, correctly stated by Speiser\(^2\) of P in writing the later creation narrative was to explain the origin of the "universe"—the origin of cosmic order as he knew it. This is to be understood in contrast to the earlier J narrative which sought to explain the more specific creation on earth.

B. Jacob writes, incorrectly, that, "In chapter 1 the man is the pinnacle of a pyramid, in chapter 2 the center of a circle."\(^2\) Rather, the climax of the creation narrative attributed to P is the initiation of the Sabbath which is appropriate to P—the Priestly Source. With this insight as to the purpose of P in writing this myth we may better understand the individual elements of which it is composed.

The first of the passages we will examine reads as follows:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth." So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Gen. 1:26-27

A number of scholars have been led to argue that

\(\text{adam} = \text{mankind}, \) in these verses, is one creature encompassing two sexes—\(\text{adam} \) is both male and female within


one form. Cuthbert Simpson writes that, "the male and female are created at the same time, with which the representation of the older J story...should be contrasted."27

We strongly disagree with both conclusions! The simple fact is that the information is not there to be extracted. The P writer was not concerned with being specific as concerned the creation of 'adham; 'adham was but a step forward on his path to his climax, the Sabbath. Thus we are led to disagree with Thomas R.W. Longstaff when he writes that, "...it is important to note that P describes the creation of man and woman as simultaneous."28

If we accept that P wrote to tell of the creation of the Sabbath and not specifically of the creation of earthly creatures (as did J), then we must realize that the statements by P concerning the other elements of creation are probably just steps on his path to his end.29 We must caution ourselves against seeking more from the P narrative than is there. In this light it is important to note that P does not necessarily describe the creation of man and woman as simultaneous or androgynous. We just do not know; we are not told.


29We are not suggesting here that P wrote with but a single purpose in mind; this seems unlikely. Yet, we agree with Speiser (Genesis, pp. 3-25.) that the center of the stage for P is heaven, and man is but an item in a cosmic sequence of majestic acts. We are told of the creation of man but the
Also, to use the "extraction" of Eve from 'adham (Gen. 2:21-23=J source) to explain an androgynous creation (Gen. 1:26-27=P source) is not justified. The imposition of J on P is not to be condoned by any scholar or student of the Hebrew Bible.  

Genesis 5:1-2 reads:  

On the day when God created man he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and on the day when he created them, he blessed them and called them man.

This passage emphasizes the fact that the man and the woman were created on the same day. Some scholars have argued that this passage provides a basis by which we may accept a simultaneous creation; the two were born on the same day. Others have suggested that we must take into account the length of a mythical day. If a mythical day may be understood as being a lengthy era then there is no basis for a simultaneous creation. Yet, it seems clear that P is not talking in terms of mythical creatures, mythical plants, or a mythical Sabbath; how then may we argue that he is talking about a mythical day? We know that the creation of the man and the woman was in the same day but it seems clear that we cannot convincingly argue for androgyny or simultaneity; neither can we argue for a separate creation for each sex. We are not given enough details are lacking as is the case with the other elements of the creation. The few details given are not conclusive!

It seems clear that both P and J relied on Mesopotamian data in the creation of their myths. Yet, it also seems clear that P and J worked independently. Thus, though the works are similar, they should not be used to support each other as Paul does in 1 Cor. 11:7-12.
data to arrive at a final conclusion.

The use of הָגִיר (zakhar=male) and הָגִירה (n̄ebḥah=female) in Gen. 1:27 offers no evidence for the subjugation or exultation of either sex. The same terms are used of the animals—see Gen. 6:19 for but one of many examples. The terms probably denoted biological differences, undoubtedly the sex organs.

Genesis 1:27 also states that God made 'adham in his own image, in the imago Dei. How are we to understand the imago Dei? If it is as a Father in heaven ruling his people then, as Mary Daly has written, it may be just and fair that women are subordinate to men. But, we must question the validity of this understanding of the imago Dei.

A number of arguments have been forwarded as to a proper understanding of the imago Dei, but the speculations for our purpose are unnecessary. Genesis 1:26-27 very clearly states that the male and the female participate equally in the imago Dei—"... in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The male and the female participate in the imago Dei with no quantitative or qualitative differences!

Now that we have made our point that the two participate equally in the Creator's image, we may reflect upon that image. In the light of the equal participation of the two in

31 Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 13. or see pp. 14-15 of this paper where the material is quoted.
the *imago Dei* we may rule out the difference of the sex organs as being related to the image.\(^{32}\)

Skinner feels that the *imago Dei* relates to the physical form.\(^{33}\) Although his methods may not always be exact, Skinner is, at least, partially correct.\(^{34}\) The P and J writers of the Pentateuch did indeed picture a God who walked and talked in true mythical form. That the ancient Hebrews ever advanced to a conception of God as a formless spirit would be difficult to prove; yet the P writer expressed a partial understanding of this complex entity. This fact in itself is amazing.

It is our belief that the early Hebrews understood the *imago Dei* as being more than just the corporeal form. In Hebrew thought, "the body was a part of the whole man and was necessary to his complete being."\(^{35}\) This conception may be seen as common to many peoples—that something that is unlike us is made certain to us only when we capture it in bodily terms, in terms that are familiar to us.

Yes, early mankind may have conceptualized God in a human form but there is something else beyond that. Beyond

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\(^{32}\)Exceptions to this statement would occur if we viewed the image as being related to procreation or if we took seriously the view that there may have been a Hebrew goddess. The former seems highly unlikely; the latter seems not to have been the case when P was writing, although an earlier period may have witnessed a different situation.


\(^{34}\)Skinner also imposes J onto P and vice versa.

\(^{35}\)Simpson, *Genesis*, p. 484.
that distinctive (some would call it child-like) yearning for something that is like ourselves, something we can see and touch, there is more. In Genesis 1 a greater conception is breaking through. Simpson argues convincingly that the Semitic mind worked instinctively with pictures, not abstractions. He wrote that the body was...

the outward manifestation of the reality of which it was a part, the representation that man was made in the image of God meant much more than that man looked like God or like the divine beings which formed his retinue. The image included likeness to them in spiritual powers—the power of thought, the power of communication, the power of self transcendence. No doubt these concepts remained to some extent inarticulate in the author's mind. He was trying to state in concrete terms—in the only terms he knew—what could only be stated, however inadequately, in abstract terms!

Note that this fits very neatly with our conception of myth. P was trying to state in clear terms that which existed as an unclear reality in his consciousness.

Other arguments have been offered as explanations of the *imago Dei*; among them are that it is to be seen in dominion, in mankind's capacity for rational thought, and in morality. We will not explore these other possibilities but will reiterate an earlier point. What is important to note for this study is that the male and the female participate equally in the *imago Dei*.

Genesis 1:28 assumes sexuality. Once again, this is understandable when compared to J who uses fruit and a serpent to explain sexuality. It is understandable because P sees

36 Simpson, "Genesis"; p. 485.
sexuality as merely another step on his path to his end—the Sabbath. Therefore, what may have been a long and involved story was condensed into:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of the heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth." Gen. 1:28

It is simply stated by P that sexuality is good; it is a blessing from God. As was the case with the creation of the man and the woman and the animals, P sees that the creation of sexuality was important enough to slow down his travel along the path to the Sabbath. Where J explains the process of creation in a thorough manner, P only highlights the major points so as to reach the Sabbath.

Despite P's emphasis on the importance of the Sabbath, a number of points seem to be clear. P envisioned man and woman as being equal in creation, both are given dominion over the animals and both participate equally in the imago Dei. Sexuality is a fundamental part of creation; it is good. There is no hint of the subordination of the woman to the man in Genesis 1:1-2:4a. We shall, then, move on to examine the creation narrative attributed to J as it appears in Genesis 2:4b-25.
The second creation narrative in the Hebrew Bible was written by the Yahwist writer(s) ca. 950 B.C.E., over 400 years before P wrote. It is widely recognized that J wrote to tell of creation on earth, a much narrower scope than that of P.

Many readers and students of the Hebrew Bible are under the impression that P recognized the equality of the sexes whereas J made woman a second and, therefore, subordinate sex. Are women a second sex? Do they participate in Creation to a lesser degree than do men? Elizabeth Gould Davis does not think so. She writes that,

...it is man's fear and dread of the hated sex that has made woman's lot such a cruel one in the brave new masculine world. In the frenzied insecurity of his fear of women, man has remade society after his own pattern of confusion and strife and has created a world in which woman is the outsider. He has rewritten history with the conscious purpose of ignoring, belittling, and ridiculing the great women of the past, just as modern historians and journalists seek to ignore, belittle, and ridicule the achievements of modern women. He has devalued woman to an object of his basest physical desires and has remade God in his own image--"a God that does not love women." Worst of all, he has attempted to transform woman herself into a brainless simulacrum, a robot who has come to acquiesce meekly in the belief in her own inferiority.

So long has the myth of feminist inferiority prevailed that women themselves find it hard to believe that their own sex was once and for a very long time the superior and dominant sex. In order to restore women to their ancient dignity and pride, they must be taught their own history, as the American blacks are being taught theirs.37

Davis, quite obviously, does not desire to see a society where men and women coexist in harmony. Her idea of a perfected society would be a return to the matriarchates of the past. We believe that a conception far greater is breaking through in the literature handed down to us from J. We will examine Genesis 2-3 to better understand J's perfected society and will then examine the evidence for a matriarchate if, indeed, there is any (see Chapter III).

The narrative in Genesis 2:4b-25 takes place in the Garden of Eden. We are not able to speak of the young earth except in the context of myth. God prepares an exceedingly beautiful garden for man, for man that he has created with his own hands. A man of the desert, as was the Semite in this early period, may easily have conjured up the image of the Garden of Eden--of flowing streams and trees laden with fruits; where all is precious and beautiful; where man, woman, and animals coexist in harmony--where the desert does not exist. The mind may easily have created a Paradise out of the all to infrequently encountered oasis. Perhaps the Semites did believe that the Garden existed, that it was in the distant land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Our understanding of myth has shown us that the Garden did indeed exist for J; it was reality, he believed in it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the late distinguished German theologian, was correct when he wrote that,
Pictures are not lies: They denote things, they let the things that are meant shine through. But pictures change, of course; the pictures of a child are different from those of an adult, those of the man of the desert are different from those of the man of the city. Either way they remain true, just as human speech and expression of ideas generally can remain true. They are true to the extent that God remains in them.38

That which we picture as Eden is, indeed, Eden. The Garden is ours to conceptualize if only God remains in it. Pictures, that is the mythology of J, are not lies. How may we understand the “truth” according to J then? What sort of picture does he paint?

Our examination of the picture brings us first to Gen. 2:18: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will provide a partner for him.'" It was not good that man was alone; it was divine judgement that decided that man needed woman. The divine figure also stated that the creation of the partner was good. God was not easily satisfied; He first brought the wild animals of the ground and the birds of the heaven into existence, but they were not good—not good enough. It was then that God created First Woman. Let us examine these ideas a little further.

The final words of Gen. 2:18 read, "I will provide a partner for him." This is more popularly known in the well-cadenced words of the KJV: "I will make him an helpmeet for him." Many have read this line and assumed that it places

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woman into a subservient relationship to the man. This understanding remains today as one of the tyrannies of tradition which the Church has handed down. The woman has been a servant for a long time; it is now time for her to rise up and escape. An examination of the Hebrew text gives a clear understanding of what intended when he penned Gen. 2:18. The Hebrew (read from right to left) appears with its English equivalent below.

These final words of Gen. 2:18, as they appear above, must be reinterpreted. The correct meaning rests on the proper understanding of the phrase interpreted 'a partner for him' in the NEB.

The term 'ezer appears nineteen times in the Hebrew Bible. In all but four of these verses (Ps. 121:1; Isa. 30:5; Ezek. 12:14; Hos. 13:9) the term pertains to the deity; it is used with respect to the God who brings succor to the needy. In the four verses where 'ezer does not pertain to the deity

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39 All Hebrew texts are taken from R. Kittel, Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967/77).

40 Gen. 2:18, 20; Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9; 121:1; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5; Isa. 30:5; Ezek. 12:14; Dan. 11:34; Hos. 13:9.
the word also implies, in a relational sense, an inferiority of those needing the help. It would be convenient to make the jump from here to say that the man was inferior to the woman and therefore unable to exist without her, it was not good that he was alone. Yet, this idea needs to be qualified for us just as J qualified it when he penned the verse. The qualifying word—קֶנֶדוֹ—acts as a modifier for 'ezer.

Longstaff writes, and we think correctly, that:

The word נֶגוֹד denotes "that which is conspicuous" or "in front of" and when used with the preposition קֶ denotes "that which is in front of" in the sense of "that which is parallel to" or "corresponding to." Thus, the Yahwist describes the female as the necessary counterpart of the male and portrays 'adam, mankind, as incomplete until the two essential components, male and female, have been created.

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Phyllis Trible informs us that 'ezer is a relational term which becomes specific in its intent only through the use of קֶנֶדוֹ which connotes equality.

In this light we may understand the woman to be a helper who is a counterpart to the man. In Gen. 2:20 'ezer is used in connection with the animals, but they fail to correspond equally to the man. Thus, we are led to once again agree with Trible when she writes that:

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42 Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," pp. 35-43.
God is the helper superior to man; the animals are helpers inferior to man; woman is the helper equal to man.\(^{43}\)

Trible also deals with a second aspect of this early creation narrative, a ring composition theory.\(^{43}\) In this theory man is understood to be the beginning of the narrative and the woman is the end of the narrative. In the ring composition, the woman is the return to the original and, resultantly, is to be understood as being on the same level as the man. Man begins, woman ends, and by definition (of the ring composition theory) the two are equal. The theory is, in itself, interesting but we are leery of it.\(^{44}\)

Assuming that we are correct in accepting Trible’s definitive explanation of the relationship between God, man, woman, and the animals; how are we to understand Gen. 2:21-25?

And so the Lord God put the man into a trance, and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over the place. The Lord God then built up the rib, which he had taken out of the man, into a woman. He brought her to the man, and the man said:

"Now this at last—
bone from my bones,
flesh from my flesh!—
This shall be called woman,
for from man was this taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Now they were both naked, the man and his wife, but they had no feeling of shame toward one another.

Does woman’s position after man in the order of creation make her inferior to the man? Or perhaps we should view

\(^{43}\)Trible, “Depatriarchalizing,” p. 36.

\(^{44}\)Trible, “Depatriarchalizing,” pp. 35ff. Our reservations are stated most simply in a question: Does the narrative fit the ring composition theory or has Trible made the ring composition theory fit the narrative? The answer is not clear.
creation as climactic in progression thus making the woman superior to the man? Neither alternative seems to be correct. Loftiness for one sex over the other does not appear to be incorporated into J's understanding of creation.

Yet, the separate factions have each pushed loftiness for their side. "Evidence" for the loftiness of man includes the notion that he was the first in the order of creation (Does this give woman a position somewhere below the animals?). So also did First Man--'Adham--name the animals and his wife, naming being a source of power in Semitic culture. The man was not taken from the woman but the woman from the man. Therefore she should be subordinated to him.

Other evidence is argued for the loftiness of woman. Woman, by virtue of being created last, is the climax of creation. Also, the man cleaves to his wife and the pronunciation of her creation uses the word "good". Further, there is the amazing use of the term 'ezer k'negdo in relation to the woman.

Before examining these pieces of evidence for "loftiness" we will examine the picture painted for us by J in this creation narrative. To do this we must be willing and able to put ourselves in the place of J; we must attempt to see the world as he saw it. Only then may we understand the mythology he has handed down to us--mythology of incomparable beauty and meaning.

If we, as individuals, were to attempt to picture Paradise recovered I am positive that we would all envision
worlds quite different from that in which we live. No two Eden's would be identical; many factors would influence the shape which our picture would take. Just as we may picture something far removed as our Paradise, so may the desert wanderer--the nomad--picture a different society.

What could be more heavenly for the desert nomad than the all too infrequently found oasis--an island of beauty and comfort in the midst of barren land and stifling heat? The Garden of Eden is away to the West, the much talked about West. It is to the West where rivers of clear water and greenery of various hues are to be found. It is to the West that the mind of J travelled, to the beautiful West where he envisioned an oasis of comfort unlike that to which he was accustomed.

In this Garden God places the man whom he created from the barren land--from the dust to which the nomad was so accustomed. The Garden is beautiful but the potential for danger resides therein, not hidden but in the open. The man, in the Garden, does not have to roam; he may settle down. He works the land (Gen. 2:15) and it is productive--for the Semite of that time a blessing beyond hope.

The writer, J, pauses and surveys his Eden. It is nice but could be nicer; it is not good that man is alone. It seemed obvious that a helper was needed for the man. Yet, J did not envision just a helper but rather an ezer k'negdo--a helper corresponding equally to the man.
The animals and the birds are created and the man names them, but there is not among them ezer k'negdo. Now that the earth has been populated with its nonhuman inhabitants the writer may introduce the woman. The woman is created of 'adham's rib and she, at last, is ezer k'negdo. Creation is complete in J's narrative only with the creation of the woman. It is in this blessed state of a finished creation that the man and the woman have no shame toward one another despite their anatomical differences. But, the trees in the midst of the Garden are still there and...

Before we examine the Fall narrative in Gen. 3 there are a number of elements in the current narrative which require examination. One such element is the nature of the first human--'adham.

Phyllis Trible writes of Gen. 2:4b-25 that:

Until the differentiation of female and male, 'adham is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes. 45

The conception of an androgynous creation was, we believe, beyond the comprehension of the Semitic mind. There exists no parallel story in the literature of the Israelite and surrounding cultures to warrant an androgynous interpretation of this narrative. That J pictured the first human as a man in bodily form is clear from the account of the awakening of the man and the woman to sexual awareness (Gen. 2:25; 3:7), he was man in every sense except the sense which

45Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," p. 35.
we have attached to "man" today. We envision the man as the opposite of the woman; this vision does not enter J's narrative until Gen. 2:22. Yet, it seems clear that J envisioned the first human as having had the bodily form of a man.

The notion of an androgynous creation is dealt another setback through an examination of the Hebrew text of Gen. 2:22-23, 25. In Gen. 2:22 humankind exists as 'adham and 'adham's rib is built up into woman. At the end of the verse 'ishshah (=woman) is brought to 'adham; 'adham is the term we have noted above as being used for the first human.

In Gen. 2:23 we note two terms being used for the first human--he (it?) is first 'adham but later becomes 'ish (=man). Woman remains, as she does throughout the text, 'ishshah. This verse in itself may serve as fuel for those who argue that creation was androgynous, that 'adham became two separate entities--'ish and 'ishshah, but Gen. 2:25 offers evidence

46 Trible argues that, "Man as male does not precede woman as female but happens concurrently with her." ("Depatriarchalizing," p. 37.) Also, Trible argues that the dualism of mankind first occurs in Gen. 2:23; while we agree that this is the first account of man's awareness of a dual sexual nature for mankind we also argue strongly that mankind, in the vision of J, becomes dual first in Gen. 2:22. This is important to note in light of the fact that many scholars consider Gen. 2:23-24 to be a later addition to the text (see Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gn 2, 23a)," CBQ 32 (1970): 532-542.). It is clear that both Gen. 2:22 and Gen. 2:23 recognize a period when sexuality was not a part of man's sphere of awareness.

47 It is important to note that we are not arguing for a sexless creation here. Rather, J's vision may reflect the same Semitic thought exhibited by Paul in Gal. 3:28 where, in Christ, bodily and social distinctions escape the awareness of mankind.

48 The author of Gen. 2:23 is mistaken in thinking that 'ishshah is derived from 'ish by adding the feminine ending-ah;
to the contrary.

In Gen. 2:25 the term used for the male is, once again, 'adham; the female remains 'ishshah. It is of interest to note that J continues to use the term 'adham in the following verses; he does not again use "'ish" in the Creation and Fall narratives.

We may conclude, then, that 'adham, in the literature of J, is used for man and not mankind as is the same term in P's creation narrative. Thus, it appears that J envisioned the first human as having had the outward appearance of a man. But he was not "man" as we understand the term today.

We will conclude this examination of Gen. 2:4b-25 by examining briefly a number of points vital to a proper understanding of the position which the female occupied in the thought of J. Some of these points will be restatements of the above material, other points will expand on these same ideas. All are important to a proper understanding of the literature.

1) In Gen. 2:18 "good" is used to describe the creation of the woman. This is perceived to be divine judgement!

2) We note again the amazing use of ezer k'negdo to describe the woman's relationship to the man, a relationship of equality!

the pun, though it carries over well into the English language (man--woman), is not correct. Whereas "'ish" (=man) probably comes from מְשַׁלֶקֶת, a root meaning "to lead", 'ishshah is thought to have been derived from מָשַׁלֶקֶת, a root meaning "to be delicate". For a more thorough examination of this topic see O.J. Baab, "Sex, Sexual Behavior," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by G.A. Buttrick, IV. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962): 296-301.
3) Woman is the conclusion of the creation; without her the creation was not good. Indeed, the creation was incomplete without the addition of the woman.

Yet, despite the views of many, the woman may not be seen as the climax of J's creation narrative. The creation of a pure sexuality must be understood as being the peak of Gen. 2:4b-25; this can clearly be seen in the relationship of Gen. 2:25 to Gen. 3. We are to understand then that both the man and the woman were essential for the creation to be complete, but neither one was more essential than the other.

4) It is argued, we think incorrectly, that 'adham exhibits a form of control over woman in that he names her in Gen. 2:23. Gerhard von Rad writes that the act of naming is of importance in Semitic thought. "Let us remind ourselves once more that name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."49 The word "woman", in the light of our understanding of Gen. 1-3 as myth, cannot be understood as being anything more than a recognition of fact. Woman was introduced into the text and the author is recognizing this fact.

A second point of importance in this vein is brought to light by Phyllis Trible.50 She brings it to the reader's attention that J accomplishes the act of naming through the


50Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," p. 38.
use of the verb יָנַח (qara’=to call) plus השם (shem 'eth= name). Examples of this formula in the work of J can be seen in Gen. 2:19-20 where the animals are named, Gen. 3:20 where the woman is named Eve⁵¹ and also in Gen. 4:17, 25, 26a, 26b. In Gen. 2:23 the verb qara’ is used but the rest of the formula is lacking. Thus we may conclude that J did not understand himself to be naming the woman; he was merely recognizing the entrance of the woman into the myth.

7) Both 'adham and 'ishshah were built up from raw materials. G. Ernest Wright understood the use of dust for man and the rib for the woman to imply that the two were built of "the same stuff."⁵² Both required divine labor in order to achieve their final state. Vos⁵³ and Trible⁵⁴ have both made the point that man has nothing to be proud of as concerns the creation of the woman. The narrative gives the impression that much labor was required to build the rib up into a woman. Trible tells us that 'adham was "neither participant, nor spectator, nor consultant at her birth."⁵⁵

If we assume that the woman is subordinate to the man

⁵¹We will examine the naming of the woman as "Eve" in the "Fall" section of this chapter.

⁵²Wright, "The Creation of Man and Woman." A similar conclusion is also reached by Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," and Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone."

⁵³Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship.

⁵⁴Trible, "Depatriarchalizing."

because she was taken from him, then should we understand the man as being inferior to the ground from which he came? We cannot accept man's inferiority to the ground in the pre-Fall period; neither can we accept the woman's subordination to the man in the same period.

It seems clear that J envisioned the man and the woman as being equal in creation. Domination does not seem to have been a part of the creation narrative. The male and the female lived in harmony and in a harmonious relationship with all that was around them.

FALL: GENESIS 3

Genesis 3, J's account of the Fall, has long provided the basis for theological arguments that woman is, and should remain, the subordinate and inferior sex. The Church Fathers have long held to such a tradition and only recently have concerted efforts been made to expose the tyranny of tradition in the Church. A new understanding of the Fall is necessary if these efforts are to succeed.

Is the Fall to be demythologized while retaining some of its content (Bultmann), to be retained but understood as myth and thus not taken literally (Tillich), or to be understood literally (Barth)? These questions have dominated most examinations of the Fall and this may be the problem. When other
scholars question the nature of the Fall—is it an expression of universal alienation or existential estrangement?—they tend to lose sight of J's vision. It is in our best interest, in the context of this paper, to set aside questions of historical and contemporary theology. Rather, we will examine the Fall as myth and try to extract J's theology so as to understand what the Fall meant to the ancient Semite. It seems proper to combine myth and theology in this study; both are essential elements of the Fall.

Genesis 2 closes with the proclamation of harmonious sexuality (Gen. 2:25). Genesis 3 introduces the end of this relationship with the introduction of the serpent. J forewarns his readers that the serpent is "more crafty than any wild creature that the Lord God has made." (Gen. 3:1b). The serpent presents a question that is not a question (Gen. 3:1) and raises previously unexperienced indignation in the woman as she seeks to defend God. Speiser is correct: "In her eagerness to make her point, the woman enlarges on the actual injunction; cf. ii 17." 56

The humans, first the woman and then the man, eat from the fruit of the tree which, it appears, was forbidden them in Gen. 2:15-16. Immediately their eyes are opened to a new awareness—an awareness of their sexuality and of their common nakedness. They hide their sexual organs from one another and hide themselves from God, an anthropomorphic figure as portrayed

56Speiser, Genesis, p. 23.
It is clear that J pictures the man and the woman as equal in their sin. After eating the fruit both cover their nakedness and both attempt to hide from God; both are awakened to sin. The contrast between Gen. 2:25 and Gen. 3:7,10 is striking; J uses the image of sexual awareness to emphasize the inception of the Fall.

J pictures both man and woman as participants in the Fall. The question thus becomes, "Do the man and the woman participate in the Fall to the same degree?" If not, we may justify the subsequent subjugation of one sex to the other. If so, then we must rethink and redefine our understanding of the text. These questions lead to several others about the text. To these questions we now turn.

We have noted that the serpent approaches the woman in Gen. 3:1. Why does the serpent approach the woman and not the man? This is not a new question and a number of solutions have been suggested:

1) The cunning of the serpent in approaching the woman with a question that is not a question is seen as symbolic in its similarity to the cunning of the woman in her relation to the man. She also gets what she wants through deception.

2) The woman has often shown an inclination toward obscure astrological cults; she has easily been led astray.

3) The woman possesses a moral weakness linked with sexual attraction. Once again, she is easily led astray--this...
time by sexual desires and a lack of control. Some see the serpent as a phallic symbol but this is, as we shall see below, unjustified.

4) The woman is attractive and is desired by the serpent.

5) The woman did not directly receive the prohibition concerning eating from the tree, although she did know of the prohibition (Gen. 3:3).

6) In all honesty, we just do not know.\textsuperscript{57}

Although solution six seems to be the most nearly correct, we will confine our examination to solutions one through five. The first three solutions leave the impression that their proponents have failed to recognize that the Fall had not yet occurred. Cunning, deception, inclinations toward the obscure, moral weakness, and sexual desires are marks of the Fall and are not to be associated with the idyllic Garden. Solution four may be accepted if we believe that Gen. 3:15, the curse of the Lord upon the serpent, implies an interest in the woman on behalf of the serpent. This, however, seems highly unlikely. It is clear that Gen. 3:14-15 was meant as explanation and description. The serpent, prior to the Fall, is understood to have been like the other animals—he possessed arms and legs and had the ability to walk. These two verses explain the present (then and now) plight of the serpent. J’s

\textsuperscript{57}These solutions have been suggested by various scholars and resuggested by even more scholars. It is not clear where or when they were first offered.
purpose was clearly not to explain why the serpent first ap­proached the woman.

It is our belief that the answer may lie with solution five. The answer may be understood through an examination of a short series of parallels concerning the questioning of the man and the woman by God.

In Gen. 3:11 God questions the man in this manner: "Have you eaten from the tree which I forbade you?" Further, in Gen. 3:17 God begins his judgment of the man by saying that, "Because you have listened to your wife and have eaten from the tree which I forbade you..." The parallels for these verses can be found in Gen. 3:13 and 3:16. Genesis 3:13 reads: "Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?'" Further, Gen. 3:16—God's judgment of the woman—includes no mention of the woman having been forbidden by God to eat of the fruit of the tree. The woman is not treated as if she had received the direct prohibition from God not to eat from the fruit of the tree.

It seems clear that the woman did know of the prohibition which surrounded the tree; she clearly knows that she should not eat the fruit which the serpent points out. Yet, her knowledge was not "first-hand" knowledge as was that of the man. He received the direct prohibition; she did not. Thus, the serpent approached the woman first because she was the most easily deceived.

Another question is also answered by solution five.
Many have questioned why it is that God first questions the man in the post-Fall narrative. If the serpent approaches the woman first because she had not received the direct prohibition, it seems likely that God approached the man first because he had received the direct prohibition and was, thus, more likely to be held accountable for his wayward actions. This becomes an acceptable explanation only when we realize that God knew of the Fall before he approached the man. Speiser illustrates this point well:

When Adam has been caught in his transparent attempt at evasion, Yahweh speaks to him as a father would to his child: "Where are you?" In this context it is the same thing as, "And what have you been up to just now?" This simple phrase—a single word in the original—does the work of volumes. For what has thus evoked is the childhood of mankind itself.

Thus, God first approaches the child who was told not to do that which he has just done. The woman is also to blame but she is questioned after the guiltier of the children. At the time of questioning the man cannot bring himself to make a clean breast of it. In his fallen state he throws the blame directly on the woman and indirectly on God who gave her to him. The woman, in like manner, exculpates herself by pleading (truly enough) that she had been deceived by the serpent. No question is put to the serpent; God accepts the "explanations" of the man and woman and curses the serpent. The serpent acted as might have been expected of him.

Speiser, Genesis, p. 25.
It is clear in the Hebrew text that the serpent and the ground are *cursed* (Gen. 3:14,17) whereas the man and the woman are *judged*. This point becomes important later on. For now we will examine the judgments.

The significance of בּוּל (mashal=to rule) in Gen. 3:16 is greatly debated. Longstaff offers one possible solution:

The first suggestion of inequality between the sexes or of masculine dominance is to be found at the end of Gen. 3:16. "To the woman he said,'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'" It is important, however, to take account of the twofold context in which this verse occurs. In the first place the poem of Gen. 3:14-19 abounds in etiological motifs. By reference to mankind's first transgression, the author attempts to explain why snakes have no legs but crawl on their bellies, why snakes eat dust (which the author evidently believed), why there is hostility between people (especially women?) and snakes, why of all creatures women have the greatest difficulty in producing offspring (none of the other animals were observed to experience the same painful difficulty), why women are subject to men (a situation taken for granted in most ancient cultures and certainly in that of ancient Israel), and why of all creatures man must work so hard to provide those things necessary for his survival (the other animals seemed much more easily to obtain food, shelter, etc.). In short, the author is here commenting on life as he knows it--and particularly on the negative aspects of human existence which seem to require explanation. This is in striking contrast to the creation stories where the authors present a vision of what life must have been like in the beginning when God created and it was good....Gen. 3 "tells it like it is."\(^59\)

The above discussion of the judgment of man and woman is not without problems. While Longstaff is probably correct about the etiological motifs in Gen. 3:14-19, more than this is to be seen in the narrative.

J seems concerned with the willingness and the outright

desire of women to have children given the pain involved. J speaks out in wonder at the sexual desires of the woman for her husband. The attention given sexual relationships throughout the Hebrew Bible is great. The attention which J gives to this theme in these early passages is noteworthy. Gen. 2:25, which ends Gen. 2 and begins Gen. 3, speaks of a harmonious sexuality. Gen. 3:1-13 witnesses the Fall of this harmonious state. It is not surprising, then, that the important element of sexuality enters into the judgments of God.

Gen. 3:16 reads:

"To the woman he said:
  a) I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;
  b) in pain you shall bring forth children,
  c) yet your desire shall be for your husband,
  d) and he shall rule over you."

-RSV-

Otwell notes that,

In the structure of Hebrew poetry, the second half of a line is related closely in content to the first half. 60

This pattern can be seen in Gen. 3:16. Parts (a) and (b) are related through sympathetic parallelism: (a) considers the pain involved in childbearing and (b) reiterates this point. Parts (c) and (d) are related through a cause and effect relationship: the woman's desire allows her husband to rule over her. Just as (a) is related to (b) and (c) is related to (d), so also must we realize that (ab) is related to (cd).

60 Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 18.
It is clear that the woman's desire in part (c) is related to her desire to have children (or at least intercourse) in spite of the pain involved. It is at this point that many scholars take a larger leap than is correct in their explanations of the passage. We may not argue that (d) reflects woman's social position in the ancient Israelite culture without first relating (d) to (abc). Skinner is not one who has missed this point. He writes:

The pains of childbirth, and the desire which makes her the willing slave of man, impressed the ancient mind as at once mysterious and unnatural; therefore to be accounted for by a curse imposed on woman from the beginning. It is not, however, implied that the woman's sexual desire is stronger than the man's; the point rather is that by the instincts of her nature she shall be bound to the hard conditions of her lot, both the ever-recurring pains of child-bearing, and subjection to the man. The idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the vb.; but it means that the woman is wholly subject to the man, and so liable to the arbitrary treatment sanctioned by the marriage customs of the East. It is noteworthy that to the writer this is not the ideal relation of the sexes (cf. 2:18, 23).61

Skinner suggests that the woman's sexual desires shall bind her to the hard conditions of her lot in the thought of J. This is a result of the Fall. This notion allows us to connect (d) with (abc): the husband's "ruling" is directly related to the woman's sexual desires and only indirectly to man's social domination of the woman. The woman's sexual desires result in her being "wholly subject to the man, and so liable to the arbitrary treatment sanctioned by the marriage customs of the East." J understood the position which women

61 Skinner, Genesis, pp. 82-83.
held in his culture to be a result of sexual desires which were a result of the Fall. The man's ruling power is seen as a result of the Fall and is due to a weakness on the part of the woman.

It seems clear that the judgments in Gen. 3:16, 17 were influenced by the social situation that existed in the period of J. The Fall was given shape by the sex-linked roles which men and women carried out in tenth century B.C.E. Israel. Phyllis Trible is correct when she points out that:

We misread if we assume that these judgments are mandates. They describe; they do not prescribe. They protest; they do not condone. 62

The suffering and oppression that women and men experience today are marks of the Fall and not of creation. The judgments which resulted from the Fall are to be protested against. Clarence Vos asks his readers to consider whether every attempt to free women from the dominion of men goes against the ordinance of God or whether it is simply an attempt to ameliorate the evils caused by sin. 63 To misinterpret J's picture of the Fall is to aggravate the results of the Fall in our present society. 64

63 Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, p. 163.
64 We may argue, in the light of the Fall, that man exerts power over woman in Gen. 3:20 when 'adham names Eve. In this reference Trible's formula, as expressed above, is complete--'adham did indeed name Eve. Yet, it seems that this instance of man naming woman is inconsistent with the other instances of naming which occur in J, where the woman names in 22 instances and the man in only three. Perhaps the naming of Eve is merely a recognition of fact--a recognition that reflects the importance of sexuality in J.
CONCLUSIONS

W. Lee Humphreys writes:

From chapter 2 through chapter 11 of Genesis a rich tapestry is woven out of motifs and themes drawn in part from a wide variety of ancient Near Eastern materials, forming a prologue to Israel's own story. The prologue opens with the presentation of a fully integrated, harmonious created order (Genesis 2:4-24) which disintegrates because of an act of human disobedience. The harmony is shattered; what was once a blessed state becomes cursed. The depth of this reversal is then developed in a series of scenes illustrating the disintegration. In this tapestry the Yahwist offers not merely an account of the past but presents his vision of the human situation of this day as he perceives it from his vantage point.65

It is important to note that J offers the reader an account of the past that is shaped by his understanding of the present society in which he lived. It is in this light that we have come to understand Gen. 1-3; so also shall we understand Gen. 4-11 as myth—as myth that describes rather than prescribes. These chapters are statements of the way things are in a fallen setting.

If we accept Gen. 4-11 as being a description of the world in its fallen state, it is interesting to note that only six women are mentioned in Gen. 1-11: Eve, Adah, Zillah, Naamah, Sarai, and Milcah. In this same literature eighty-four different men are mentioned by name.66 The gap can be

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66'Adham, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, Lamech, Jabal, Jubal, Tubal-cain, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Canaan, Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras, Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah, Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Rodanim, Cush, Mizraim,
understood in the wake of the Fall.

The creation narratives of P and J are of interest to all who are interested in sexist theology. It is remarkable that two men (schools of men) could write in an era that was obviously patriarchal and yet, still envision a past era when there was no domination of one sex by the other. Any religion which offers such visions of freedom and harmony, despite its androcentric nature, possesses the impetus by which it may overcome its sexist prejudices and biases. When people's perceptions of divine intentions differ from that which is historical reality there is the opportunity for change; the bête noire may be overcome. The codification of these traditions is, indeed, encouraging.

The early chapters of Genesis are memorable as literature at its best. Unfortunately, this literature is often misunderstood—it is used to degrade and subjugate the "second sex", to make her a "non-member" of the cult of Yahweh. We have attempted to clear up some of these misunderstandings and feel confident in saying that both P and J understood that the woman was an equal participant in creation with the man. We are not called to accept the conditions of the Fall but rather to realize that these post-Fall conditions are per­versions of ghan-‘edhen, of the Garden of Eden and the harmony of Creation.

CHAPTER III

TRACES OF A MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

Many have argued that women were dominant over men long before men were dominant over women, that the various civilizations in prehistory were matriarchal before they were patriarchal. James Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* states that "it is certain that by far the most frequent process throughout the world has been the transition from mother-right (matriarchy) to father-right (patriarchy)." 67 Robert Graves insists that, "the original matriarchy is obvious despite patriarchal interpretation of the Old and New Testaments." 68

Perhaps evidence does exist to prove the existence of matriarchy in the prehistoric Semitic cultures but it does not seem "obvious" that the Bible suggests such a matriarchal culture. 69 We are, however, prepared to argue that the biblical

67 As cited in Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 76.
68 As cited in Davis, *The First Sex*, p. 76.
69 Elizabeth Gould Davis is one who argues for the existence of a matriarchal period prior to the patriarchal period which characterized biblical Israel. In her book, *The First Sex*, Ms. Davis relies on extra-biblical literature to prove her point; in so doing she discards the biblical material as biased. She does not force matriarchy on the biblical material as Graves appears to. Though her method is legitimate we will use only the biblical literature in our examination and, as Davis realizes, this literature does not support matriarchy.
literature suggests that a matrilineal system was in effect in the prehistory of Israel. Although it seems clear that such a matrilineal era may have been a transition stage as a matriarchal culture gave way to a patriarchal culture, such an idea is not to be found in the biblical literature and, therefore, matriarchy will not be accepted in this study. At this point it is important to express the connotative differences that distinguish "matriliny" from "matriarchy" so that we may examine what evidence there may be for matriliny.

"Matriarchy" implies the ruling of society by women. It suggests that dominant women ruled over meek men and that the men had no control over the situation. As we have stated, the biblical material does not support such a conclusion. On the other hand, "matriliny" implies a period when the family was understood as being of the mother's lineage and not, as is common today, of the father's lineage. This theory--the matri-lineal concept--does not propose that women were dominant over men but only that women occupied a position of importance. Their families were just that, their families; the woman was "the mother of all living". The term "matrilineal" implies a more harmonious society than does "matriarchy".

Important evidence for a matrilineal concept is to be found in an examination of the Semitic practice of naming children. We recall the words of Gerhard von Rad who wrote that we should "remind ourselves once more that name giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of soveriegnty,
A number of students of the Hebrew Bible have noted with great interest that women seem to have named children at least as often as did men. Otwell suggests that this is "a ratio which reflects the description of the relationship of husband and wife being presented here (one of equality) far better than it does the traditional patriarchal picture of the Hebrew family." We cannot agree with such a conclusion.

The true significance of the naming instances becomes clear only when we consider the tradition from which each naming incident comes. An examination of the naming incidents in the Pentateuch is presented in Table 1. In the Genesis narratives thirty-one naming incidents occur. The mother gives the name in twenty-one of the incidents, the father in nine, and the husband and wife as a pair give the name in one instance. The only other instances of naming in the Pentateuch come from Exodus where the mother names once and the father the other time. These figures, though interesting, become important only when they are placed in proper chronology. In Table 1 we have assigned the various incidents of naming to their proper authors—-to the various strands of J, E, JE, D, and P which comprise the literature of the Pentateuch.

71Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 112.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J: 950 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Gen. 4:1 Mother</td>
<td>The mother names through the influence of an angel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:25 Mother</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:26 Father</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:11 Mother*</td>
<td>**The mother names through the influence of an angel.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19:37 Mother</td>
<td>**Isaac and Rebecca both name Esau and Jacob.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19:38 Mother</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>25:25 **</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:32 Mother</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29:33 Mother</td>
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<td>29:34 Mother</td>
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<td>29:35 Mother</td>
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<td>38:3 Mother</td>
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<td>38:4 Mother</td>
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<td></td>
<td>38:5 Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exod. 2:22 Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: 850 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Gen. 35:18 Mother***</td>
<td>***Rachel names Ben-oni but Jacob renames him Benjamin after Rachel dies in childbirth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35:18 Father***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exod. 2:10 Mother****</td>
<td>****Pharaoh's daughter names Moses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JE: 720 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Gen. 30:6 Mother</td>
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<td></td>
<td>30:8 Mother</td>
<td></td>
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<td>30:11 Mother</td>
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<td>30:24 Mother</td>
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<td>41:51 Father</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41:52 Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: 620-570 B.C.E.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: 550-450 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Gen. 5:3 Father</td>
<td>The father names through God's direction.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5:29 Father</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>16:15 Father</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:19 Father****</td>
<td>*****The father names through God's direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21:3 Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: In Exod. 18:3, 4 Moses names Gershom and Eliezer. These verses are understood to be insertions into the text by a later writer. This later writer was probably influenced by the material in Exod. 2:22. For this reason we have not included these references in our examination.

Source: The data included in this table was extracted from various tables and references in The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible, ed. by Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).
In the twenty-eight naming incidents attributed to the earlier schools (J, E, JE) the woman participates, in one manner or another, in twenty-three of them while the man names in only six instances. This becomes significant when compared with the data from P where men name in all five instances.

Some would argue, on the basis of reasoning similar to von Rad's, that the namer claims some form of power through the act of naming. The power that is exerted is explicitly over the named, that is the child, but the power is also implicitly over the parent who does not name. In this latter vector, we may assume "total" power for the namer if the act of naming is vested only in that single sex; this would support matriarchy and patriarchy. But, if both the male and the female are allowed to name then another solution must be sought.

It seems likely that the instances of naming in P, all attributed to the father, support a patriarchal theory. The earlier data in Table 1 includes naming by both the mother and the father but there is a marked dominance of the mother in this act. Although this material cannot support matriarchy or patriarchy it may support matriliny. It may be that it was the woman's "duty" to assign a name to her children in these early societies.

The evidence we have thus far presented cannot, by itself, support a matrilineal theory. Yet, we believe that the predominance of the mother in the early incidents of naming is but a small part of a much greater development. It seems possible that this data hints at a system that was in transition; one that was developing from matriliny into patriarchy. To
support this theory it is important to consider the evidence concerned with consanguinity.

In almost all cultures consanguinity is a bar to marriage. In a patrilineal system, children with a common father but different mothers would not be allowed to marry; neither would those children with a common father and a common mother. This would be the case because the two children would be understood to possess the same blood, the blood of their common father. The mother is not of importance in this scheme as concerns the tracing of the family line; all is related to the father's line. However, in a matrilineal system the opposite would hold true. The father would be of little importance because the family would be traced through the mother's blood. For this reason those children with common fathers but different mothers would be allowed to marry—in a matrilineal system there would be no bar to the marriage.

This idea comes out boldly in E's account of the union of Abram and Sarai. E emphasizes that Abram and Sarai are brother and sister by virtue of having the same father although they have different mothers! E seems to offer this bit of biography as justification for the marriage of Abram and Sarai. In a matrilineal system this would be understandable. Yet, the fact that E has to emphasize the relationship suggests that the matrilineal system may have been challenged in this period. It is interesting to note that J's account of the union of Abram and Sarai differs from E's account of
the same in that J fails to mention whether the relationship of the two is through the blood of the mother or father. But, it is of interest to note that Gen. 11 includes a reference by J to another marriage, this one the marriage of Nahor to Milcah. A close reading of the text shows that Milcah is not only Nahor's wife but that she is also his niece. The relationship is through the father of Milcah and not his mother; therefore the marriage would meet with no objection in a matrilineal system.

It seems likely, then, that J "assumed" a matrilineal system and, therefore, felt no need to mention the relationship of Abram to Sarai or of Nahor to Milcah. Also, it seems that E must have felt some pressure when writing that necessitated his justifying the relationship of Abram and Sarai. This pressure is what probably resulted in the creation of laws in later periods that banned consanguinous relationships. What were probably anti-consanguinous undercurrents in the time of E became explicit as laws in the time of D (Deut. 27:22) and P (Lev. 18:9, 11; 20:17). It seems clear that these laws would not have taken shape unless they were speaking out against occurrences of the frowned upon act. E spoke out against the gradual shift away from the matrilineal system by defending it as proper.

Another example of a matrilineal marriage can be inferred from the incident involving Amnon and Tamar in 2 Sam. 13. Tamar--David's daughter, and Amnon--David's son by a woman other
than the mother of Tamar, engage in sexual relations. Amnon forces himself upon his sister Tamar and, in desperation, she cries out:

"No brother, do not dishonour me, we do not do such things in Israel; do not behave like a beast. Where could I go and hide my disgrace?—and you would sink as low as any beast in Israel. Why not speak to the king for me? He will not refuse you leave to marry me." He would not listen, but overpowered her, dishonoured her and raped her.

-2 Sam. 13:12-14

Clearly, the dishonor was not in the relationship between the brother and sister of different mothers but rather in the force by which Amnon sought to, and eventually did, realize the fulfillment of his desire. Tamar spoke out to say that honor may be bestowed upon the relationship if the two were first married. It is clear that Tamar would not have suggested a marriage which was not feasible in the society of their time. Thus we may assume that any bar which consanguinity placed on marriages at this time did not extend to children with common fathers and different mothers. This passage is understood by most scholars to have been written in the tenth century B.C.E.

An incident commonly credited to P is found in Num. 36. The daughters of Zelophehad marry their cousins from their father's side of the family. It is of interest to note that these marriages were understood, according to the text, as having been sanctioned by Moses as instructed by the Lord. Yet, other P material and an even earlier reference from D
outlaw these consanguinious relationships. Is this an exam­ple of the gap that often exists between man's perception of divine intention and patriarchal reality? We can only guess and we leave the question, for the present, in its unanswered state.

The above examples are the only ones which depict consanguinious relationships that we have been able to un­cover in this examination of the Hebrew Bible. No marriage between a brother and a sister with a common mother was un­covered. From the evidence, it seems fair to suggest that there may have been a period when the family line was traced through the mother and not the father; it was once the blood of the mother that was significant. Indeed, Gen. 27:28; Deut. 13:6; and Ps. 69:8 suggest that, even to a later date, kinship through the mother was regarded as closer than through the father. Also, in Hebrew and some of the cognate languages the husband is said to "go in" to the bride, when as a matter of fact she is brought to him (Gen. 38:2, etc.). It has been suggested that originally the tent belonged to the wife and her children (Gen. 24:66; Judg. 4:16). Similar in import is Gen. 2:24.

If we assume the matrilineal concept and use it to examine several verses from J's literature then more sense can be made of some of the passages. Gen. 2:24 becomes clearer in this context. If, as we have suggested above, the tent was the property of the woman then the man would have left his family for the family of his wife. It was in this relationship
of the husband and wife that the two became one flesh. If we assume a patriarchal culture then it would be hard to understand the tradition behind this verse; with matriliny the verse makes sense.

Consider also Gen. 3:20. This verse describes the naming of Eve="the mother of all living". It seems clear that J would offer First Woman as "the mother of all living" under the influence of matrilineal thought. If J were instead influenced by patriarchal or patrilineal tendencies then we would expect that 'Adham would have been "the father of all living".

The ideas and conclusions which appear above serve in no way to elevate the woman over the man or the man over the woman. Rather, we have seen that a previous form of society may have once existed and that in it the woman had a special role as the mother of all living. She was certainly not Eve; she was not pràmordial woman but she did exercise a great amount of authority within her family. She was not the "mother" of the later patriarchal writings but rather the "mother" of high esteem, the founder of her family. J seems to have written with a knowledge of this system as did some of the later writers. It seems likely that many writers incorporated matrilineal material in their literature without knowing it. As times progressed the matrilineal system appears to have become increasingly frowned upon; laws eventually spoke out against it. E appears to have defended the system to the end against the
changes sought by an increasingly patriarchal culture. It is in the literature of E that Jacob feels free to rename Ben-oni Benjamin only after the death of his wife shortly after childbirth.

J also seems to have defended the matrilineal system. He first paints a picture of man and woman in perfect harmony. With the occurrence of the Fall the two are judged and presented with certain functions. The woman is blessed as the mother of all living prior to the Fall and J retains it for her in the post-Fall period. He seems to defend her motherhood and the rights thereof—rights born of a matrilineal system.

It is of interest to examine the possible development that may have resulted in the changing of a matrilineal (and perhaps matriarchal) culture to one that was patriarchal and patrilineal. We have noted in Chapter II that J understood one result of the Fall to be the creation of specific functions for the man and woman—a division of labor which often resulted in roles that were sex-linked. This division of labor is important for a proper understanding of the matrilineal culture of pre-biblical history.

The wife's duties, as evidenced throughout the texts, appear to have been related mainly to the dwelling—she kept busy weaving, spinning, and dyeing materials as well as making clothes; she also prepared foods, cooked, tended the sick and old, and was childbearer, childraiser, and educator of her children. The dwelling was, for the most part, her responsibility.
As can be seen from the texts, the husband was concerned with tending the flocks, tilling the ground, performing the religious ceremonies, writing and keeping the sacred scriptures, carrying on political activities, and warring. Their duties were, for the most part, involved with aspects of day-to-day existence not closely related to the dwelling.

We know, however, from the examples of Sarah, Rebekah, Deborah, Jael, Abigail, Jezebel, Miriam, and Huldah that the division of labor was not a strict one. Women of exceptional abilities were able to escape the tasks assigned them. This suggests that the division of labor, as it existed in biblical Israel, was not based on law as much as tradition. We, of course, must recognize that the law came to reflect the traditions. It is also recognized that the division of labor changed to adapt itself to various environments; the guidelines were probably not rigid.

We may assume that the ancestors of Israel were nomads. The early nomadic period gave way to a semi-nomadic existence which later coexisted for some time with an agricultural orientation. J appears to have been writing at a juncture in the system where the semi-nomadic was slowly giving way to the agricultural. The nomadic way of existence, though subordinated to the agricultural leanings of the society, was still known and, to a degree, idealized.

We know that the clan was of importance in nomadic/semi-nomadic existence. If the clan was too large the desert
could not support it; if it was too small then the clan would fall prey to desert enemies. Safety existed in the solidarity of the clan. It seems fair to assume that the clan functioned with the same division of labor that the later, historical, Israelites did. Despite this, there were a number of differences between the ancestors of Israel and historic Israel.

In its prehistoric stage the Semitic culture differed from that which we recognize as the culture of historic Israel. There was no sense of being a chosen people and there was not the unity which came later with a growing belief in a monotheistic deity. Religion was important for the prehistoric Semitic people but was probably centered in the dwelling and evolved around the family unit. In the nomadic and semi-nomadic stages the family and clan were of central importance. Unity in this period was associated with the clan. The move into an agriculturally oriented society where urbanization slowly developed led to a decrease in the importance of the family unit. While the family remained an important social unit in early Israel the major interest in unity shifted from an emphasis on the family/clan to an emphasis on the unity of Israel as a whole.

With the move to the agricultural orientation the early Israelites adopted a number of agricultural festivals. These festivals helped to further the unity in the land as a whole as people got regular chances to come into contact with others. The monarchy, a result of urbanization, aided in a decreasing
emphasis on family unity as well.\textsuperscript{72} The families came to be understood not as separate entities as they once had but rather as vital elements of larger social cohesiveness.

It is our belief that the society of Israel may have been a result of a shifting from what was once a matrilineal structure to one that is patriarchal and, eventually, patri­lineal.

The early Semitic culture consisted of a number of clans which were very loosely related; they occasionally came into contact with one another but that was all. This gave way to the more rigid orientation where the interrelations between the various families and clans became important for the survival of the society. The cult of Yahweh served as a great unifying factor in the shift to the agricultural urban­ization.

When the society was nomadic/semi-nomadic the family was of central importance. Their unity was their strength. There was relatively little interaction with those outside this unit. The division of labor, as we have discussed it above, gave the woman control over the internal affairs of the family life while the man had control of the external affairs. It seems legitimate to suggest, then, that the woman was of central importance in this early period because of her responsibilities in the dwelling. She was responsible for the smooth functioning of the family. The man’s duties were related to

\textsuperscript{72}de Boer, Fatherhood and Motherhood, pp. 9-13. This material suggests the importance of urbanization and the monarchy for the decrease in emphasis on the unity of the family.
the external duties necessary for the survival of the family. The relationship was not, it appears, one of matriarchy but rather one of matriliny where the woman controlled her dwelling but her control was not absolute.

But, as the society entered the historical period and moved toward agriculture and urbanization, the external affairs of the man become more important. The man became responsible for the unity of the new society and, with the growing emphasis on the cult of Yahweh, he became responsible for the functioning of the cult. There was no shift in the division of labor involved. Rather, the shift was that which signified the move from a nomadic/semi-nomadic orientation to an agricultural, monotheistic orientation.

As the urbanization continued and monarchies developed the external involvement of the man made him a central feature of the culture. The growing emphasis on the cult of Yahweh also amplified the man's role in the society. Matriliny and the "balanced" relationship of man to woman in the nomadic/semi-nomadic stages gave way to a growing dominance on the part of the man. Patriarchy seems to have coexisted with matriliny for a period of time until patriliny eventually overtook matriliny (see esp. Table 1).

Matrilineal customs persisted for a long time after patriarchy and patriliny came into existence. The patriarchal aspects have never completely obliterated the matrilineal aspects although a long process of civilization has served to
make the traces of such a system appear to be gifts granted by ruling patriarchs. Despite this patriarchal bias the matriline seems obvious.

The existence of a matrilineal system prior to the patriarchal system we all know has its significance for our modern day. We are still living largely under the sway of patriarchal/patrilineal ideas but the social adjustments—indeed, readjustments—which are occurring in the world today are menacing the continuance of that dominance. Women are making advances in the secular and sacred worlds so as to be on a footing equal with men. Because women have begun to escape the tyranny of tradition some have argued that society is threatened. This is not obvious.

We have, thus far, written of the earliest society where man and woman were created equal and have explored hints of another system where women held an honorable position in the culture. We have stopped, above, with the inception of patriarchy. It is our purpose now to examine the literature of the Hebrew Bible outside of the myth of Genesis to determine what changes the shift from matriline to patriarchy brought about. We will examine these patriarchal changes in relation to the changes which brought about the patriarchy. By doing this we will show that patriarchal ideas resulted from various aspects of early Semitic culture which are not valid today. The bases upon which patriarchy grew are no longer valid in today's society; patriarchy is outdated.
CHAPTER IV

WOMEN IN THE LAW CODES:

A SYNTHESIS

The Hebrew law codes differ somewhat from the other ancient Eastern codes. Whereas the other codes, especially the Code of Hammurabi (CH) and the Assyrian Code (AC), concern themselves with purely civil legislation, the Hebrew codes do not. Compiled and written down centuries after the AC, and an even longer period after the CH, the Hebrew codes show little interest in legislating for purely civil affairs but rather seek to draw everything into relation with the cult of Yahweh—with the Yahwistic religion.

The central interest of the Hebrew codes seems to have been reform; the codes seem to assume a knowledge of existing legal customs and, resultantly, lack the clear cut practical tones of the AC and the CH. The codes of the Hebrews are characterized throughout by religion and the additional plea of the prophets for humanity, mercy, and justice. Indeed, we are able to find a sense of compassion here which is lacking in the purely civil legislation of other Eastern codes.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the law codes of the Hebrews as they existed at different time periods.
The main codes with which we will deal are the following: the Decalogue (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:7-21), the Covenant Code (=CC; Exod. 20:22-23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (=DC; Deut. 12-26), the Holiness Code (=HC; Lev. 17-26), and the Priestly Code (=PC; Exod. 12:1-27; 13:1-16; 25-31; 35-40; Lev. 1-16; 27; Num. 1:1-10:10; 15:1-31; 18-19; 27:1-11; 28-30; 35-36).

It is clear that the "law" is not always carried out in a society. Also, the somewhat idealistic codes of the Hebrews fail to deal with some important aspects of the woman's position in the ancient Semitic culture. For these reasons we will have recourse to the general narratives to augment our understanding of the position which women held in the society. Many of the aspects dealt with lightly here will be covered to a greater degree in ensuing chapters.

As compared with a son at birth, the Hebrew daughter was less desirable (Lev. 12:1-5), but otherwise she was treated with similar consideration in the codes. Both she and her brothers were exempt from Sabbath labor (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). Her removal to an alien land was a loss equal to that of a son (Deut. 28:32). Her father could sell her for debt as he did his son(s), as Deut. 15 would indicate (cf. Exod. 21:7; Neh. 5:5). Early on she was not free at the end of six years as was the Israelite man (Exod. 21:7) so she was, in effect, a slave and not a pledge as the man appeared to be. However,

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73 Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, p. 121 suggests that a daughter would be sold before a son. This does not seem clear.
this condition was changed by the legislation of Deut. 15:12.

The woman's father had the power to offer her as a prostitute (Gen. 19:8; Judg. 19:24) but this was later forbidden in Lev. 19:29 when a higher conception of woman was breaking through. It is doubtful if an Israelite daughter returned to her father's house regularly as a widow or divorcee as was the case with the daughter of a priest (Lev. 22:13; Gen. 38:11; Ruth 1:8). 74

With the exception of the later PC legislation when a woman might marry whom she chose provided he was from her own tribe (Num. 36), there is no certainty that she was allowed to choose her own husband. 75 In Abraham's time, however, she was not forced to marry against her wishes (Gen. 24:58). From the freedom which women necessarily enjoyed in going for water or tending the flock (Gen. 24:15; 29:9; Exod. 2:16) 76 we may assume that acquaintances resulted which ended, from choice, in marriage; 77 there are many affectionate couples in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, it was customary for the father (Exod. 22:16; Deut. 22:29) -- or if need be the brothers (Gen. 24:53; 34:11) -- to arrange the marriage of his daughter. Frequently the father of the bridegroom took the initiative (Gen. 74:58).


75 See Chapter V for more on marriage.

76 See Chapter VII for more on freedom.

24:3ff.; 38:6), perhaps at the son’s instigation (Gen. 34:4; Judg. 14). The law codes do not mention a betrothal ceremony but references to the betrothed maiden (eg., Exod. 22:16; Deut. 20:7; 22:23ff.; Lev. 19:20) presuppose such an event. During the period of the betrothal the woman was held to be virtually a wife since death was the penalty for the ravishing of both the married woman and the betrothed maiden (Deut. 22:23ff.; Lev. 20:10) and only a fine was levied on the despoiler of an unbetrothed woman (Exod. 22:15-16; Deut. 22:29).

Elizabeth Mary MacDonald explored the significance of the veil in early Israel. She concludes that the information is to scant to draw any formal conclusion but notes that it is quite definite that the bride was veiled during the marriage ceremony (Gen. 29:25; Gen. 41:1, 3; 6:7)." She also cites the meeting between Rebekah and Isaac as indicating that she only drew her veil only after learning his identity, the bride-to-be was also veiled in the presence of her future husband.78

Virginity was highly valued by the early Israelites.79 In the CC it was still thought of in the terms when a woman was literally bought for a price and virginity was demanded for that price. Consequently, when a man destroyed what was considered another man’s due (cf. Deut. 22:14) he had to re-

78Elizabeth Mary MacDonald, Women in Ancient Semitic Law Codes (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1927): 53ff.
79For a thorough and interesting study of the importance of virginity in the eyes of men see Davis, The First Sex, pp. 86-97, 158-176.
compense the woman's father who, due to the loss of his daughter's
virginity, might have had difficulty in disposing of her. The
ravisher was required to marry her unless the father objected;
in any case he had to pay the bride-price as a fine (Exod. 22:16).
By the time of the DC virginity was still valued for much the
same reasons as in the CC. In the DC, if a betrothed woman
was forced to have intercourse then the crime was greater
than if the woman were unbetrothed. Both were stoned (Deut. 22:24).
The "betrothed woman was held responsible in the city where
her cries might be heard but in the country where she would
not be heard if she cried out an allowance was made for her
and she is absolved (Deut. 22:25-26). These instances point
to an infringement of a law of possession--property rights--
and do not appear to be morally linked. But it appears that
the DC recognized the value of virginity as a sign of virtue.
While the man, the ravisher, still paid what amounted to a
fine (the bride-price), when an unbetrothed girl was violated
there was no question of the father's refusing to give the
girl to him in marriage (Deut. 22:29). It seems clear that
honor demanded that she must marry him.

An accusation against a woman's virginity, if false,
was punishable by a fine of one hundred shekels of silver
(Deut. 22:14-19); the fine was imposed because the accuser--
er her husband--had given her a bad name. It was her honor and
not his property rights that were at stake. Likewise, if the
accusation were true her punishment was death (Deut. 22:21)
not because her husband's property rights had been violated but because she had committed "a shameless act in Israel." It seems that the loss of a woman's honor was not valued as highly as was the loss of her purity!

Further, a Hebrew virgin was the only woman whom a High Priest might marry (Lev. 21:13-14); this is proof of the importance of purity in the eyes of the patriarchal culture of Israel in the time of the HC. This is further attested to in the case of the prostitute who in the earlier periods was not an outcast but by the time of the monarchy was held in disrepute. With the higher ideal it was forbidden to give one's daughter over to prostitution. (Lev. 19:29). Such women were definitely banned from marrying a priest or High Priest (Lev. 21:7, 14) and, we assume to maintain the purity of the priest's family, any priest's daughter guilty of harlotry was punished unconditionally by death (Lev. 21:9). These passages from the HC suggest that a more exalted idea of womanhood was forming in Israel. The woman received more respect than she had in the previous law codes. 80

Evidence for this improved position can be traced through developments concerning divorce. Exod. 21:11 allowed a slave wife her freedom if she were not treated according to certain guidelines. This can not be counted as an actual case of divorce since the woman in the passage had to be a slave but it is noteworthy as the closest the Hebrew Bible comes to permitting

80Ms Davis (The First Sex) sees this emphasis on purity (virginity) to be a result of man's desire to be "the first one" for the woman of his choice. In this context, the emphasis on purity is, in itself, sexist.
the woman to take the initiative in leaving the man. It seems clear that the right of divorce lay with the man in all periods. There is no evidence that he was required to make any provision for the woman's future maintenance. In the early periods there were no formalities that accompanied divorce; the wife simply left his home. The husband needed no defined grounds; his private reasons sufficed. If he desired to take her as his wife at a later time the man could remarry the woman he divorced (1 Sam. 25:44; 2 Sam. 3:15). However, there was some improvement in this situation over time. Several laws in the DC aimed at making divorce a less facile matter. First, a bill of divorce had to be written (Deut. 24:1-4; cf. Isa. 50:1); this would have tended to protect the wife against the temporary whims of her husband as he would have had time to reconsider his decision. Second, in the case of divorce due to a lack of virginity the charge had to be proven before a court (Deut. 22:15ff.) and the fact that the husband was subject to a fine if he were proved wrong would have strengthened the marriage bond. Third, two distinct prohibitions with regard to divorce appear: a man could not divorce the woman whom he had violated and had been forced to marry, nor could he divorce the one whose virginity he had wrongly questioned. Fourth, if a woman were divorced from a second husband, or was his widow, she could not now remarry her first husband because it was adultery (Deut. 24:4).

In spite of these restrictive measures divorce remained
a comparatively easy matter; it was simply the case of a wife losing favor. However, the fact that there was a growing tendency to require a man to produce reasons for his actions argues that woman's position was improving. At a later date, among the prophets (Micah 2:9; Mal. 2:14-16), divorce was denounced but this was because the men of Israel were divorcing their native wives to marry foreign women.

Society did not scorn the divorced woman; on the contrary she enjoyed some privileges denied other women. She apparently made her own choice in her second marriage (Deut. 24:2); her vow in religion was not subject to a man (Num. 30:10). The divorced daughter of a priest could return home and eat of the holy things (Lev. 22:12-13) and the only reason that a priest could not marry a divorcée (Lev. 21:7, 14) was so that a high standard of purity be maintained in the priestly family (only the virgin was acceptable—Lev. 21:13). No stigma seems to have been attached to the divorced woman.

We will pause for a moment here and sum up our understanding thus far: in the early period a sense of chivalry toward women was lacking (e.g., Gen. 12:13; Judg. 19:24). Later, the conception of property rights effected a change; women were treated better because they were seen as being the property of men. The Israelites advanced beyond this and unfaithfulness became punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:23-29) not because of violated property rights but because Israel wished to weed out the wicked from the Lord's chosen people (Deut. 22:22). The act of unfaithfulness had
to be proven and the suspected woman was subject to an ordeal. The position of women seems to have improved with time although it remained below the standards that many desire today.

Throughout the law codes the Hebrew mother was on the same level as the father in commanding honor (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 18:7; Deut. 5:16; 27:16). The mother also commanded obedience (Deut. 21:18) and fear (Lev. 19:3). Death was the penalty for cursing or striking either the mother or the father (Exod. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9).

The Levirate system was a custom in the early Israelite society (e.g., Gen. 38); it became obligatory in the DC (Deut. 25:5-10) and was prohibited in the HC (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). It appears to have been a survival of the period when the deceased's property was inherited by his brother and the wife was included in this property—note the difference between Exod. 20:17 and Deut. 5:21 where the woman's position improves to the point where she is no longer categorized with the ox and the ass. Under the traditions of the Levirate system a childless widow of brothers living together was required to marry her husband's brother or, if necessary, wait for a younger brother (even if not yet born) to grow up so as to be of marrying age. She might also be taken by her father-in-law (Gen. 38). On the other hand, the widow with children was commended by the laws and by the prophets to the justice and mercy of the public (e.g., Exod. 22:21; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 17:17, 23; 10:2; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Ezek. 22:7; Mal. 3:5). She was virtually an
object of charity in that Deut. 14:29; 24:17, 19; 26:12-13 required the community to benefit her every three years; up until this period we may assume that her means of support was very indefinite. This fact also illustrates that she did not inherit her husband's property, and this was true of the widow generally, for Num. 27:8-11 (PC) ignores the wife but mentions all other members of the family.

The law codes show very clearly that women were members of the cult and that they attended the major festivals and the religious gatherings. We will explore their participation further in Chapter VIII. Two other important areas which are mentioned in the law codes will be covered in Chapter VIII: the relation of women to vows and the nature of uncleanness.

Before drawing this chapter to a conclusion we would like to examine another aspect of the law codes. If we examine Exod. 21:22 (CC) and Deut. 25:11 (DC) we get a feel for the punishments dealt to men and women. In the early passage a man is responsible for the loss of the life of an unborn child in that he struck a pregnant lady and caused a miscarriage. The act is certainly punishable and he is punished—a fine is set by the husband of the woman and agreed to by the "assailant" and a judge. Yet, in the later passage a woman comes into contact with a man's genitals while trying to stop a fight—her "fine" is the loss of her hand. The former offence seems by far the worst and yet it is the latter fine that is the most severe. This seems to regularly be the situation; the woman is
required to pay greater fines for lesser offences.

All-in-all we cannot say that the women of Israel benefited equally with the men of the laws of Israel. Any final statement as to the position of women in the law codes defies definition due to the silence of the codes on many points. Also, the nature of the codes--various collections and traditions gathered over long periods of time and issuing from various segments of the culture--does not allow for a cohesive study of the material; too much "guess-work" is involved.

In the early periods the position of the woman was far worse than it was in the time of the HC and the PC. In the early period the woman could be sold into debt or thrust into an arranged marriage. The power of divorce lay with her husband and no provision for her support is mentioned. She was forced, as a childless widow, to marry her husband's brother without consultation of her wishes. On the other hand, this provided support for her; otherwise she was an object of charity.

In later times she was not sold into marriage and although the law codes show that the marriages were often arranged by the parents the narratives show that these marriages were not without affection.

Further, she could choose her own husband within her clan when she had an inheritance. The inheritance she received because her father died leaving no sons made the woman a valuable member of the clan; the elders of the clan desired to keep a hold on the wealth of the deceased man. Thus, although
the woman could choose her own husband, she was required to marry only within her own tribe. What were understood to be divine intentions became subject to cultural realities and the reality in this instance was definitely patriarchal!

The law codes exhibit the development of a more exalted position for the woman over the span of several law codes. The position which women held in these codes was not what we would call fair today but, as we have seen, the women were much better off in the period of the HC and PC than they were in the CC and DC. There was improvement for the woman in the changes which occurred in the Hebrew law codes.
CHAPTER V

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN:

MARRIAGE

In the twentieth century marriage is understood to be an intimate personal union to which a man and a woman consent; it is a relationship consummated and continuously nourished by sexual intercourse and perfected in a life-long partnership of mutual love and commitment.

But there is more than this to the concept of marriage. Marriage in the Hebrew Bible is a social institution regulated by the Word of God and by the laws and customs which a society developed to safeguard its own continuity and welfare. The Creator made man and woman and only with the creation of the woman was His work complete. The Lord manifested his image as man and woman; each is made for the other. Their essential natures being complementary, they are brought together in the union of marriage.

In the ancient Semitic cultures, marriage was the sacrament of human society. The unity of husband and wife was of God's creative will and, from this unity, the couple grow together, bear children, and fulfill their responsibilities to their children and to their society as a family unit. The marriage union was important for the survival of the race.

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It is clear that the child and the propagation of the race were important in these early times—times characterized by high infant and maternal mortality rates. We will examine the important area of motherhood in Chapter VI; our present concern is marriage.

Isaac Mendelsoh relates that marriage, despite the beliefs of many, was not a cultic institution in Israel; it was a civil affair. This orientation is best exhibited by the fact that many Eastern cultures required a marriage contract to make a marriage legal. Mendelsohn relates that marriage was based on a five-part written contract (rikistum) in Babylonia; so also was this the case in Assyria (riksu) and Nuzi (tuppi-riksi). As Mendelsohn realizes, there does not appear to be any explicit reference to a marriage contract in the literature of the Hebrew Bible but he is probably correct when he writes that "it is hardly likely that (a marriage contract) was unknown." The continuation of the family through contracting marriages for the children seems to have been the responsibility of the family itself. More often than not this function was assigned to the father but others also discharged the responsibility. Although there are no clear references to a "marriage contract" it seems clear that marriages were arranged for the sons and

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daughters in the biblical periods. The setting of the bride-price seems to have involved situations similar to the contracting of a marriage; the bride-price was probably one aspect of the contract. Other areas may have dealt with the provisions which were guaranteed the woman (Exod. 21:10-11 suggests this possibility) and the provisions in the case of divorce. Mendelsohn suggests that the witnesses' names would have been an important part of the contract.

There are two areas that require our immediate concern. We must examine the incidences in the Hebrew Bible where marriages are arranged to see who was responsible for the arranging of the unions (We have already hinted above that all in the family were responsible.), and we must explore the nature of the bride-price: was it "marriage-purchase", a system of "compensation-gift", or something else?

It is clear from the biblical literature that the custom throughout the years was for the father, as the head of the household, to initiate the plans for his son's marriage. Likewise, the bride's father played a major role in planning the marriage union.

It is of interest that most examples of "unarranged marriages" occur in the period of the Deuteronomic Historian and later. Examples of this are Lev. 21:13-15; Num. 36:6; 1 Sam. 18:17; 25:39; 25:40-42; and 2 Kings 3:1ff. The problem

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\[83\text{E.g. Gen. 24:4 (J); 34:8 ( JE); 38:6 (J); 38:7 (J); 38:11 (J); Judg. 14:1-4 (DH); 2 Chron. 11:23 (post-exilic); Jer. 29:6.}\]

\[84\text{E.g. Gen. 29:23, 28 (E); 34:6 (JE) Exod. 2:21 (J); Judg. 1:12 (DH); 15:2 (DH); 1 Sam. 18:17 (DH); 25:44 (DH); Jer. 29:5.}\]
with these references is that all but Lev. 21:13-15 and Num. 36:6 refer to incidents involving David and it is well known that kings were granted special privileges in the early cultures just as they are now. The remaining two passages—Lev. 21:13-15 and Num. 36:6—are both from P: the former allowed a priest to choose his own wife and the latter allowed the daughters of Zelophehad to choose their own husbands (and to inherit property!). Because there are no other references to marriages being arranged—regardless of who it was arranged by—we may not attach any special significance to these passages though.

It appears, then, that nothing can be said about the arrangement of marriages for the children involved except that it appears to have been a family matter. Rebekah's mother and brother represented her in the marriage negotiations with Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:28-51) and Jehoida, a priest, "took" a wife for the young king for whom he was acting as regent (2 Chron. 24:2ff.). Also, Samson and Shechem asked their parents to arrange a certain marriage for them; the passages show that Samson was represented by his father and his mother! In Gen. 38:2 we see that Judah took a wife for himself. The incident involving Amnon and Tamar in 2 Sam. 13 suggests that there was nothing wrong with approaching the father about marrying his daughter. This all seems very inconclusive and it is! As we have suggested, the only conclusion we may arrive at is that all members of the family seem to have aided in the arranging of marriages. It is clear
that the prime responsibility was the father's as head of the household. However, in the absence of the father there were no apparent bars to the other members of the family arranging the marriage. We will examine a number of these incidents more closely later in the text.

The second area of questioning—the nature of the bride-price—does not seem to be any clearer than the first. We can not be sure whether marriage was effected by purchasing a girl from her father or guardian or whether a price was paid to the girl to provide her with wealth. Perhaps these two conditions were often merged. The existence of a bridal-price system in the Hebrew Bible is further evidence that a form of marriage contract may have once existed.

What was the nature of the bride-price system? Was it "bride-purchase"—a form of slavery—or was it a "compensation-gift" system? Then again, perhaps it was but a subtle indication that the groom was able to support the bride. Perhaps it was but a sign of goodwill and friendship between the families.

The bride-price concept was common in the East. In Babylonia, Assyria, and Nuzi the term was tirhatu; in Ugarit it was tirhatu or mohar. In the Hebrew Bible we find the term mohar three times—Gen. 34:12; Exod. 22:16; and 1 Sam. 18:25.

Mohar signified a price paid for a wife by the groom; the price was arranged in consultation with the bride's parents.
The mohar was different from other gifts such as a spousal gift promised to the future wife or the gifts given by the parents to their daughter, the bride-to-be.

Gen. 34:11-12 refers to the mohar and is necessary for a proper understanding of the system. A definite price appears to be referred to.

And Shechem said to the girl's father and brothers, "I am eager to win your favor and I will give whatever you ask; but you must give me the girl in marriage."

From this passage we receive the impression that the bride-price was an accepted phenomenon but that, for some reason, it was not fixed. It appears that it could vary according to the will of the woman's father (or according to the ability of the potential groom's payability).

Yet Exod. 22:16 and Deut. 22:29 appear to specify the amount of the mohar at fifty shekels of silver. It is clear that Gen. 34:11-12, from the CC, comes from a period earlier than do Exod. 22:16 and Deut. 22:16 (DC). Thus, it is likely that a definite bride price may not have been set until a later period. Once again, though, the evidence is not conclusive. The post-exilic material as concerns marriage contracting is negligible.

Bride-prices were not always set in monetary terms. David was but a poor boy (1 Sam. 18:23) and could not afford to pay a high bride-price for Michal, the daughter of Saul, the king. Saul answered this by saying that David needed only to present the king with a hundred foreskins of the
Philistines. It seems that the father of the bride was able to set the price in any terms he desired. Shechem realized this when he pleaded for the girl he loved. The law, however, later set a price for cases where one seduced an unbetrothed virgin.

Other examples of non-monetary bride prices exist. Among these are the taking of a city (Josh. 15:16-17; Judg. 1:12), the slaying of a giant (1 Sam. 17:25), and the offering of gifts (Gen. 24). It is possible that the true nature of the bride-price system can be seen in these verses.

In Gen. 24 Abraham sends his servant, laden with gifts, to his country and kin to find a wife for his son Isaac. When the servant finds Rebecca and judges her to be the proper wife for Isaac, he gives her a nose-ring of gold; she immediately runs and tells Laban, her brother. Laban's interest is aroused at the sight of the golden adornments which have been presented to her by Abraham's servant. Laban actively seeks out the servant of Abraham—the possessor of great wealth. In Gen. 24:30 we read the greeting of Laban to the servant: "Come in, sir, whom the Lord has blessed." It seems clear that Laban's interests are financial in nature. In verse 53 Laban and his mother get the desired wealth and Rebecca is given to be the wife of Isaac. She was consulted about the marriage only after it had already been arranged.

In another passage, Caleb is said to have promised Achsah, his daughter, to anyone who would capture Kiriath-
sepher (Josh. 15:16; Judg. 1:12). 1 Kings 3:1 declares that a marriage arranged by a king may have been for purposes other than love; it was also for secular ends. These marriages were often entered into for the purpose of cementing alliances with foreign kings as the kings married the princesses of many foreign nations. Thus, Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh was one of alliance; so also may the seven-hundred princesses who were wives of Solomon have represented as many marriage alliances.

Yet, not all instances of the bride-price system suggest such corruption. Samson finds the woman he loves and desires to marry. He then requests that his parents seek to arrange the marriage for him (Judg. 14). His parents disagree with his choice but seek to fulfill his wish. This is an instance where the son is allowed to make his own choice of a wife but he is not free to arrange the wedding by himself. He relies on the established system and asks his parents to arrange for the marriage—the bride-price system was respected by Samson; he did not transgress its bounds.

Shechem is also allowed to make his own choice of a bride. Although his method of "choosing" her is not to be commended by today's standards the verses are worth noting in that he seems to have felt bound by the bride-price system. Shechem's father seeks to negotiate the price with the father and brothers of the woman. The brothers appear to be the ones who set the terms for the marriage—circumcision for the resi-
dents of Shechem's town. This was, of course, a ploy by which to weaken the men of the town so that it may be taken.

Once again we see the use of the bride-price system to achieve the desired end of one of the parties involved. However, it is important to note that Shechem and his father felt bound to the system as did the girl's father.

Perhaps the clearest reference to the nature of the bride-price system can be seen in Gen. 31:14-16. Speiser's translation of this (Genesis, p. 241) gives the proper image—an image which often escapes most translations of the Hebrew text. His translation is as follows:

(Jacob has mentioned that it is time for he and his wives to move on. They answer as follows:)

Rachel and Leah answered him saying, "Have we still an heir's portion in our father's estate? Are we not considered by him as outsiders? Not only did he sell us, but he has used up the money he got for us! All this wealth that God has reclaimed from our father is really ours and our children's. Do just as God has told you.

Skinner (Genesis, p. 395) interprets this passage correctly when he writes that:

The complaint implies that it was considered a mark of meanness for a man to keep the mohar for himself instead of giving it to his daughters. A similar change in the destination of the mahr appears in Arabia before Islam.

We agree with Skinner that a change probably occurred in the bride-price system. It is likely that the mohar was once a price paid by the husband to the father of the bride that served both as a compensation for labor lost in the economic spectrum and as a form of wealth which the woman
...it seems most probable that fundamentally the mohar was bride-wealth, but that, either because of the great desire for wealth on the part of the family or because of their assurance that their daughter was well provided for, the money or goods paid primarily to the father to be transferred to the girl was often annexed by him, although sometimes with the reservation that it would be returned to the daughter after the death of the father.\textsuperscript{85}

We would suggest that the situation was as follows:

The mohar was at one time a system which benefited both the father of the bride and the bride herself. The father received compensation because he was losing a vital element of his work force--it was not "bride-purchase" that was exhibited early in the system but rather a system of "compensation".\textsuperscript{86} So also, Gen. 31:14-16 suggests that at least a portion of the price was to go to the wife as a wealth of her own. Sk\ddot{a}nner suggests that this can be seen in the later practices of the early Muslims.

However, at a later point in the system the notion of the "bride-price" became corrupted.\textsuperscript{87} If we look again at the stories previously mentioned--those of Laban, Caleb, Saul, and others--we can see that the bride-price system lost

\textsuperscript{85}Beer, Die Stellung, all translations are by the author and Nancy Harding, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{86}For more on this see Mendelsohn, "The Family," pp. 148ff.

\textsuperscript{87}Mendelsohn suggests, perhaps correctly, that "in the course of time, varying in accordance with the cultural level of a given society, (the mohar) developed into a general custom with very slight relation to its original meaning." (p. 148).
its original intent. It became a system which was manipulated by the patriarchal society for desired ends, usually financial ends but also for political motivations. It was, without a doubt, the woman--the potential bride--who suffered the most as the mohar came to be understood in this manner. Once again--if we look at Gen. 31:14-16 we see that E wrote at a point in time when the change from the old mohar to the new was not complete. Leah and Rachel recognized the change that was occurring in the system. They realized that what had once been a "bride-wealth/compensation-gift" system was now a system of "bride-purchase" in the minds of many--including their father. In apparent disgust they tell Jacob that it is time to go. Yet, the daughters accepted their marriage to Jacob under the system of the mohar; they rejected their father's abuse of the system. Most of the cases of abuse of the system seem to come from wealthy families--families for whom the bride-price was unimportant. Instead, they used the system for achieving ends which otherwise would not have been accomplished. It is possible that the mohar remained for the masses as it had been in the past--a system of compensation and bride-wealth. We cannot be sure though since the Hebrew Bible is not interested in the plight of the masses; individual accounts concerning the poorer folk are relatively rare.

The early nature of the Semitic culture, where a labor force was necessary as neither natural nor technological
resources were abundant, made the mohar an important system. It is in this context that we may understand the reason for the mohar; it is also in this context that we may understand the perversion of such a system. For the wealthy it was an unnecessary system and, therefore, they were able to abuse it for other than economic ends. For the poor folk it may have turned into a get rich easy practice. What is apparent is that the system changed from its original intent to one where bride-purchase became implied. It is possible that the corruption of the system may have begun to fade in the post-exilic period but the material is not conclusive. What is important to remember is the gap that came to exist between what was the ideal of the original mohar and the corrupted reality where mohar came to mean bride-purchase.

Another area of interest in the study of marriage in the Hebrew Bible is that of polygamy. Polygamy is a term that means "more than one marriage", and could take the form of "polygyny"—marriage with more than one woman, or "polyandry"—marriage with more than one man. The former is that which is evidenced in the Hebrew Bible. Monogamous relationships are often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament monogamy is supposed; yet polygamy did exist.

In a note appended to Mendelsohn's "The Family in the Ancient Near East" G. Ernest Wright wrote the following:

...As Dr. Mendelsohn points out, Israelite law took polygamy for granted. It should be noted, however, that the Old Testament seems to go out of its way in certain instances to describe the trouble a man gets into when he obtains more than one wife! Jacob and Elkanah are examples, as is also Abraham, though the latter's home was not typically polygamous, possessing instead a wife and a concubine. (p. 161)
Yet, despite the "trouble" that did accompany polygamy, it did exist. Polygamy seems to have existed for four basic reasons: (1) love and list (2) the desire for children (3) diplomacy on the part of the rulers of nations (4) for economic reasons.

David viewed Bathsheba from afar and lusted after her. We are led to believe that this lust may have developed into love over time because David marries her after two incidents: first she became pregnant by David and secondly, her husband—Uriah—met an "unfortunate" death in battle. Whereas the marriage of Bathsheba and Uriah was presumably monogamous, the marriage of Bathsheba and David was not.

Jacob became involved in a polygamous marriage due to the lust of Laban—a lust for financial gain. Jacob did not desire to have two wives but was willing to enter into a polygamous relationship in order to marry the woman that he loved.

Esther 2 relates that many women, all young and beautiful virgins, were brought into the woman's quarters of King Ahasuerus's palace. All were there to try to take Queen Vashti's place as the wife of the king. Yet, all of these women would become the wives of Ahaseurus by virtue of the fact that they were all required to engage in intercourse with him. Esther is among these women and, of course, becomes the queen. It is of interest that we are told that Esther's father had but one wife (vss. 7,8).
The desire for children played a major role in the number of polygamous relationships. The best known of these is the story of Sarai and Abram. Sarai bore Abram no children so she gave her slave-girl, Hagar, to him that she may raise up children. In Gen. 16 a distraught Rachel ("Give me sons, or I shall die.") gives to Jacob her slave-girl Bilhah for a wife that she may raise up children by her. So also did Elkanah have two wives, one barren and the other fecund. It seems likely that the barren wife was the first one and that Elkanah took another wife when he realized that his first wife would probably not bear him children.

It is of interest to note, as did Wright, that in all of these cases of polygamy there is great emnity attached. This is the case with almost all Hebrew Bible references regarding polygamy. A passage in Deuteronomy addresses the problem of polygamy by stating that the first wife is the first wife regardless of where the man's love lies (Deut. 21:15, 16; c.f., Exod. 21:10; Lev. 18:18).

The third reason for polygamy can be seen in the diplomacy of Solomon (1 Kings 11:3). See also the case of Abijah (2 Chron. 13:2) who allied himself to many nations by marrying princesses from them. David, Reheboam, and Gideon—all of them kings—also had many wives. It appears that Israelite kings did not feel bound by Israelite law in this period (see Deut. 17:17). Rather, they married many women to further their own position in the international scheme of
affairs.

Examples of polygamous marriages seem to be confined, for the most part, to the pre-exilic period. In the post-exilic period it was mainly the kings who were engaged in polygamous relationships. This is in spite of the fact that Deut. 17:17 speaks out strongly against the king having too many wives so as to be led astray (c.f. 1 Kings 11:4-8). Kings did not feel bound by law.

That polygamy was not common can be seen in a number of passages which imply monogamy. These verses treat monogamy as being common and accepted: Exod. 20:17; Lev. 18:8, 16, 20; 20:10; 21:13; Num. 5:12; Deut. 5:21; 24:5; Judg. 13:2; 14:2-4; 2 Sam. 11:3; 12:1-7; Ezra 24:15-18; Job 2:9ff.; Ps. 128:3; Prov. 5:18; 12:4; 18:22; 19:13-14; 21:9 25:24; Isa. 8:3; 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32; Hos. 2:16-19; Mal. 2:14ff.; Song of Songs; Eccl. 9:9; etc.

Both monogamy and polygamy did exist side by side, with monogamy becoming more and more the norm. In the semi-nomadic, agricultural period of Israel's history the possession of more than one wife provided a larger labor force. Polygamy in this context, though untasteful to us today, served a useful and necessary purpose. In this period conditions of life were hard and infant and maternal mortality rates were high. With these dim expectations of life, it was crucial that children be brought into the world.

G. Ernest Wright notes that monogamy was the religious
ideal in the creation stories of both P and J, but especially of J. \(88\) (c.f. Gen. 2:24).

In this brief comment on polygamy we have tried not to impose the standards of today on biblical societies. We should accept the existence of polygamy as necessary for the survival of the growing nation. Yet, men and women entered into polygamous relationships for other reasons—out of lust and love, for begetting children, and for economic reasons.

Children were essential in this early period and were probably the cause of the levirate system. If the brother of the deceased were already married then he would have been forced to enter into a polygamous relationship in order to fulfill the law.

Wright was correct when he noted that the problems of polygamy in the Bible are many; perhaps this is one of the reasons for its general disappearance from the text over time. Other important factors for this were probably increased economic considerations and improved technology. Even the levirate system was outlawed (Lev. 18:16; 20:21).

Divorce is another important aspect of the biblical marriage. Chapter IV (pp. 78-80) includes a discussion of divorce; here I will simply say that the power of divorce was definitely the man's. Mal. 2:14-16 condemns divorce as a cruelty against the wife.

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\(88\) See the note appended to Mendelsohn, "The Family."
In conclusion, marriage in the Hebrew Bible is a complex matter to understand. The evidence is very sketchy and quite inconclusive. Opinions among scholars differ as to the nature of the marriage contracts, the bride-price, and divorce. It seems clear to us that the marriage arrangements done for the children were necessary due to the restricted interaction that was able to take place between clans. When relations with relatives were forbidden by law the situation probably became worse. The arrangement of marriages was probably less acceptable for the female than the male. It seems that it was more often than not the male's father who sought to arrange marriages. It is likely that the father often took account of who his son desired to marry. The woman had relatively little say in this and, as the bride-price system (mohar) became corrupted ("bride-purchase"), was seen by many as property to be sold.

Divorce seems always to have been the male's power over the female. Yet, as we saw in Chapter IV, the relative position of the woman seems to have become more favorable.

Marriage seems, in final conclusion, to have been more favorable for the male. The woman's position appears to have once been much higher than the biblical literature would have the reader believe. Still, it is clear that the woman participated in the marriage union on an unequal basis with the man although her position seems to have improved slightly over the time framework of the Hebrew Bible.
We turn now to the important area of motherhood as it is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. The word for mother is אֶם (‘em=mother) which was probably derived from the root עָמַמ (‘mm=be wide, roomy). From this same root we get the word "womb". From this derivation of "mother" we can see that the physical act of bearing children was important. The woman who bore a child was no longer just a woman—she was a mother of the living. Eve, the mythical first of all women, was blessed by the Lord to be the "mother of all living"; 'אָדָם recognized this fact. Mendelsohn sheds some light on the importance of motherhood:

A childbearing woman is a boon; in a society based on small scale agriculture, where the family constitutes a self-sufficient economic unit, each child is welcome as an addition to its labor strength. \(^90\)

Survival was, indeed, a primary concern for the early Israelites. There was both infant and maternal death; we suppose that death in childbirth was not uncommon (c.f. Gen. 35:18). \(^91\)


\(^90\) Mendelsohn, "The Family," p. 158.

\(^91\) Further evidence for high infant and maternal death rates can be seen in 2 Chron. 11:21; 13:21. Reheboam has 78 consorts and only 88 children; Abijah has 14 wives and only 38 children.
Children, then, were needed in greater numbers than we can comprehend today; they were needed to ensure the survival of the family. "The woman was uniquely the locus of the basic manifestation of the benign presence of God in the midst of the people, for without new life the people would soon cease to exist." Indeed, the woman was a coworker with God in the sustaining of life.

P hints at the importance of motherhood in Gen. 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it...'" J is emphatic about the importance of the woman as mother. The function of childbirth is present in both Gen. 3:16 and 3:20. Motherhood was an important element of the Fall according to J.

We must agree with John Otwell's perception that the male is the head of the pool of life in a patriarchal society but that, '

...to the female belonged the constant replenishment of the pool of life that was the only guarantor of the survival of the group. Because they believed passionately that God had promised them survival if they were faithful to God, and because they saw all new life to be the consequence of the Lord's direct intervention, the woman was seen to be a primary locus of divine activity.

That women desired to have children cannot be denied. Many recall the cry of Rachel: "Give me sons, or I shall die." (Gen. 30:1). We also recall the story of Sarah who conceived at the age of ninety and also the accounts of wives who gave

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92 Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 192.
93 Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, pp. 65-66.
their slave-girls to their husbands so that they may be rescued from their barren state. Some verses of importance showing the importance of motherhood as being desirable are: Gen. 29:32; 30:1, 20; 35:17; 1 Sam. 4:20; Ruth 4:15; Psalm 128:3; Isa. 51:1-3; 56:4. These are but a few of the examples we could mention; note that they include both pre-exilic and post-exilic references—motherhood was important throughout biblical history. But, we do not desire to leave the impression that the desire for children was without problems; it certainly was not!

We would be remiss if we did not consider the nature of the desire to have children and also, the greater desire for sons than for daughters. In a society such as biblical Israel—young and relatively weak—reaching manhood, womanhood, marriage, and childbirth all belonged to the essential and elementary matters of life. The authority in and the maintenance of the family was also of extreme importance.

Israel, in its short existence, was patriarchal. So also was this the standard in the surrounding cultures. We must strive to understand the nature of the desire to have children in this context. We have already mentioned the aspects of the culture which made it desirable to have a large labor force available—agriculture, lack of technology, high mortality rates, high casualties in war, and the construction of defenses. We have also seen that the customs of the society took account of the need for children—the bride-
price system, polygamy, and the stipulations of the cult.

It was in this context that women desired to have children. It was also this context of necessity that resulted in women being measured by their ability to bring forth children. We turn to the story of Elkanah, Hannah, and Peninnah as told in 1 Sam. 1:1-20. Peninnah bears children for the family of Elkanah; Hannah is barren. Peninnah torments her about her barrenness and Hanah is hurt; Elkanah tries to comfort her to no avail. Hannah's only comfort comes when, after praying to the Lord, she bears Samuel. From this passage we may understand that Hannah desired to bear a child. Peninnah torments Hannah because of her barrenness whereas she, Peninnah, is obviously fertile. The desire of Hannah here seems to stem from her desire to prove herself, to prove that she also could be a mother. She appears to feel that she would be more readily accepted if she had children; she would no longer be overlooked at the sacrificial feast nor would Peninnah any longer have a basis by which to torment her. This seems also to be the case with Rachel; she feels inadequate because she has borne no children.

As we have noted above, it took much labor to run a family properly in this early period. The more children that were available for a work force, the easier the task of the head of the household would be. By bearing children the woman made her husband's lot in life easier. This, however, was not the case with Hannah—she desired only to prove herself;
Samuel was dedicated to the Lord, he was not a worker for Elkanah.

It appears that the importance of having children must have decreased over time. As the society became more settled and began to operate more efficiently there was no longer as great a need for children. Yet, the tyranny of tradition kept on. Though children had been desirable for economic reasons in the past, the reasoning seems to have been lost in the biblical accounts. Peninnah degraded Hannah because she had no children, Rachel wanted only to have a child, and Sarah laughed at the thought of having a child so late in life; she had been jealous of Hagar for so long that she thought that she would never get even with her—a child would do that but it seemed such an impossibility.

We may conclude, then, that women originally desired to be mothers because it was a necessity for survival in the early periods of Israel. However, it appears that this reasoning was, at least partially, lost in the later periods. Women seem to have desired children then in order to prove themselves. Society made them feel incompetent if they did not bear children. J, in Gen. 3, realized the importance of the woman as mother; he placed great emphasis on this aspect of the woman's existence. It is not any wonder, then, that the woman who did not contribute to the pool of life felt inadequate. She did not feel "unfulfilled" as some would suggest—the anguish present in "Give me sons, or surely I die." speaks of frustration, not fulfillment.
It is of interest to note that equal treatment was prescribed for both the mother and the father in relation to the child. The child is to treat them both with great respect: Gen. 28:7; Exod. 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev. 18:7; 19:3; 20:9; Deut. 21:18; 22:15; 27:16; Josh. 2:13, 18; Judg. 4; 1 Sam. 22:3; 2 Sam. 19:37; 1 Kings 2:19; Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:26; 23:23; 28:24; 30:11; Ps. 27:10; 109:14; Ezek. 22:7.

The welfare of the woman seems to have been bound up in having children although this was not completely the case (see Chapter VII). Children were evidence of Divine favor in life. The lack of children was grounds for divorce and for polygamy.

It also appears that sons would have been more desirable than daughters due, in part, to the nature of the work that was required to be done. Many of these "jobs" required great amounts of strength. Also, with the move from the matrilineal to the patriarchal form of society the duties assigned the man by the division of labor became more important than were the woman's functions (see Chapter IX). These increased responsibilities for the man in the government of the society and in the cult made the son more desirable than the daughter. It was also the sons who fought the many wars of the biblical period. The strength of the family was in the male; for social and cultic representation and for the protection which his strength afforded the family.

We turn now to the last, and perhaps most troubling,
aspect of biblical motherhood—that of the ancient Semite's conception of the birth process.

We read in Gen. 30:1-2:

When Rachel found that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, 'Give me sons, or I shall die.' Jacob said angrily to Rachel, 'Can I take the place of God, who has denied you children?'

Evidenced in the above passage are two things; we see that Rachel desires a child due to feelings of inadequacy and also that Jacob understood God to be a vital part of the conception process. It is likely that this active part that God played in the conception process led to childbirth being seen as unclean—close contact with God could easily lead to death; to look upon him was certain death.

Not only in Israel, but throughout the East, the mother in her childbed is considered to be unclean. Döller relates that, "Wir finden ihn bei antiken, primitiven und modernen Völkern in allen fünf weltteilen." The Church considered the mother of a newborn child unclean for many years. That the Eastern Church still does is evidence of the tenacity of this custom. Döller relates that many ancient tribes viewed the new mother and her baby as particularly susceptible to evil spirits and, therefore, seclusion was considered to be protective in nature.

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95 Döller, Die Reinheits, p. 63 as cited in Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, p. 45. Note that all conceptions of uncleanness reflected the culture from which they came. They were not all alike.
The uncleanness associated with birth in the Hebrew Bible can be seen in two stages (as was common with other cases of uncleanness). In the first stage the woman is dynamically or contagiously unclean and transmits her uncleanness to other persons and objects. In the second stage the woman is ritually unclean and is forbidden from coming in contact with sacred items, the temple included. In the latter stage she is no longer considered to be unclean for her fellow Israelites (c.f. Lev. 15).

A general look at cases of uncleanness shows that uncleanness was brought on by death (Lev. 21:11), disease (Lev. 13; 15:3-12; 25-27), and by certain secretions (Lev. 15:16-18, 19-25). Also, Lev. 12 clearly associates uncleanness with menstruation and childbirth. We may understand menstruation and childbirth to be unclean because they involved discharges from the body. Also, God is seen as being part of the conception process.

The new mother, in a weakened state, was not to approach the temple lest the people die (Lev. 15:31); so it was that the woman's supreme function brought her into a state of uncleanness.

The act of intercourse was clearly not the reason for the uncleanness. In Lev. 15:16-24 we see that the man's semen is understood to be unclean but it was cleaner than was the woman's flow at the time of menstruation. His uncleanness was for but one day; hers was for seven days.
There is no clear answer as to why the woman's flow was understood to be less clean than was the man's. It stems, no doubt, from a thought pattern that has been forever lost to us. It seems clear, however, that the ancient Semite had a great fear of that which he did not understand. The emission of the man's semen was, in most instances, controllable; the woman's menstruation was not. That which was known in ancient times was seen as being, at least partially, in the control of the one who had the knowledge. The ability to have some control over the emission of the semen made it less of an enigma to the Israelites than was the woman's flow at the time of menstruation. The flow of the woman at the time of childbirth was probably seen as being unclean in a manner similar to this.

It also seems clear from Lev. 12 that the sex of the child affected the degree of uncleanness. If the child was a male then the uncleanness lasted seven and thirty-three days; if the child was a female then the period of the uncleanness was doubled. This probably stems back to an ancient thought process that is no longer common to us today. Vos is probably correct when he writes that:

One striking difference with respect to the sexes was noted in the case of the duration of the uncleanness of the new mother (Lv. 12), which was twice as long if the child was a girl. The explanation of this difference of time according to which the circumcision of the boy had a purifying force for even the mother is not convincing. In my judgment, in this instance as in other instances, the law conforms to certain thought patterns of ancient Israel, which thought patterns are
no longer clear to us, but through these thought patterns Yahweh impressed upon Israel's consciousness the difference between clean and unclean. 96

This "non-answer" is probably the best answer we can offer for this problem. Any comments as to the reasoning behind this law are only guesses. Aristotle thought that the flow of blood and watery discharge continued longer after the birth of a girl than a boy. 97 Others have suggested that perhaps the female sex was inferior in the eyes of the Semites or that she was understood to be more susceptible to impurity than was the man. Any of these answers are possible but to argue that any one of them is the correct or even the likely solution is to overstep the evidence. We cannot force a solution on the material. The problem must, for now, remain unanswered.

In conclusion, it seems clear that women did desire to have children. It is likely that this desire stemmed originally from the great need for labor that was experienced in the early semi-nomadic/agricultural period. Yet, this notion seems to have lost its impact upon the people as women later desired to have children for the sake of having children. They were supposed to be the mother's of all living; they felt guilty if they were not. Once again, an aspect of the society that served a functional purpose early

96 Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, p. 130.

97 For evidence supporting this theory see David Macht, "A Scientific Appreciation of Leviticus 12:1-5," JBL 52 (1933): 260-268. Vos is probably correct when he says that this concept was beyond the comprehension of the early Semites.
on lost its meaning and became tyranny in the form of a
tradition that was outdated--women desired children for
no apparent reason. They felt useless as a wife if they
were not able to supply their husband's with children, pre-
ferably sons.

Uncleanness was also important in the early cultures.
The unclean person was an outcast for the duration of their
uncleanness. The man and the woman seem to have been equal
in their uncleanness except in the case of childbirth. Here
only the woman could be unclean and, yet, the uncleanness
of the woman differed according to the sex of her child.
This is an interesting point but it is also one for which
we have no answer.
Women and freedom are two terms not often associated with one another in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Caroline Breyfogle relates that:

Whenever the sphere of woman's actions seems to point to dominance in community affairs, it betokens liberties taken by the woman of intelligence and strong personality rather than privileges granted her by custom. 98

Breyfogle is right; tradition and custom can be strong barriers in any society. It is the purpose of this chapter to show that there were women of "intelligence and strong personality" in the literature of the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible there existed a chance for freedom.

We have discussed the importance attached to motherhood as well as the many requirements of the woman's role as mother. The woman was required to remain in the general vicinity of the dwelling a major portion of the time. Her responsibility was her children and her dwelling; she was, indeed, a busy woman. Prov. 31:10-31 (see page 114) clearly spells out the many duties of the woman. The implications

Who can find a capable wife?
Her worth is far beyond coral.
Her husband's whole trust is in her,
and children are not lacking.
She repays him with good, not evil,
all her life long.
She chooses wool and flax
and toils at her work.
Like a ship laden with merchandise,
she brings home food from far off.
She rises while it is still night
and sets meat before her household.
After careful thought she buys a field
and plants a vineyard out of her earnings.
She sets about her duties with vigour
and braces herself for the work.
She sees that her business goes well,
and never puts out her lamp at night.
She holds the distaff in her hand,
and her fingers grasp the spindle.
She is open-handed to the wretched
and generous to the poor.
She has no fear for her household when it snows,
for they are wrapped in two cloaks.
She makes her own coverings,
and clothing of fine linen and purple.
Her husband is well known in the city gate
when he takes his seat with the elders of the land.
She weaves linen and sells it,
and supplies merchants with their sashes.
She is clothed in dignity and power
and can afford to laugh at tomorrow.
When she opens her mouth, it is to speak wisely,
and loyalty is the theme of her teachings.
She keeps her eye on the doings of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her sons with one accord call her happy;
his husband too, and he sings her praises;
'Many a woman shows how capable she is;
but you excel them all.'
Charm is a delusion and beauty fleeting;
it is the God-fearing woman who is honoured.
Extol her for the fruit of all her toil,
and let her labours bring her honour in the city gate.

of the data thus far examined are clear: the primary function
of the woman was that of motherhood and caring for her family.
Vos feels that most women did not cry out for a release from
bondage but rather that she desired protection. She was the physically weaker of the sexes and the strains of motherhood made her even weaker. Vos is probably correct; it is hard to be certain due to the fact that all of the literature that we have (probably) comes from the hands of men--we get no true impression of how women felt. Rather, we read only of man's perceptions of woman's feelings. Still, the fact that women of intelligence and strong personality were able to play an active part in the society outside of their prescribed limits shows that it was possible. It is likely that there are not more references than there are because of the tenacity of custom. Women were used to being in the home; Prov. 31:10-31 shows this very clearly. Their jobs in the home were very well layed out. They were jobs that had to be done and the woman had always done them. There was certainly enough to do in the dwelling that the woman did not have to search elsewhere for things to do.

The situation in the biblical period was vastly different from that of today's society. Women are no longer tied to the dwelling by the many duties listed in Prov. 31:10-31. No longer must the capable wife burn the candle at both ends. No longer is the capable wife tied to the house by motherhood. Modern advances in medicine and transportation have aided in giving the capable wife more freedom in society. Also, the capable wife can purchase clothes and prepared foods at a price well

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Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship.
below what it would cost to make the same. Appliances and automatic timing devices on ovens have allowed the woman (or man) to leave the kitchen behind for most of each day. In short—modern technology has enabled our society to differ vastly from the society reflected in the Hebrew Bible. Without the modern conveniences of which we have been talking, either the husband or the wife would be forced to devote more time to the home—cooking, cleaning, and effecting repairs.

The above discussion has placed the “capable wife” of Prov. 31:10-31 into the proper light. We may understand that the duties of the biblical period confined the wife to the home. Her duties were vital for survival. The law does not appear to have bound her to the dwelling; rather tradition, custom, and the many tasks assigned her kept her there. It is clear that this early culture was not ready to leave the tasks of the home to the man as some are doing today. Even today, many are not willing to break with tradition and custom—most men are not willing to become house-husbands!

In spite of the many duties of the woman as wife and mother in the biblical culture, she did have a limited degree of freedom. Mendelssohn writes:

While a recital of the Hebrew woman’s position according to the law paints a gloomy picture of her legal and economic status, her social and religious standing came very near that of the Babylonian woman.\footnote{Mendelsohn, "The Family," p. 157.}
It is clear that only social and religious freedom of some degree could produce some of the women of the Hebrew Bible. Custom served as a very real barrier to keep many women in the dwelling but it was not always effective. Women did move about outside of the dwelling.

That women were allowed to be about by themselves can be inferred from Deut. 22:23-27. In this passage a distinction is made between the rape of a woman in the town and the rape of a woman in the country where there was no one to whom she could yell. We may assume, then, that women were allowed to be off by themselves. They were allowed to serve as shepherds (Gen. 29:9; Exod. 2:16) although their regular periods of uncleanness probably prohibited them from being herdsmen. They were also allowed to work in the fields (Ruth 2:8, 22). Further, in 1 Sam. 18:6 the women of the town were not restricted from leaving the town to greet the returning army with praise and songs. Women did not, generally, participate in wars and yet there are examples of some that did. There were Deborah (Judg. 4:1-10; 5:1; 12-18) and a (not the) wise woman who took the gruesome initiative in 2 Sam. 20:14-22.

Jael (Judg. 4:18ff.), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:14ff.), and a Shunnamite woman (2 Kings 4:8ff.) all realized a great sense of freedom about their actions. Jael felt at ease to go out and meet Sisera and Abigail did not feel compelled to let her husband know that she was going out from the tent.
It is the Shunnamite woman who moves about most freely in the literature of the Hebrew Bible. She appears to be totally at ease with her right to move about freely.

A woman was allowed to appeal to the king for justice and mercy (2 Kings 8:3-6; 6:24-31). She was also allowed to hold property and to inherit the same (Num. 27:5-8; Josh. 2:1-15; Judg. 17:1ff.; Ruth 4:1-6; and Job 42:13-15. Women were allowed to give goods for the Tabernacle (Exod. 35:25) and to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Lev.).

Women held some leading roles as well. We will look at these cases more closely in relation to the cult in Chapter VIII but, for now, we note that women served as prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible: Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and the unnamed prophetess of Isa. 8:3. There is also the case of Athaliah, daughter to King Ahab, who took control of the nation upon the death of her son Ahaziah. She executed (almost) all of the royal seed in order to assure herself the throne of Israel, a throne she held for seven years until Jehoiada the priest brought to light the prince and rightful heir to the throne--Joash (2 Kings 11:16).

The woman appears to have had an element of freedom in the culture depicted in the literature of the Hebrew Bible but her prime function remained that of mother and wife. She was not limited to the "house" in any forceful manner; rather custom and tradition combined with the many duties
of the capable wife to make her exit from the dwelling
a rare occurrence.

Breyfogle writes:

If, then, the ordinary woman of the Old Testament
would be something more than the spoiled beauty of
fortune, satirized by the prophet (Isa., chap. 3),
she must find her career as a mother or in contributing
something of real value to the home through her labor.
Public recognition was not wholly lacking, when it
found utterance in the words of the Wise Man: "House
and riches are an inheritance from fathers; but a pru­
dent wife is from the Lord."101

It is clear, as Breyfogle points out, that the
woman was responsible for the home. It was in her roles
as housewife and mother that the woman was "capable".
Society placed her in the home and it is likely that most
women were satisfied with that role. The texts, admittedly
written by men, do not show that the woman was unsatisfied
with the position in society given her by tradition.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RELIGIOUS STATUS OF WOMEN:

MEMBERS, PARTICIPANTS, OFFICIALS

When asked to consider the position which women had in the cult of ancient Israel some have reacted by asserting that women had no position in the cult of Yahweh. Others categorize their participation in three functions: cultic prostitutes, witches, and mourners of alien gods. If these understandings are correct then the woman may not have had any real position in Israel. Israel was a theocentric culture; membership in the cult was an important indicator of status in this, as in any, theocentric culture.

Caroline Breyfogle indicates that women were important in the Babylonian and Assyrian cults as givers of oracles. She asserts that women were not understood to be "parasites upon the body politic" but rather as vital enough elements of the worshipping community to command a role at the center of an elaborate worship system with offerings, oracles, and magical incantations.102

Georg Beer painted the Israelite cult in a different

light when he wrote that:

Only a few religious leaders appear among the names of women in the Old Testament. This is due to the deliberate exclusion of women from the public cult. The religion of Israel, and also of Judaism, was in general a man's religion.¹⁰³

We cannot fully agree with Beer that women were "deliberately" excluded from the cult. As was the case with the women of Babylonia and Assyria, the women of Israel were not parasites upon the body politic. Women belonged to the cult as can be seen from the literature of the Hebrew Bible; yet, their membership was not on the same level as was the man's membership. We will examine their membership and participation in the cult closely and will then explore any leading roles that they may have had in the cult.

MEMBERS AND PARTICIPANTS

That women were members of the cult is clear. We see this point expressed in Deut. 29:9-13:

You shall observe the provisions of this covenant and keep them so that you may be successful in all you do. You all stand here today before the Lord your God, tribal chiefs, elders, officers, all the men of Israel with your dependents, your wives, the aliens who live in your camp--all of them, from those who chop wood to those who draw water--and you are ready to accept the oath and enter into the covenant which the Lord your God is making with you today. The covenant is to constitute you his people this day, and he will be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We see from this passage that not only were women

¹⁰³ Beer, Die Stellung, pp. 34-35.
members of the cult but even non-Israelites were included—the aliens who live in your camp. The rights of the cult appear to have been inclusivistic. It is also clear that this verse is addressed to men; the women and aliens were understood as being dependents of the men.\footnote{It has been suggested that the breakdown of the people who entered into the covenant was issued along the lines of descending power in the cult (as in Deut. 29:10-11). Clarence Vos (Women in Old Testament Worship) argues convincingly against this idea through an examination of the Masoretic Texts and the Septuagint, neither one of which is consistent in presenting the order of the members of the cult. This can be seen in a look at the following verses: Deut. 5:23; 29:9; 31:28; Josh. 8:33; 23:2; 24:1; 1 Kings 8:1ff. It is still possible, though, that the husband was a "ruler" in the cult.} Josh. 8:35 emphasizes this point:

There was not a single word of all that Moses commanded which he did not read aloud before the whole congregation of Israel, including the women and dependents and the aliens resident in their company.

From this passage we may assume that "the congregation of Israel" did not always include women, dependents, and resident aliens (c.f. Neh. 8:2); yet the cult could certainly include these members. There appears to have been more than one conception of the congregation. This point comes through clearly in Exod. 23:17; 34:23; and Deut. 16:16. Exod. 23:14-17 reads:

Three times a year you shall keep a pilgrim-feast to me. You shall celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days; you shall eat unleavened cakes as I have commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one shall come into my presence empty-handed. You shall celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Harvest, with the...
first-fruits of your work in sowing the land, and the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you bring in the fruits of all your work on the land. These three times a year shall all your males come into the presence of the Lord God.

Also, Deut. 16:10-11, 16 is important:

...Then you shall keep the pilgrimage feast of Weeks to the Lord your God and offer a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing that the Lord your God has given you. You shall rejoice before the Lord your God with your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites who live in your settlements, and the aliens, orphans, and widows among you. (vss. 10-11)

Three times a year all your males shall come into the presence of the Lord your God in the place which he will choose: at the pilgrim-feasts of Unleavened Bread, of Weeks, and of Tabernacles. No one shall come into the presence of the Lord empty-handed. (v. 16).

Two questions arise from these verses. We must ask why men are required to appear before the Lord three times a year and women are not. Also, why are wives not explicitly mentioned in verse 11? It is of interest that the omission of the wife from the list also occurs in Deut. 12:12, 18; 16:14.

The male was required to attend the pilgrim-feasts; his presence before the Lord was not optional. Yet, it is clear from the literature that he functioned there not only for himself but also as a representative for his family. The male head of the household was certainly understood to be the legal and cultic representative of his family; it is in this function that he may be viewed as a leader in the cult. His function at the gatherings benefited his entire family—all of whom were permitted to attend the feasts.
Women were not prohibited from appearing before the Lord and did so when circumstances permitted. A case in point is that of Hannah in 1 Samuel. Hannah neglected the pilgrimage of her family to Shiloh because she was weaning the new-born Samuel (1 Sam. 1:21-23). In the years that followed though, Hannah resumed her attendance at the pilgrimages to Shiloh (1 Sam. 2:19). We may understand, then, that Hannah traveled to the sacrificial feast when circumstances permitted. Motherhood could certainly have served as a deterrent to keep women away from the gatherings on a regular basis. That this was the case can be seen in Joel 2:15ff. where even the nursing infants are called into the solemn assembly.

Motherhood was not the only event that could keep women from attending the feasts. We recall that men and women became physically and ritually unclean for many things. Among these were the flow of the man's semen and the flow of the woman's blood. The man who knew that a festival was coming would have been able to abstain from intercourse with his wife in order to remain clean (see esp. Exod. 19:15). The woman would not have been similarly able to keep herself ritually clean at the times of the festivals. On several occasions women were admonished not to attend public worship lest they defile others and the holy places (Lev. 12:1-5; 15:19ff.; 1 Sam. 21:5ff.; 2 Sam. 11:11ff.; Ezek. 19:15ff.).

Thus, we must understand Exod. 23:17; 34:23; and Deut. 16:16 as relieving women of the obligation to attend
the feasts; yet, they were able to attend whenever it was feasible to do so. To have required women to be present three times a year at the feasts might have been burdensome in view of her role as mother and keeper of her dwelling, and virtually impossible in light of her periodic and sometimes extended condition of defilement.

This solution seems most likely in view of the evidence that women were active participants in the cult. They were expected to know the word of the Lord; they were present for the reading of the law: Deut. 29:10-13; 31:9-13; Josh. 8:33-35; Judg. 21:19-21; 1 Sam. 1:3ff.; 2 Sam. 6:19; 1 Chron. 16:3; 2 Chron. 20:13; 34:30; Neh. 8:2; 12:43; Joel 2:16. Also, women were able to approach the Divine in person or through prayer, without having to first consult their husbands: Gen. 16:5; 16:7; 21:17; 25:22; 30:6; 30:17; 30:22; Judg. 13:3; 1 Sam. 1:10; 1 Kings 14:4; 2 Kings 4:23. Further, women were subject to theophanies (=divine visitations): Gen. 3:13; 16:8ff.; 18:9ff.; 21:7ff.; Judg. 13:3ff.

Women were present at the Passover gathering (Exod. 12), and at the other feasts: Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26; Deut. 31:12. Women were also present at the many festivals of Israel: Lev. 10:12-15; 22:1-16; Num. 18:18; 18:19; Judg. 13:15-23; 1 Sam. 2:19; 2 Sam. 6:19; 1 Chron. 16:3; Jer. 9:17; 16:6-8; 31:4; 31:13; Neh. 12:43; Zech. 12:11ff.

Women were to observe the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:11-15); they also gave oracles (1 Sam. 28; Ezek. 13:17ff.)
and consulted oracles (Gen. 25:22). It is interesting to note that women were worthy of being offered as sacrifices to the Lord (Judg. 11:34); they were also permitted to make sacrifices as can clearly be seen in Lev. 12. Women were allowed to make contributions to the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 35:22-29).

The above examples seem to depict a strong membership of women in the cult and, yet, it is of interest that the major portion of the references come from the pre-exilic period. There are several verses from the PC that show that women were indeed still members of the cult so our question is "Why are women not mentioned as often in the post-exilic period as they were in the pre-exilic period--especially when they appear to have remained active members in the cult?"

Perhaps the best explanation is hinted at by Caroline Breyfogle. She explains that women were removed from the temple choruses (Ezra 2:65; Neh. 7:67) and that the female descendents of the priestly family were no longer allowed to eat of "the most Holy offering" (Lev. 6:18, 29; 7:6) as one result of the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah to cleanse Israel of Baal and Ashteroth perversions. This may be the reason for the decline of the mention of women in the post-exilic literature of the cult--the authors were trying to rid the faith of what seemed to be Baal and Ashteroth perversions. Yet, it seems clear from the sacrificial rites of women in

Lev. 12 and the ability of the woman to take the strict Nazirite vow (see below) that women were indeed active and practicing members of the cult. Therefore, it may be that the authors failed to mention women as often in the literature so as not appear as "the heathens" did. This is especially likely when we recall that the position of the woman as reflected in the law codes and in marriage and divorce seems to have taken a turn for the better in this period.

We would like to turn now to an area of the cult demonstrative of the close relationship of mankind to God. Vows were an integral part of many religions and traces of this remain in our culture today. In the Hebrew Bible, vows were voluntary promises to God to perform some service or pleasing thing for him or to abstain from doing other things. Vows were binding in Israelite culture:

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not put off its fulfillment; otherwise the Lord your God will require satisfaction of you and you will be guilty of sin. If you choose not to make a vow, you will not be guilty of sin; but if you voluntarily make a vow to the Lord your God, mind what you say and do what you have promised.

Deut. 23:21-23

This passage from the DC does not make any apparent distinction between the man and the woman. Yet, a later passage--Num. 30 (a supplement to P)--serves to limit the ability of women to make vows. It is possible that this was a move to further rid the cult of Baal and Ashteroth.
perversions but Vos is probably correct when he writes that:

It is a simply a fact that the social structure at that time could hardly tolerate a daughter and a wife acting independently of the father or husband. And that a wife or daughter would be tempted to make a vow which might relieve her from some basic obligation is also quite possible. 106

Vos offers these examples of possible disruptions from the misuse of vows:

... a vow of abstinence from servile work at the time of harvest

... a vow of sorrow at a time of planned festivity

... a vow of abstinence from coitus

Further, Caroline Breyfogle is probably correct when she suggests that:

To avoid domestic or social conflict, a right of veto over a woman's vow was vested in later times, in her father or husband. A widow or divorced woman, having a looser social connection, was exempted from this veto. 107

The taking of vows was most certainly an act of worship but women were not allowed to escape menial or unpleasant duties through the "rash, thoughtless utterances of her lips. (vss. 7, 9). It is of interest to note, as has Breyfogle, that widows and divorcees were required to fulfill their vows as were men (v. 9).

In the above discussion of vows it seems clear that the daughter and the wife were not seen as "women" but rather as family members; as family members it was necessary that

106 Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, p. 93.
they fulfill their prescribed duties. It is likely that this situation reflects the primacy of the clan over the individual in this early period. It was the woman's "duty" to be subordinate to her father or her husband in order to guarantee efficiency in the running of the family. True religion did not consist first of all in vows of abstinence but in fulfilling the role of daughter, wife, mother, son, husband, father, slave; the obligations involved were vital. It would have been a misuse of the cult to make it a means of escaping obligations. The qualifications of Numbers 30 clearly seem to have been aimed at the social contents of the vow and not the right of utterance. When not incompatible with duty, women did have the right to make vows.

Another aspect of woman's vows occurs in the context of the monetary redemption that later became a popular way of "escaping" a vow of service to the Lord. In the scheme of monetary redemption the woman was valued at a price well below that of the man. This makes sense in an economic viewpoint; the man was worth more due to his greater strength. In a "man's world" a premium would be placed on those who were fit to be warriors, builders, farmers, and husbands. This was also the case in the American slave trade. The slave who was most able to work was valued at a higher price. So also in Israel, the one who could offer more output under his/her vow would also have to pay more to escape the vow; this was only basic economics.
Vos may also have been correct when he suggested that if it had cost the husband more to redeem his wife than to get a new one, then he may indeed have gone elsewhere. Thus, Vos suggested that the lower valuation for the woman was a necessity to facilitate her taking a vow.  

The Nazirite vow was a special vow. The Nazirite, who could be either a man or a woman (Num. 6:1), was bound by a vow of a peculiar kind to be set apart from others for the service of God. The obligation was either for life or for a prescribed period of time. The Nazirite, during the time of his/her consecration, was bound to abstain from all products of the vine. S/he was forbidden to cut the hair of her/his head, or to approach a dead body, even that of a close relation. When the period of the vow was complete the Nazirite was brought to the door of the Tabernacle and was required to offer a he-lamb as a burnt offering, a ewe lamb for a sin offering, and a ram for a peace offering, as well as the usual accompaniments of peace offerings (Lev. 7:12-13), and the offering made at the consecration of priests (Exod. 29:2; Num. 6:15). The Nazirite also brought a meat offering and a drink offering. S/he was to cut his/her hair at the door to the Tabernacle and put it in the fire under the sacrifice of the altar.

We have elaborated these aspects of the Nazirite vow to impress upon the reader the seriousness with which the

vow was considered in Israel. It is clear that all who took this restrictive, highly worshipful vow were members of the cult. The regulations that surround the vow imply the seriousness of it. Women were permitted (we assume on the same basis as men\textsuperscript{109}) to take the vow; they were active members of the cult.

We turn now to the role of women as officials in the cult.

**OFFICIALS**

We may begin by noting that the Hebrew Bible makes no mention of women priests. Biblical Hebrew has no feminine noun corresponding to \(\text{כֹּהֶן} (kohen= priest).\) There are a number of speculative reasons as to why there were no women priests. The most viable of these are:

1) **Restriction of the priesthood to one sex would discourage the intrusion of Ba'alistc fertility worship practices.** The male would have been the obvious choice.

2) **Much of the work of the priests was difficult.** It is hard to conceive of a woman slaughtering the large animals for sacrifices.

3) **The priesthood was a profession by which the priest supported his family** (Lev. 6:9 ff.; Deut. 18:3-8). The priesthood provided an "income" and, in biblical culture, it was

\textsuperscript{109}It is possible that women were also subject to the approval of their father/husband in the taking of the Nazirite vow.
the man's duty to support his family.

4) A mother was preoccupied with her maternal duties. Woman's most important function in the biblical culture was certainly understood to be that of bearing children. Unmarried women may have been able to undertake the tasks of the priestly profession whereas they would have no children but it is not likely that the ancient Semitic culture considered this a possibility--marriage was an important aspect of the everyday life.

5) Women had to contend with periodic uncleanliness. Menstruation would have required a woman priest to be away from the holy things for at least seven days of every month. The conception that the woman's flow of blood is unclean is, as we have mentioned, a world-wide phenomenon and cannot be attributed to the male priests of Israel; it is likely that this view of the woman's uncleanliness comes from ancient tradition.

We will consider these possible solutions for the lack of women priests further in the conclusion to this thesis. For now we will continue on to note that there were no such limitations placed on the role of prophet, the woman did function as a נביה (nebi'ah=prophetess). Nebi'ah occurs six times in the Hebrew Bible: Exod. 15:20 (Miriam); Judg. 4:4 (Deborah); 2 Kings 22:14 (Huldah); 2 Chron. 34:22 (Huldah); Neh. 6:14 (Noadiah); and Isa. 8:3 (Isaiah's wife). It is remarkable that a patriarchal culture accepted prophetesses into their cultic structure.
In other leadership roles, Esther called for a fast with no apparent need for an explanation by the narrator as to why she was able to do so (Esther 4:16). A woman called the fast and men participated in it. So also did Esther and Mordecai institute the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:29-32).\(^{110}\)

The other position of women in the cult that merits mention is the ministry of women at the door of the Tent of Meeting. The form that this ministry took remains a complete mystery. It may have been a form of fasting, a military service, a group of menial taskdoers, or perhaps a group of singers. Calvin suggested that it was a matter of pious women wishing to beautify the sanctuary. Clearly none of these guesses bring us any closer to a conclusive understanding of the literature which mentions the ministry of the women at the door of the Tent of Meeting.

As we conclude this chapter we may note several points. The woman was definitely seen as being a member of the cult. She was legislated for and against, she was able to approach the Lord and to offer sacrifices. She was permitted to take the Nazirite vow and to attend all of the festivals and feasts. However, her participation was limited by superstitions concerning her flow from menstruation and also by her important role as mother. Further, the efforts of Nehemiah and Ezra limited her actions somewhat so as to rid the cult of apparent Baal and Ashteroth perversions.

\(^{110}\) Note that Jezebel also initiated a cultic occasion (1 Kings 21:9ff.), but she did so in her husband's name by signing his signature. This is not a sign of leadership.
Her ability to hold official positions in the cult was very limited. There are very few examples of women as active officials in the cult. Yet, we may conclude here, as we have earlier regarding the freedom of the woman in society, that it was custom and tradition that limited her and not explicit law. That the priesthood was ever considered as a profession for the woman is doubtful. We will discuss this point further in the Conclusion. Women were not generally leaders in the cult, but they were members.\footnote{We have failed to mention the masculine nature of God as it is exhibited in the literature of the Hebrew Bible. While we feel that this point is beyond the present scope of our paper, we do offer the following conclusions. We agree with most current scholars who feel that the Hebrew Bible knows of no sex functions for God. If sex must be applied to the deity of Israel then it would be a "monosex". This is, in fact, a contradiction in terms. Clearly, the God of the Hebrew Bible transcends sex; it is neither male nor female. It is not a man that it should repent (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29); it is a deity complete and whole (Deut. 6:4). We agree with Phyllis Trible that, "$\ldots$modern assertions that God is masculine, even when they are qualified, are misleading and detrimental, if not altogether inaccurate...the nature of the God of Israel defies sexism." ("Depatriarchalizing," p. 34).}
CONCLUSION

It is well known that Western civilization is firmly rooted in the heritage of Hellenism and, consequently, a distinctive mentality prevails in the Occidental which differentiates him/her from the Oriental. Whereas the Occidental mind inclines toward abstraction, theorization, and conceptualization, the Oriental mind concerns itself with practices, practicalities, vivid imagery, and the like. The Hebrew mind, and in fact all Semitic thought, is much moreso Oriental in nature than is it Occidental. This has long been one of the problems leading up to the tyranny of tradition; the Occidental approaches the Hebrew Bible with a Western mind. Concepts and categories foreign to the material are thrust upon it. So also is systematization attempted where no system is evident, and presuppositions are assumed that are unintelligible in the original situation. An understanding of the milieu out of which the Hebrew Bible emanated is a prerequisite for a proper understanding of the literature and the position of women in it.

In the stories of the Hebrew patriarchs the women, probably the unmarried women in most instances, water the flocks (Gen. 29:6; Exod. 2:16) and apparently move about without fear of molestation. This was doubtless the usual thing, partly because nomadic life made strict seclusion
impossible and partly because of the blood bond which existed between her and her clan--one was obliged to protect one's kindred. The latter would apply only in a situation where beena marriages were common. A beena marriage, where the husband goes in to his wife's clan, is probably the intent of Gen. 2:24.

With the change of the system from a matrilineal form to one that was progressively patriarchal the beena marriage gave way to the baal marriage form where the woman went into the clan of the man. This form of marriage denied the woman the freedom to move about; she was no longer among her own clan. In this system and moreso with the move to urbanization the woman's actions were restricted because of danger to herself and, in some periods, because of danger to her husband's property rights.

The pre-history of Israel was generally nomadic in orientation. The clan was the important social unit in this period. This early period seems to have involved a division of labor which J, writing with a knowledge of the matrilineal era, suggests was sex-linked. In Gen. 3:14-16 the woman is assigned to the task of motherhood and the man to the task of working the ground. More generally, it appears that men were assigned the external aspects of the day-to-day existence and woman the internal aspects of the same. This notion is supported by the ancient texts from the surrounding cultures.

Elizabeth Gould Davis (The First Sex) shows clearly
that women were dominant over men in prehistoric periods. We will accept this conclusion without further comment; the work of other scholars in the field coincides with her findings. The woman's "domination" was, we believe, a result of her control of the internal aspects of the culture in a period when the dwelling, the tent, was of central importance. The tent was the focal point of the day-to-day existence. The woman was probably responsible for cooking and cleaning, organization, and for the functions of motherhood. In a period when the family was of primary importance, the woman controlled the dwelling--the focal point of the social unit. It was in this period that the man went "in to" the woman's tent upon marriage. We have also seen in Chapter III that women probably named their children in this period--the effects linger on into the Hebrew Bible. The woman named her children; the power was hers to exert.

The husband was concerned with the external aspects of the daily existence; these included the economic and social vectors of the culture. In this period there was no urbanization; all social contacts were very loose. Long-lasting and binding ties were not common. Therefore, the man's primary duty was economic in nature--he was to feed his family. In this situation the woman was clearly in control; she was responsible for her family.

Urbanization changed this situation. With the move from a nomadic orientation to a semi-nomadic/agricultural orientation, a number of "cities" began to grow up. With
this urbanization came a more elaborate central structure. With the inception of cities the emphasis on unity began to shift from the family where it had been for some time to the city units. The city became the prime social unit; monotheism, monarchy, and Canaanite tensions aided this occurrence.

Monotheism was a great unifying factor in Israel; it was a common bond felt by all people in Israel. The importance of monotheism is expressed in the fact that Israel was a theocracy. Israel's neighbors did not have this common bond; it was Israel's alone.

The inception of the monarchy brought with it the royal court, a standing army, royal tribute, diplomacy, and commerce. Canaanite tensions also served to unite the people against these threats from the outside.

With the decreased emphasis on the social importance of the family, the woman's power began to wane; her family became just one of many thrust into a close social relationship. It is in this context that the man gains prominence. With the emphasis on the city the man's responsibilities in the external world changed. What had been loose social relations in the nomadic/semi-nomadic state were now close social relations in the urban environment. The man was responsible for these relations and for the development of a more elaborate system of ritual to further unite the cult. These were all aspects of the external daily existence in the new society. It is at this time that the man becomes the dominant figure in the family.
It is evident that the "sexism" that we have illustrated in the body of this paper stems from processes that began long before the society was patriarchal. The division of labor was probably sex-linked early on due to the greater strength of the man and, perhaps in part, the superstitions that surrounded the woman regarding uncleanness. The society that was matrilineal (and probably matriarchal at one point) in the nomadic/semi-nomadic stage became patriarchal in the semi-nomadic/agricultural/urban stage not because the nature of man changed but because the division of labor did not change. The changes that took place in the form of society that existed resulted in a change in the emphasis given the family. The woman remained in charge of her family for some time after the patriarchal period began but this power was "irrelevant" in the larger scope of things. It appears that from this point the male sought even greater power as he became the lord of the house as well.

We may understand, then, that the changes that took place in the change from a matrilineal society to a patriarchal society were as a result of "sexist practices" established in the pre-history of Israel. We are speaking, of course, of the division of labor along sex-linked lines. This was probably a necessity in the early periods due to the lack of any technology. Yet, as society has progressed and technology has become more and more advanced, we have retained the division of labor as it was in prehistoric times. It was necessary then but it was not necessary in the Hebrew
Bible and it is not necessary now.

We misunderstand the implications of the Hebrew Bible if we think that it requires sexism and patriarchal practices as part of its faith. These "sexist" elements stem from cultures long outdated. In Gen. 2-3 J realized that the division of labor was not a proper concept in its sex-linked orientation. It was a mark of the Fall; we should protest against it and not accept it just because the men and women of J's culture did.

The literature of the Hebrew Bible reflects traces of the past society where women had a higher status. We see in the Scriptures traces of the matrilineal period and we also see the high status given to motherhood. It is true that elements of motherhood became corrupted over time but even Yahweh is cast as a mother in one instance. Further, the important image of the mother is used to express love (in relation to her child) on a number of occasions. Also, women are certainly understood to be members of the cult; they participate to a high degree. Yet, all is not clearly good in the literature. The Fall does occur, matriliny does give way to patriarchy at the expense of the woman's control over her family, the law codes do treat women as chattel although there is a slight improvement exhibited in the later codes, marriage does become corrupted in its relation to the marriage contract and the mohar, motherhood does become a requirement for a woman to lead a happy life, and
women do have to exhibit superior qualities in order to break with established customs and traditions. That women were ever considered for leadership positions in the external sector of the society is unlikely only in the area of the priesthood. Women were prophetesses and a woman reigned as queen for a number of years.

It is clear that men furthered the gap between the outward manifestations of the faith, i.e. religion, and the faith as implied by the Israelite conception of God. Yet, God approached both men and women throughout the Hebrew Bible and women were allowed to approach God. His love was for all Israelites, not just the men. He created woman to be equal to the man, not inferior. We are mistaken if we allow ourselves to see the sexism of the Hebrew Bible as consonant with biblical faith.

The "sexism" of the Hebrew Bible resulted from tradition and custom: a division of labor was established in the pre-history of Israel and it was necessary at that time; it was not necessary that it remain unchanging throughout all time. The entire text of the Hebrew Bible exhibits the fluidity of the religion; we have exhibited this on a number of occasions in the text, perhaps best in the law codes. Despite this ability to adapt to situations as they happened, the ancient Hebrews allowed the division of labor to remain intact.

We reflect on the Scriptures and think of them as sexist. Yet, we are mistaken if we attribute this "sexism"
to the design of God as exhibited in the Hebrew Bible. Rather it is a tyranny of tradition which continues on into our present society. Even now men and women insist on remaining in their sex-linked roles. Very few men are willing to be house-husbands; many women would never consider abandoning their housewife status. Yet, our society is slowly changing. The nature of sexism is being challenged not only by feminists but also, and probably more importantly, by economic strains. Women who never would have entered the work force have done so because of run-away (almost) inflation and high credit rates. This move towards a break with a sex-linked division of labor has challenged patriarchy in both the secular and the profane worlds. The secular world seems to have adapted well; the sacred world--the Church--lags behind. There is no reason to fear though, the Church is fighting a tradition three-thousand years old. It dates from the pre-history of Israel. We are mistaken if we think that the Hebrew Bible is sexist because it was patriarchal; rather, it was patriarchal because of a division of labor that was sexist--it took into account, however necessarily, the sex of the individual. We are fighting the tyranny of tradition today as more and more women enter the job market, but do we realize that we are doing it?
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