ONE BECOMES TWO:
THE GENDER ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE
EDEN NARRATIVE AND ITS RECEPTION
JOURNEY

By
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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
February 2019
This thesis is a literary study of the female-male pair in the non-P creation narrative (Gen 2:4a–3:24). It takes its place alongside, and builds upon, historical-critical and feminist readings to recapture a vision of the place of sex/gender diversity within this creation account of the Hebrew Bible.

This study argues that, in the Eden narrative, the interaction between woman and man drives the story, and reveals the interest of the tradent in sex/gender partnership. At the outset, the question of the lack of one to לעבד את־האדמה ("serve the arable land," 2:5) is answered by the creation of differentiated humanity. The attributes of the pair, enigmatically suggested by the עזר כנגדו, and by other semantic and syntactic features, are revealed as the story progresses.

The theme is developed further through the Cain/Abel narrative in Genesis 4 and adumbrates the salient role of partnerships in Israel’s Primary History.

Study of the reception history of the Eden narrative shows that subsequent interpretation elided the woman under the influence of Hellenism’s single-sex anthropology, especially conveyed through the Septuagint (LXX) translation. The work of feminist and gender critical scholars since the twentieth century has restored the woman and revealed the ideological stances of both author and reader but not fully recovered the agential dynamic of the human pair. Rabbinic midrashim show an alternate thread of interpretation that better reflects the trajectory of the HB.

The study concludes that a recovered reading of Genesis 2–4 which highlights differentiated humanity, can contribute fruitfully to sex/gender
discourse in the twenty-first century. While still bearing the marks of its development within a patriarchal context, the Eden narrative challenges single-sex and male-dominant ideologies. The Genesis human pair foreshadows the cooperative work of diverse humanity in the task of serving and keeping the earth.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, and affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed

Date: Feb 22, 2019
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A work such as this one has a long gestation. It began with the encounter of two young women in Myanmar and northern India who watched over their dying babies. I acknowledge these two women and the millions like them whose lives will ever show the toxic effects of the distorted narratives that underpin their lives.

Conversations began with work colleagues at TEAR Australia and continued with the opportunity for a fellowship at Duke Divinity School in 2012, secured with the encouragement of Dr. Jo Bailey-Wells. During that time, I was inspired by the teaching of Prof. Ellen Davis and her love of the Old Testament.

Groups of interested friends have kept the questions bubbling and I acknowledge the special place of my Alice Springs interlocutors, Celia Kemp, Anke Klevjer, Mikaila Mangohig, Mel Quilliam, and Sue Woods, in grounding my reflections in the real lives of women.

Closer to home, Fran Boydell, Mavis Payne and Marilyn Jones have blessed me with prayer, questions, and conversation while we tramped many hiking trails around Australia. Deborah Storie, ever the interested and perceptive friend, and Gordon Preece, who has encouraged my writing, and speaking, both deserve special thanks.

This research has needed more than inspiration and encouragement. Sabine Voermans and the helpful staff at the Dalton-McCaughey Library in Melbourne have kept me richly supplied in resources. Chris Mulherin has assisted with skilled editing. I also acknowledge with gratitude the Australian
Postgraduate Award from the Commonwealth Government of Australia as well as a grant from the University of Divinity in Melbourne that enabled travel to the ANZATS conference in Adelaide in July 2017.

This study would never have seen light of day without the midwifery of my supervisors Dr. Mark Brett and Dr. Merryl Blair. With incisiveness, commitment and humour, they have encouraged me and stretched my thinking in fruitful directions. It has been an enormous privilege to work under them.

In the back of my mind at all times have been my daughters, daughter-in-law, and grand-daughters, Julia, Anita, Nat, Iva, Ana and Jindi, for whom I hope that this small contribution to gender thinking has been worth my distraction and absences. This work is fundamentally for them.

I acknowledge with special appreciation the men in our circle, son Andrew, and sons-in-law Alex and Gordon, whose partnership brings joy into our lives.

And finally, to Peter, who has provided food, conversation, laughter, perspective, and peace, my everlasting gratitude: an עזר כנעני, in every way.
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# ABBREVIATIONS

## BIBLICAL TEXTS AND VERSIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNT</td>
<td>Good News Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>The Septuagint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJB</td>
<td>New Jerusalem Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>New King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLB</td>
<td>The Living Bible</td>
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## ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

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## JOURNALS, PERIODICALS AND MAJOR REFERENCE WORKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBR</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBRSup</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research, Supplements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BibInt</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWA(N)T</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament</td>
</tr>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBET</td>
<td>Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAT</td>
<td>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPS</td>
<td>The Jewish Publication Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOTSup</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHBOTS</td>
<td>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTS</td>
<td>Oudtestamentische Studiën</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEÅ</td>
<td>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SubBi</td>
<td>Subsidia Biblica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTB</td>
<td>Uni-Taschenbücher</td>
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<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTSup</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum Supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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**GENERAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANE</td>
<td>Ancient Near East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCE</td>
<td>Before the Common Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Common Era</td>
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xii
HB Hebrew Bible
LGBTIQ+ Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Intersex Queer and other
MT Masoretic Text
Non-P A source not attributed to P
NT New Testament
OT Old Testament
P Priestly source/document/tradent
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

We do not even know in the least the final cause of sexuality: why new beings should be produced by the union of the two sexual elements, instead of by a process of parthenogenesis . . . . The whole subject is as yet hidden in darkness.

—Charles Darwin

Framing the Study

Charles Darwin’s 1861 conundrum involving the reproductive habits of primulas can equally be applied to the human person. We know not why new beings should be produced by two sexual elements and not parthenogenesis. The meaning of the biology of human reproduction is still “hidden in darkness. More than this, humans experience a gendered personhood that goes beyond the bare materiality of biology. The research that lies behind this current study suggests that the Hebrew Bible has been a rich resource of reflection on questions of sex, gender and the partnerships they generate. What is the meaning of femaleness and maleness? How are they constituted beyond the material differences related


2. The question of whether there is behind the biological markers of femaleness and maleness anything that is not discursively produced, is bracketed until a fuller discussion is taken up in chapter six. To frame the questions of this thesis in this introduction, a certain shared understanding of ‘female’ and ‘male’ is assumed, comprising a minimum of physical difference upon which socially visible personae are enacted.

to reproduction? What is their difference? Why is there difference? What is their sameness? Why are they two?

The configurations of sex and gender in the twenty-first century are as complex as they are fluid. A quick review of the issues that continue to shape news headlines speaks to their pertinence: same-sex marriage legislation; gender-based violence; gender ‘dysphoria’; gender ambiguity in élite athletes; sexual harassment; gender segmentation and pay differentials in the work-force; female underrepresentation in board-room and legislature. A global focus reveals disturbing evidence of the harsh lives of women in the Global South. One indicative statistic of our unequal world is that there are sixty-two million more men than women in the world.

The perplexing, chronic disparity of life experiences and outcomes for women and sexual minorities suggests that there is something at play that

4. Traditionally sex (biologically-determined assignation) and gender (socially-constructed affects) were viewed as distinct concepts, but modern thinking has collapsed the difference between them. See further discussion in chapter six. The conflated term ‘sex/gender’ will be used in this thesis to indicate the fragile boundary between the two terms.

5. The term ‘Global South’ is used to refer to countries with histories of colonization in which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources pertain.

6. A summary of statistics relating to unequal outcomes for females and males is available in The State of the World’s Women 2015: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html. “... in developing regions, complications linked to pregnancy and childbirth, as well as sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV, continue to take a heavy toll on the lives of adolescent girls and young women. This is due not only to underdeveloped health systems that are unable to address women’s needs, but also to gender issues. Poor access to information and education, early marriage, and lack of decision-making power among girls who are married or in relationship increase their exposure to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and the risk of unsafe abortion. Traditional gender expectations also exert a harmful effect on men. Adolescent boys and young men often take up habits and risky behaviors that are associated with images of masculinity.” Statistics Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The World’s Women 2015: Trends and Statistics," (New York, N.Y.: United Nations, 2015), ix–x.

7. For instance, since 2017, the persecution against LGBTIQ+ men in Chechnya has intensified. Alexandra Topping “Russian LGBT Activists Describe Victimisation, Repression ... and Hope,” The Guardian, 6 April 2015; Natalya Vasilyeva and Alexander Roslyakov, “Gay Chechens Report Days
interacts malevolently with physical differences. Michel Foucault's work highlighted sex as the transfer point for relations of power. In Western feminist analysis, the heterosexual norm, along with the concomitant female/male binary and their enacted sexuality, are all functions of the arrangements of power. According to Catharine MacKinnon, "Sexuality is the social process through which social relations of gender are created, organized, expressed, and directed, creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create society."9

According to such analyses, the female/male dynamic is deeply problematic. Created through the discourse and exercise of male power, such that it appears 'natural,' it is in essence hierarchical, incipiently violent, and conscripted to the service of male goals. Viewed in this way, it is troubling indeed to find in the creation narratives of the Hebrew Bible, confessed as scripture by the three ‘Peoples of the Book’, adherents of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, a story of the creation of a human pair quickly followed by an account of an incident that impacts the relationship.

This thesis studies the sex/gender anthropology of Genesis 2–4, and thus

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10. The term ‘anthropology’ is used instead of alternatives such as ‘configurations,’ or ‘characteristics,’ in order to capture the wider social implications of the narrative. Merriam-Webster defines anthropology as: the science of human beings, especially: 1. the science of human beings and their ancestors through time and space and in relation to physical character, environmental and social relations, and culture; 2: theology dealing with the origin, nature, and
prompts the question of why the Bible need be regarded as a serious interlocutor in such debates at all. Is such an ancient document relevant to modern questions? There lurks, moreover, the persistent shadow of the accusation that the Bible itself is implicated as a source of attitudes that buttress male patriarchy and its malevolent affects. Theological reflection ought never be divorced from its political affects and in the case of sex and gender, those affects have negatively affected women and sexual minorities to this day.¹¹

The Bible, however, is a foundational part of Western thought. Its authority is ceremonially invoked in courtrooms and legislatures in Australia and around the world where sex/gender matters are arbitrated. The Eden narrative claims special relevance because it is so frequently referenced in debates on marriage and women's status. It is a cultural motif that recurs in literature, art, popular entertainment and, persistently, in contemporary advertising.¹² The narrative has entered, and indeed shaped, the Western discourse of sex/gender.¹³


Sex/gender questions, moreover, are theological questions, ones that recall essential questions of the nature and purpose of human existence. The book of Genesis, as part of the Hebrew Bible and Christian scriptures, carries spiritual weight for people of faith, of which I am one. A narrative that purports to tell a foundational story of human origins, of transgression and punishment described through its effects on the relationship between sexes, must be an interlocutor given due weight in sex/gender debate in communities of faith.

Thus, I dare ask these foundational questions of a text that means so much to me, aware that they are etic questions, drawn from experience, shaped within a body of sociological knowledge and theory, more than a little influenced by ideology and distilled with reductive brevity. They are modern questions that would have little purchase with the original tradents because Genesis 2–4 is not a comprehensive treatise on ancient Israelite understandings of sex and gender and reveals little of its emic assumptions. It is, rather, a story of origins, a creation narrative with wider questions to answer than those that form the focus of this thesis.

Nevertheless, the narrative betrays an interest in the creation of a pair, not just individuals, and the interactions of that human pair play the critical role in the unfolding story. The woman and man are created in relation to each other (2:7, 18, 21–22), they transgress the divine edict together (3:6), and they are

14. “Emics refers to cultural explanations that draw their criteria from the consciousness of the people in the culture being explained . . . Etics refers to cultural explanations whose criteria derive from a body of theory and method shared in a community of scientific observers.” Norman Gottwald (The Tribes of Yahweh, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 785.
punished in relation to each other (3:16–19). There is no evading the agential dynamic of the human pair in Genesis 2–4.

Furthermore, if human bodies are material sites on which sex/gender meanings have been inscribed, Genesis brings its own questions with the strong emphasis on the physicality of those different bodies. Having formed them in two separate creative acts (2:7; 2:21–22), suggesting images of manual fashioning and creative surgery, under the gaze of the awakened male, their separate personhood is brought to recognition (2:23) and becomes the grounds of the narratorial declaration that they become ‏בשֶר אַחֲזָת‏ “one flesh.” Lest we wonder at the effects of their gaze on their different bodies, the text declares them ‏לֹא תבָּשָׂשו‏ “unashamed.”

The Genesis human pair is not only relevant to our etic questions from a twenty-first century perspective, the pair is also part of the narrative’s answer to the questions it poses for itself. If we assume that 2:4a, אָלֶה תּוֹלְדוֹת השמים והארץ (”These are the begettings of the heavens and the earth when they were created”) is a rubric relevant to the ensuing story, we have a superscript suggesting that there follows תּוֹלְדוֹת (”begettings”), of the heavens and the earth, a theme suggesting notions of human relating in sexual ways. Narrative tensions that follow insert human sexuality into the framing theme of how האדמה (”the earth”), will be served with no one to till it (2:5). Gen 2:18 deepens the conundrum with the problematic singleton and the question of how the לֹא תבָּשָׂשו (”alone-ness”) of the אדם (”human”) will be solved. What is this mysterious lack that is answered by the formation of another?
The narrative, then, raises inevitable questions about partnership, about how humans interact together to multiply good or evil. What is the meaning of נָשִּׁיָּהוּ (“a sustainer as his partner”) in 2:18? Does the female complement a pre-existing male or does the creation of femaleness and maleness follow the surgery upon an androgyne in 2:21? The mutual dependence that we recognize as part of human life with its ability to draw forth virtues of love and service are seen in embryonic form in 2:23–24 but then, in a reversal, in negative form in 3:16b.

Equally insistent for the twenty-first century reader are the questions the narrative does not ask, the questions in which it shows no interest. Centered on a woman and a man, the narrative does not hint at other possible sexual configurations. Did the tradents not know of other sexualities apart from the female/male couple? What did they understand about the meaning of אדם and אישה? Did they know of other sexualities but want to make this particular story about a simple twosome? Is there polemical purpose to this focus on two?

Two constellations of readers attribute special valency to this question. Those who read from a socially conservative perspective (some of whom identify as ‘complementarian’15), attribute divine intentionality to a clearly defined female and male pair, which they describe in essential terms.16 “God not only created two genders, male and female, with unique and glorious and mysterious

15. For more detail on the complementarian position, see the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, founded in 1987: https://cbmw.org

16. Gender essentialism refers to the practice of regrading something (as a presumed human trait) as having innate existence or universal validity rather than as being a social, ideological, or intellectual construct. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 427
differences; he made these two genders complementary. They don’t simply fit side by side, like peanut butter and jelly; they fit together in an interlocking pattern like puzzle pieces.”

On the other hand, those who argue for more liquid sexual configurations find the Eden narrative oppressive in its construction of binary sex/gender. “What is awry is the compulsory heterosexuality, complete with God-fashioned ‘natural’ similarity-in-difference of woman and man that creates sexual desire and binary gender roles from physical differences.” Post-modern gender theorists point rather to the way that sex/gender is socially constructed. For them, the assumption of the female and male pair as ‘natural’ is part of the obfuscation created by influential ideological sources such as the Bible.

Such provocative and radically different perspectives give us pause as we read the Eden narrative. While both angles of vision provide valuable insights, ultimately neither fully accounts for the narrative as it stands. This thesis will argue that there is complexity in the story that makes such simple conclusions unsatisfactory. The clue to this is the way the story of the human pair is embedded in the larger narrative of Genesis 2–4.

The fundamental orientation of the narrative is to the purposes of יהוה אלהים in the begettings of the heavens and the earth. The Genesis narratives

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reorient the questions from ones of sexuality to the theocentric ones of how the created earth is to be served.

A further dimension to the Eden narrative is provided by considering how notions of the relationship between the couple are transposed in other parts of the HB. Conversations on sex/gender are conducted in many different registers in the HB. Although rarely foregrounded as prominently as in the Genesis narrative, the gendered partnership is nevertheless the currency of human interactions throughout scripture depicted in narrative, law, writing and song, and is often depicted with allusions to the Eden garden.

Charting the ways that the female/male partnership is taken up along with wider allusions to Genesis 2–4 themes, can thus provide important additional perspectives on our subject. Study of the reception history shows how the LXX translation of the Eden narrative was used to shape a single- (male) sex discourse of human sexuality from the Second Temple period until challenged by feminist scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century.

A moot point is the question of whether investigation of the Genesis partnership will have anything to say about partnerships that are not heterosexual or indeed not sexual at all. The question becomes relevant in the debate around same-sex marriage. This will be explored as the study proceeds and some conclusions drawn at the end.

A miasma that hovers around the idea of partnership that needs to be named, concerns the gendered power arrangements at play in any discussion about female/male partnership. One cannot think and write in the area of sex/gender and the Bible without attention to the work of some of gender
theorists such as Michel Foucault, Thomas Laqueur, and Judith Butler. The questions they raise warrant close attention. They include: Is there a notion of partnership that is not shaped by configurations of power? How does the Eden narrative interact with the idea of female/male performativity? How can we speak of partnership outside of notions of gendered power? Such questions raised by twenty-first century readers prompt us to step back and consider our own unexamined assumptions. Charting ANE sex/gender architecture will help us to recognize our own.

Focus of Research

This thesis is an investigation of the anthropology of sex/gender in Genesis 2–4 and its employment in different theological and historical contexts. Although the woman and man of the narrative have been the subject of reductive conclusions throughout its reception history, this thesis will show that the sex/gender configurations of the narrative confound simple conclusions, showing complexity and subtlety. It will test the narrative against HB and Hellenistic sex/gender norms and pay particular attention to the way the partnership between the woman and man is delineated. It will investigate the notion that the sex/gender anthropology of the Eden narrative was intended by the non-P tradent as a particular frame for the subsequent recorded national history.

Methodology

This study has employed a number of different methodologies. It began with an exegetical study of Genesis 2–4 drawing on feminist, historical-, and gender-critical research. It then required research into modern gender theory in an effort to understand modern reader perspectives. This led, in turn, to further research into Hellenistic and classical gender anthropologies in order to grasp the various ways that gender was constructed in the ancient world. The question was then crystallized into one focusing on the gendered couple of the narrative and the core of the study became a literary reading of the Eden narrative using a partnership lens.

This study has also involved a selective review of the reception history of the text in an effort to understand the shifting construals of the story over time and the influences at work. This identified the slightly different trajectory of many rabbinic midrashim, which served to make the influences of Hellenism on interpretation of the Eden narrative more obvious. This then drove us back to the HB to investigate whether gendered partnership is a feature in its varied texts.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that Genesis 2–4 adumbrates the essential architecture of a theological anthropology of sex/gender. Within the vocational mandate to serve and keep the earth (Gen 2:5; 15), this perspective celebrates sexual difference as well as unity, expressing a complex partnership (עזר כנגד and וה) central to building

21. A fuller description of the methodological approach is undertaken in chapter two.
This is a conscious reframing of history by the non-P tradent which provides a singular perspective on the aberrant marriages of Genesis 6, the fruitful marriages of patriarchal and later history, and metaphorically, the covenant marriage of יהוה and Israel.

It is also argued herein that, while the narrative reflects the patriarchal environment, centuries of androcentric translation and exegesis has added layers of gendered exegetical constraints alien to the text. The reception history of the narrative reveals how interpretation was shaped by Hellenistic influences (seen in the LXX translation), and then, under patristic and reformed readings, was co-opted to underpin notions of patriarchy and support a single-sex ideology until feminist readings began to reveal the ideologies at play.

Far from being prescriptive of gendered definitions, roles, tasks, and hierarchy, the Eden narrative evidences a scantness of content that invites readers to participate by reflecting on the story, encouraging even twenty-first century reading communities, who stand at considerable historical and cultural distance from the early authors, to shape their world in ways that honor God’s desire for humanity.

My interest in these questions is a function of who I am and this same subjectivity will affect my reading of the story and subsequent conclusions. I am an Australian woman who has partnered, then birthed and raised children and

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22. Some will be suspicious of the notion of partnership, it often being seen as a Trojan Horse within which to smuggle ideas of gender essentialism and female submission. At the outset of this study, let me say that I bring no such understanding. In the context of this study, the word *partnership* is best seen as a placeholder, a word without much content at this stage, awaiting fuller explication as the study progresses. *Merriam-Webster* defines a partner as "one that shares; one associated with another especially in an action." *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 904. This is our working definition as we proceed.
lived much of her adult life in contexts which have brought me close to the lives of Indian and Indigenous Australian women. While sharing little of their experience of poverty and marginalization, I have closely observed it, and worked to advocate for voiceless ones within wider Western society. My work in a Christian international development organization has brought me face to face with some of the narratives that oppress and humiliate women. I approach these injustices from the stance of being a feminist and a Christian, committed to exposing and overcoming patriarchal dominance. I confess the Bible as scripture yet baulk at the use of its texts to reinforce injustice. My interpretative communities include a growing family, a local church congregation, a community of friends and colleagues of varying sex/gender commitments and an academic community of Bible scholars.

**Thesis Outline**

Following this introduction, chapter two will outline my approach to the *composition and interpretation of Genesis*, framed by the following questions:

What assumptions will be made concerning Pentateuchal sources? What relationship does the focus text (Gen 2:4–4:26) have with its literary context in Genesis, in the Pentateuch and the Primary History, and how does this influence the focus topic of this thesis? How relevant is the search for the historical context of the Eden narrative? What methodologies will be most fruitful for exploring the sex/gender anthropology of that story?

Chapters three to five will be an *exegetical study* of Genesis 2–4, with attention to the way the elements of the creation tableau are introduced then how the relationship between those elements are depicted. The preliminary
conclusions about the gendered partnership thus elucidated in Genesis 2–3, will be tested with respect to the story extension in Genesis 4.

Chapter six, is a reading of the Eden narrative that focuses on the human pair. At the outset, the study will review twenty-first century sex/gender understandings as a caution before embarking on the reading. The approach will be a literary one, noting the artful ways the author/s have told the story. The depiction of the woman and man will be measured against the norms of femininity and masculinity in the HB, noting that both woman and man in the narrative depart in significant ways from gender ideals. The reading will then discuss the key moments of partnership in Genesis 2–4 as inauguration, consummation, communion and contestation.

In chapters seven and eight, our reading of the narrative will be consciously situated within the history of exegesis by studying selective parts of the reception history noting the trajectories of interpretation and illustrating the way that the story has been employed to buttress particular sex/gender assumptions. A special focus will be the role of the LXX in influencing readings of that narrative, causing a loss of any sense of gendered partnership. The subtle differences of emphases of rabbinic midrashim on Genesis will be noted, illustrating a different stream of interpretation. This section charts the gradual co-option of the narrative to underpin patriarchy until the challenge of twentieth century feminist scholarship.

In chapter nine the significance of the partnership discussion will be examined in relation to the larger context of the HB. The focus will be primarily the Genesis ancestral narratives but include some comparisons with other
narratives and legal material. The question of the telos of the partnership and its relationship to procreation will be taken up in a study of sexuality in the HB. This chapter argues that the rabbinic stream of interpretation has stayed closer to the sex/gender themes of the HB than early Christian interpretation.

Chapter ten will draw threads together under four headings: The expression and nature of gender anthropology in the Eden narrative; the complex journey of the partnership theme in the reception history of the narrative; the place of that theme in historical and current sex/gender frameworks; and some thoughts on possibilities for further applications within communities of faith.
CHAPTER TWO:
APPROACH TO COMPOSITION AND HERMENEUTICS

Focus Text: Gen 2:4a–4:26

Genesis 2:4a–4:26 has been selected as the unit for this research and not the commonly studied unit of 2:4a–3:24. The choice of Gen 2:4b–4:26 is determined by the focus topic, namely, the study of the primeval couple. Given the way the first humans are portrayed across this longer piece of text, it is logical to extend the study to include Genesis 4. There are good semantic reasons to regard it as an extension of the Garden story.¹ From the first appearance of אדם in 2:7 to the rounding of the story in 4:26, the relationship between woman and man is a conspicuous feature.² This is not to assert that the primary focus of the author is to describe a sex/gender anthropology. It is merely to say that this compressed text carries markers of an interest in the place of this woman and man as a joint pair, in the purposes of God. The interaction between the woman and man are an


². In using the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ I am using the common translations of איש, אשה, and make no assumptions about the content of these words. The variations in terminology between of איש and, אשה and אדם, are part of the interesting sex/gender texture of the story and will be part of the current study.
elaboration of the plot development and suggest that there is more to the narrative than first meets the eye.

Composition

An endeavor such as this one stands on the shoulders of generations of scholarly work on the ancient sources that comprise the Pentateuch. Despite much travail, there is still no agreed compositional model of the formation of the Pentateuch. Genesis, because of its grainy and fissured literary character, has been the focus of particular attention. This provokes a question for this current work: What will my approach be to the debate surrounding the composition and redaction of Genesis? To pose this question and to embark on any textual study is to make assumptions that will affect what is observed. To detect fissures is to assume different sources. By what yardstick will these different layers be uncovered? Could there perhaps be some editorial purpose in leaving the multilayered, unruly result? Once different sources are established, what does that imply for the current shape of the text? On the other hand, to assume a synthesized text and work synchronically within it, is to elide the play of the multilayered text on the reader/s and miss some of the connections with the wider Genesis and Pentateuchal narratives.

The ending of the consensus that surrounded the Documentary Hypothesis, with its determined search for sources irrupting throughout the Pentateuch, has given space for attention to the literary features of the narratives that make up the book of Genesis. This does not imply that the book is a unified composition. Genesis is not a seamless volume. The creation narratives of Genesis 1–3 can be distinguished within the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11) and this, in turn, can be differentiated from the so-called Patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12–50). The relationship between these three, component sections, remains a fertile area of research. The תולדות, “begettings,” formula loosely connects all three.

Scholarly consensus concedes two basic traditions traceable throughout the whole book of Genesis known by the siglum P (“Priestly”) and its converse,

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non-P.\textsuperscript{8} The text chosen for this study sits within the commonly-identified non-P tradition.\textsuperscript{9} As the nomenclature suggests, there is no consensus about the make-up of this tradition apart from the fact that it is not P. Some scholars argue for the existence of a Yahwist (known as J) source within non-P, delineated by characteristic terminology for God and identifiable themes.\textsuperscript{10} Extracting the J thread from the non-J/non-P material is highly subjective and not essential for the current study. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use non-P for all that is not generally accepted as from the Priestly (P) source. The first creation story (Gen 1:1–2:3) is ascribed to P and the second (Gen 2:4b–4:26), is generally agreed to be non-P. The controversial question of the provenance and role of 2:4a ("These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created") will be explored as part of the

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\textsuperscript{8} The argument was first made by Henning Bernard Witter and then developed by Jean Astruc. Henning Bernhard Witter, \textit{Jura Israelitarum in Palaestinum terram Channaneum, Commentatione in Genesin perpetua sic demonstrata, ut idiomatici authentici nativus sensus fideliter detegatur, Mosis autoris primaeva intentio sollice definiatur adeoque corpus doctrinae et juris cum antiquissimum, tum consummatissimum tandem eruat}; accedit in paginarum fronte ipse textus Hebraeus cum versione Latina (Hildescheim Schröder, 1711); Jean Astruc, \textit{Conjectures sur la Genèse: Introduction et notes de Pierre Gibert} (Paris: Noèsis, 1999).


\textsuperscript{10} Claus Westermann differentiates between P (predominantly numerative), and J (predominantly narrative). Westermann, \textit{Genesis 1–11}, 1–73. Both Christoph Levin and André LaCocque write confidently of the work of an editor known as the Yahwist (J). Levin sees J material as an editorial collection with a distinct literary profile. He identifies six blocks of material as distinctively J and notes the following characteristics: All narratives are set outside of geographical Israel and Judah; they have a distinct view of history in which God directs the destiny of everyone; a leitmotif of God’s blessing infuses the narratives; and an individual literary style is used which employs the language of a king’s court to tell the stories. "The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch," \textit{JBL} 126, no. 2 (2007): 209–30. LaCocque sees J’s interests as historical and anthropological, writing for the edification of Judean exiles in Babylon. \textit{Trial of Innocence} (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2006). Phyllis Bird also finds significantly different themes in the Yahwist source from those of P. She highlights the psycho-social terms which J uses to describe humanity, compared with P’s more biological focus. "Genesis 1–3 as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality," \textit{Ex Auditu} 3 (1987): 6.
text study in chapter three but can be noted as a redactional hinge between two narratives.\textsuperscript{11}

While traditional scholarship attributes Gen 2:4b–3:24 to the J source, many also note the existence of two traditions within that narrative.\textsuperscript{12} Following the work of Karl Budde, scholars distinguish between a base layer and its subsequent reworking.\textsuperscript{13} The reason for this is the juxtaposition of the optimistic tone of Genesis 2 and the negative tone in Genesis 3. As will become clear in our analysis, this play of light and shadow in the narrative is, arguably, part of the intentional subtlety of this sophisticated story. For our purposes, the field of study is the ‘final’ shape of the text of Genesis 2–3, on the assumption that the received form of the text is of theological import within communities of faith.\textsuperscript{14}

Non-P authors drew from a rich mix of genres and sources. The sources make use of oral material, evident in the use of features such as poetic meter and assonance within sections of the prose. These prove to be keys to meaning. The poetic acclamation of הָאָדָמָה in 2:23, for instance, changes the tone from reportage


\textsuperscript{14} We draw on the work of Brevard S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (London: SCM, 1979). “The canonical shaping serves not so much to establish a given meaning to a particular passage as to chart the boundaries within which the exegetical task is to be carried out,” 83. This thesis, however, attends to the variations between the MT and the LXX without assuming the priority of the MT in the way that Childs did.
to celebration, immediately signaling the completion of humanity. Similarly, the use of assonant word-plays \( \text{אדם} \) and \( \text{איש} \) use folk-etymologies to show conceptual derivation of human from earth and woman from man.

There is strong evidence that authors of the non-P creation narrative knew ANE cosmogonies and cosmologies and drew from their rich store of motifs.\(^{15}\) Garden narratives, conceived as symbols of blessing and new life and associated with numinous border areas between divine and human worlds, were part of the cultural knowledge from which non-P authors drew for the Eden story.\(^{16}\)

There is also much to suggest that the story is the product of a peculiarly Israelite world-view as much as that of its ANE setting. The viewpoint is relentlessly the perspective of Israel and the uniquely Israelite name for their God, \( \text{יהוה} \), paired with \( \text{ אלהים} \) is used in this narrative, unlike the P creation narrative which avoids the name \( \text{ יהוה} \) for God.

**Wisdom Resonances**

A relevant element in the discussion of Genesis textual history has been the perceived resonances with Wisdom literature.\(^{17}\) This is of interest to this study

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15. Howard Wallace has drawn attention to the themes such as the garden of god, and the rest of the gods which have much in common with other ANE literature. *The Eden Narrative* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985), 65–99.


17. Wisdom literature is usually considered to comprise Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon and a few Psalms. The Genesis 2–3 text employs wisdom figures: the snake is a symbol of wisdom in the ANE; the tree is an oft-used symbol (e.g., Prov 3:18). The narrative uses common
because these possible links touch on the subject of sex/gender relations. The אשת חיל ("capable woman") of Prov 31:10–31, for instance, is sometimes compared to the woman of Genesis 2–3.\textsuperscript{18} The Song of Songs, which has resonances of the Eden narrative, is now seen by some as a piece of Wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{19}

This prompts the question: are we dealing here with a wisdom text and if so, what impact would that have on a gender critical reading? Although no study of Genesis 2–3 and wisdom literature can avoid circularity, it is clear that wisdom assumes a creation theology, although the framework of this connection remains unclear.\textsuperscript{20} We do well to heed the cautions of James Crenshaw about the difficulties of charting wisdom influence through the HB.\textsuperscript{21}

Ascertaining the provenance and genre of the Eden narrative is not critical to our study but the presence of possible wisdom themes alerts us to the


\textsuperscript{21} Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," 9–45.
particular interests of wisdom. If human self-understanding is the central interest of wisdom, then the nature and prospects of successful human partnership is a key concern.

Contextual Questions

Two Creation Narratives

We turn now to consider the relationship of the text under study to its surrounding canonical material. To begin, what hermeneutical considerations are raised by the presence of two different creation accounts? The non-P creation narrative is editorially situated after the P creation story of Gen 1:1–2:3, thereby juxtaposing two very different stories which defy incorporation into one unified Israelite creation account. Some see the second creation story (Gen 2:4b–3:24) as a deliberate corrective to the first. This implies that the second story is temporally later, a contested proposition.


25. This notion underplays the striking differences between the two accounts, including the creation of the human and the depiction of the environment. Geertz lays out a persuasive case that
This study will not assume the temporal priority of one over the other, given that elements of both probably circulated in pre-canonized form. Helpful here is the idea that the two accounts are redactionally hinged together in 2:4a in a way that makes it possible for us to look both forwards and backwards. We need not thus see them as in critical disagreement with each other but rather, as part of mosaic of perspectives that contribute something to the overall picture of creation. It remains now for us to lay the two human creation accounts, those of P and non-P, side by side and attempt some resolution.

Both creation accounts make it clear that there is nothing that can be said about humanity that is not refracted through its sexually differentiated form. There exists in both accounts a play of single and double: of humankind being one but two. This is played out in crafted phrases that start by describing single human: בצלם אלהים ברא אתו (“In the image of God he created him”) then, by sleight of hand, it is suddenly two: זכר ונקבה ברא אתם (“male and female he created them”). The same semantic play occurs in Genesis 2. In 2:24 the pair of הָרָאָמִים הָרָאָמִים then, by change of Hebrew verb form, it is suddenly two: זכר ונקבה ברא אתם (“male and female he created them”). The same semantic play occurs in Genesis 2. In 2:24 the pair of הָרָאָמִים הָרָאָמִים then, by change of Hebrew verb form, it is suddenly two: זכר ונקבה ברa אתם (“male and female he created them”).

26. There is a linguistic argument for P being later than non-P in that P reflects a period of the demise of the Qal passive and the longer form of 1CS pronoun. Ronald S. Hendel, “Historical Context,” in The Book of Genesis, Evans, Lohr and Petersen, 56–57. See, however, the balanced argument of Erhard Blum, who argues that linguistic evidence must be used with other data to be useful. “The Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts – An Approach with Methodological Limitations,” in The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America, ed. Jan Christian Gertz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 303–26.

27. Mark Brett suggests that the juxtaposition of these two creation accounts is an example of intentional hybridity, a blending of two voices into “an unstable symphony—sometimes speaking univocally but more often juxtaposing alternative points of view such that the authority of the dominant voice is put into question.” Mark G. Brett, “Earthing the Human in Genesis 1–3,” in The Earth Story in Genesis, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 85. More recently, Brett suggests that it is the national voice that is being destabilized. Locations of God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
become ("one flesh") then the next word configures them as two: 
("the two were naked").

Humanity exists in male/female form through deliberate divine intention and as part of a wider creation project. Both accounts refer to a responsibility to the earth variously described as “fill” and “subdue” (Gen 1:28), and “serve” and “keep” (Gen 2:15).

There are differences, of course. The P account is a minimal one, limited to general statements while the non-P account evinces a slower, more expansive account. The P account, through use of the vocabulary of זכר/נקבה, draws attention to physical differences that prepare humans for procreation and dominion. In choosing to use the word-pair זכר/נקבה, P has foregrounded biological complementarity and hinted at the reproductive interests to be developed later in P’s work. It evidences an interest in bodily differences that will be the subject of legal codes and thus, the way that Israel comports itself in relation to sexuality and sociality.

The non-P account supplements P with more attention to the psycho-social relationship between the human pair. As Phyllis Bird attests, companionship, mutual attraction, shared vocation as well as reproduction are all developed by the non-P tradition.

28. The lexeme נקה has a range of meaning from “to bore through,” and, perhaps, metaphorically, “to fix or establish,” or “to denote.” With the feminine suffix, the word is used to designate “female” with special reference to female reproductive anatomy. HALOT, 719. See also the fuller discussion in Aušra Pazeraite, “‘Zākhar and nēqĕvāh He Created Them’: Sexual and Gender Identities in the Bible,” Feminist Theology 17, no. 1 (2008): 92–110. Similarly, זכר has a basic association with phallus and thus used to designate “male.” HALOT 271. It is commonly used by P to designate the laws applicable to men, especially those relating to the covenantal symbol of circumcision (Gen 17:10, 12, 14, 23; 34:15, 22).

29. Bird, “Male and Female,” 158
elements than in how things work in practice, and, in particular, what humans make of the relationship with God.

Narrowing our focus to the subject in which this study is interested, the two accounts do offer interesting perspectives on the creation of humankind that will be further explored in this study, not the least of which is the fact that they offer two differing accounts of direct divine fashioning of a seemingly dimorphic humanity. Sarah Shectman has observed that the P and non-P traditions differ in their attention to women. Non-P genealogies include women (for example, Gen 11:29). In non-P texts, women’s active roles are critical to the narrative, while in P, matriarchs are fully coopted by patriarchs and lose their unique standing. This suggests that the partnership between women and men has interesting dimensions within the work of the non-P tradition. While P sees men as independent actors, non-P sees the potency of the couple relationship in the unfolding dramas of Genesis.

The Genesis Context

The Eden narrative relates not only to the preceding creation narrative but also to the material that follows. The critical interpretative factor here is the frame to


31. Naomi Steinberg also notices the significant inclusion of women in some genealogies. She argues that, throughout the ANE, marriage functions to establish the inheritance of land but only patrilocal, collateral marriage within the line of Terah establishes the right claim to the land of Israel. Lineage is named through the man but both man and woman must be descendants of Terah. Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective (Minneapolis Minn.: Fortress, 1993).

32. Shectman, Women in the Pentateuch, 170–79. She relates diminishing roles of women in P to the centralizing of power in Israel in the late eighth century BCE.
be employed. Situating the non-P creation story within the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11), one observes common themes such as the presence of sin and evil, the significance of human choice, and the encroachment of humans on divine prerogatives. Adopting a bigger framework such as the whole of Genesis, or Genesis-Exodus, brings other concerns into focus, such as the theme of promise (land, progeny) and fulfillment. Adopting a larger Pentateuchal or Hexateuchal horizon highlights other themes but also begins to blur the focus of our current study and make conclusions too diffuse to be meaningful. This study, then, will focus on Gen 2:4b–4:26 but in a later chapter, link findings to the wider Genesis context.

The adoption of the book of Genesis as the unifying frame has good justification. The use of the תולדות “begettings” formula, a theme associated with P, creates a unifying thread along which other materials have been arranged and thus forms the backbone of Genesis 2–50. In introducing Gen 2:4b–4:26 with the תולדות formula, the editorial hand links the non-P creation story into the wider Primary History of Israel, creating an interpretative horizon for the observant reader. David Carr notes the characteristic use of תולדות (from the root ילד “to have a child”) which he translates as “descendants,” to create a bridge between a character depicted in the preceding text and his descendants. The use in Gen 2:4a is atypical. While the translation “descendants” fits many cases, it does not fit 2:4a where the referent is ‘heaven and earth.’ The תולדות label here suggests that a redactor has stretched the תולדות formula into new contexts and

33. Ronald Hendel suggests the תולדות formula be seen as a native genre-term relating individual kinship stories and identifying neighboring kin. “Historical Context,” 76–78.
thus, new meanings. This is of significance for the theme of the present thesis, because it explicitly ties the creation of woman and man into Israel’s account of its Primary History.

Genesis also shows some synchronic thematic threads. The flood story rehearses some of the tropes of Genesis 2–4 (agrarian environment; nakedness; judgement; the disobedient brother). The boundary between human and divine is another common Genesis theme. While Genesis is not a smoothly uniform volume, neither is it simply a portfolio of unordered writings. The Eden narrative then takes its place as setting the scene for the non-P history with its unique emphases and perspectives.

**Historical Context**

What approach will be taken to the question of the historical context of Genesis 2–4? Given the multilayered book that we have, it is exceedingly difficult to recreate the compositional process within the Pentateuch and therefore to find meaningful historical links. There is no reference in Genesis to dateable events or people. Some efforts have been made to assess the date of the Hebrew language used in the creation narratives with inconclusive results. It is more fruitful to

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34. Carr, *Biblos Geneseōs Revisited,* 165–69. See also Brett, “Earthing the Human,” 82, where he suggests that the introductory formula situates the land as parent and thus relates humans genealogically to the earth. The translation of תולדות as “begettings” will be used in this present work to allow for wider understanding of the concept.


consider the traces of cultural memory that may provide some chronological range. Some Genesis context is provided by accounts of interactions with neighbors such as Aram and Edom which are consistent with ninth to eighth century BCE relations. 37

A harder task is that of finding an historical situation into which the narrative was written or redacted. Scholarly consensus sees the whole HB as a product of the post-exilic period and an exercise in national self-definition in response to the disruptive events of exile. 38 Clear references to the account of the transgression of Adam and Eve are not found until the deuterocanonical books (Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon) which suggests that Genesis 2–3 was not known until the Second Temple period. 39

This study will assume that the narrative in Gen 2:4b–4:26 is a late composition whose final form dates from the post-exilic period, 40 using a


multiplicity of earlier source material, both oral and written, and appended to the opening of Genesis as the Priestly literature was developing. It is reasonable to assume that this was done to provide a lens relevant to reading the rest of the Primary History. The historic circumstances of the Babylonian Exile may have provided an impetus for a national story of alienation from יהוה, exile and dispersion but it will not account for all features of the narrative.

To sum up, the present study will make the following critical assumptions: that Gen 2:4b–4:26 is a literary unity and that it complements in some way the creation narrative of Gen 1:1–2:4a. It is the work of a different authorial tradition (non-P) than that of Genesis 1. The study will employ a synchronic approach, working with the current form but also making use of diachronic insights as appropriate.41

That certain socio-historical contexts gave rise to both the formation of component sources and the progressive redaction of the text, is assumed. It is not expected, however, that this study will necessarily shed light on those contexts, nor that these historical contexts are the only horizons of interpretation. The HB shows much evidence of a process of reshaping of traditions to meet new circumstances.42


42. For a comprehensive treatment of inner-biblical exegesis see Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). Howard Wallace compares this to a
Methodology

Feminist Hermeneutic

This study will adopt a feminist hermeneutic as its primary approach. Feminist biblical scholars were among the first not only to declare their own perspective but also to call out the androcentric and occasionally misogynist scholarship surrounding Genesis studies. In so doing, they have shone welcome light on the androcentric text itself.

The value of a feminist hermeneutic goes beyond foregrounding the presence or absence of women’s sensitivities in the text. It also shines critical light on the relations of power in the text as revealed in sex/gender relations. That light also extends to illuminate other dissymmetries of power and brings the reader into empathic association with other marginalized groups such as sexual and political minorities. Further, the feminist hermeneutic draws attention to the physical body, noting the ways that differences in human bodies, especially the differences of sexual configurations, are described. This becomes important as we study the significations of childbirth in the narrative at 3:16 and 4:1, 17 and 25.

As part of its wider commitments to the human community, a feminist

singer moulding older material to the shape of his song. The Eden Narrative, 55. LaCocque uses the image of a pebble being polished by endless use. The Trial of Innocence, 29.


44. The history of feminist scholarship is discussed in chapter eight.
hermeneutic is interested in relationality, a key theme of the current study. This relationality extends the female/male partnership delineated in the Eden narrative into the wider relationality of humanity to the created world. This relationality is clearly important to the non-P author who describes in 3:14–19 the consequences for the earth of the human transgression.

Feminist hermeneutics overlaps to a large extent with that of gender criticism. Although the line between them is sometimes contested, gender criticism has a key focus on the way sex/gender is performed in the HB and especially attends to its inscription of binary heterosexuality.

Other Hermeneutical Considerations

A cautious approach will be taken to the debate around the Eden narrative as a Christian primary story of origins, and in particular, to the salience of the Fall theology that has developed from it. While noting the obvious existence of disobedience and a fall from grace in the narrative, the story in its NT and


48. See further discussion of their different approaches in chapter eight.

subsequent Christian theological reflection has accrued a weight that has obscured aspects of the story.\textsuperscript{50} The gravity that devolves from understanding it as describing the universal human condition until redemption through Christ, has been disastrous for women and has drawn attention away from other aspects of the story that this thesis is trying to address. One aspect of this, is the dynamic of human partnership that the author has made the centerpiece of the narrative. The position taken here will be that the story describes the observable tendency of the human to choose against God while remaining within the arc of grace. Further, it will assume that the Deuteronomic injunction to choose good and not evil, gives space for human responsiveness to God with positive community outcomes long before the advent of Christ.

Conclusion

This study will adopt a methodology that blends exegesis with literary, sociological and theological reflections. The focus text is in the form of narrative prose and reviving its historicity (“Did those things really happen as described?”) is not necessary to the task of making meaning today.\textsuperscript{51} Ronald Hendel has helpfully commented that ”Genesis is an anthology of cultural memories that relate not to events themselves but to prior representations of the past. It is a memory archive that has its ancestry in prior memories.”\textsuperscript{52} The narrative form of

\textsuperscript{50} David Kelsey presents a strong argument that Genesis 1–3 should be supplemented by attention to biblical wisdom literature when developing a theological anthropology: Kelsey, \textit{Eccentric Existence}, 176–89.


\textsuperscript{52} Hendel, “Historical Context,” 76.
the text invites the reader into active engagement in the making of meaning through observing and responding to features of the narrative such as characterization, dialogue, time manipulation, repetition of vocabulary and motifs.\textsuperscript{53}

A positive approach will be taken to the unruliness of the Genesis text, assuming that, therewith, the reader is invited to consider discordances in the making of meaning.\textsuperscript{54} The narrative will be read with a certain suspicion, alert to the bias of the male-authored text. This is an earnest duty, aware as we are of the centuries of patriarchal interpretation and its negative effects on women.

Reading the Genesis narrative through a feminist lens as literature is no barrier to reading it as scripture.\textsuperscript{55} The extrinsic judgement of believing that the text speaks somehow with God's voice and authority does not foreshorten critical engagement. The position taken here is that this text exercises its authority through its invitation to communities of faith to consider what it discloses about God's person and about themselves and their worlds. As Cantwell Smith suggests: "[ . . . ] no text is a scripture in itself and as such. People – a given community – make a text into scripture or keep it scripture: by treating it a certain way."\textsuperscript{56} The

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\textsuperscript{53} Amit, \textit{Reading Biblical Narratives}, especially 14–21, 38–45.
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\textsuperscript{54} David Carr notes that, whereas, in the modern world, texts would be rewritten and older ones discarded, in the ANE, texts grew by accretion: " . . . the ancients tended to change and supplement \textit{the very texts they cherished most} [emphasis his], while leaving irrelevant and unhelpful texts to gather dust in a corner of the Temple or scribal workroom." "Untamable Text of an Untamable God: Genesis and Rethinking the Character of Scripture," \textit{Interpretation} 54, no. 4 (2000): 352.
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scriptural impact is exercised not through enforcing doctrinal positions but through shaping "faithful dispositions." 57 I will argue that these faithful dispositions include aspects of human endeavor best served through human partnership described in Genesis 2–4.

CHAPTER THREE: EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 2:4b–25

The primeval couple story recounted in Gen 2:4b–4:26 is written with theological purpose, using all the skilled craft of story-telling. The relationship between אדם and חוה is signaled by an array of narrative symbols which shape a rich, complex gendered picture. The aim of this section of the thesis is to shine a light on the ways that the Eden narrative constitutes the partnership of woman and man. We begin this section by looking at the creation of *the heavens and the earth* (2:4b) and the placement of humans within the tableau. A following section will discuss the ordering of the elements of creation and focus on the animating role of the human partners.

We begin at 2:4b, following the scholarly consensus that the second creation story, and a separate source, begins there.¹ It is a matter of interest to my theme that Gen 1:1–2:3, the work of another source, known as P, sits juxtaposed to the story of the primeval pair, lightly stitched to its sibling source by the words of 2:4a. Respectful of his sources, and unperturbed by the seeming contradictions between the two works,² the editor was content to let them confront each other under the reader’s gaze.³

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². Among them, the creation of humankind last, rather than first, the unitary creation of man and woman (Gen 1:27) and the solo creations of man (2:7) and woman (2:22).

While the reasons for beginning the unit of study with 2:4b may be clear, those for closing the unit at the end of Genesis 4 instead of at the end of Genesis 3, are not. Again, this decision has been made because of the focus of this study on sex/gender relations, as well as by the obvious thematic and semantic correspondences between chapters three and four. The man and the woman, named later as אדם and חוה, continue their interactions through chapter four with the procreation and naming of children. The agrarian context continues to impact the narrative. The sibling murder story in Genesis 4 parallels the transgression in Genesis 3 with motifs of human disobedience, cover-up, and deflection of responsibility for the event. Both include the probing divine question: “Where are/is you/your brother?” Both use the words desire and rule (משלי and esposה) in one divine statement. Cain’s punishments, to be driven from the ground and to face the resistant earth, resemble those of Adam. The loss of two sons of חוה, one by violent attack and one by banishment, reminds the reader of the divine word in 3:16 that she will bear children only with painful toil. The chapter ends with the birth of a son to אדם and אשתו, “his woman” to replace the son slain by Cain. For all these reasons, chapter four is fruitfully read with chapter three.

The Prelude Gen 2:4b–25

The Elements of Creation

The setting for what will follow in subsequent chapters is elaborately described in 2:4b–25. The narrator moves in stages from the general to the particular, from a time of not yet to the climax of the presence of man and woman, forming together בשר אחד ("one flesh"), and לא תוסף ("not disconcerted"). The author's
artistry makes it clear that this was the goal to which this prelude was leading. The process, best imagined as the infilling of a darkened stage, is framed around a series of temporal and spatial absences, gradually being constructed until the tableau is completed with the arrival of the couple.

In this exegesis, we will proceed in two stages. Although this three-dimensional image of a stage set is useful as we look into the chapter, it does not illuminate another process going on through the author’s artistry, and that is the creative process of establishing order and relationship between the items on the stage. It is this that is the key to understanding the prelude and how it establishes the primeval couple’s consummate place. We will therefore look first at the steps of filling the stage, the successive scenes of the story, then move to analyse the narrative processes at work that are critical to revealing the implied sex/gender anthropology.

Using a formula common to the beginning of Mesopotamian creation narratives, the narrator’s imagined stage is described as not yet; lacking the appurtenances that will be needed to progress the story. The first absence is arable soil because God has not yet caused it to rain. This desiccated soil produces no green plants. This lack is solved as God causes an אד (“flow,” “stream,” “source”) to well up, watering the whole earth. This source was not

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4. Genesis 2–3 uses many motifs common to Mesopotamian creation literature, including here the use of the temporal clause (“when . . .”) followed by the description of the earth in negative terms using circumstantial clauses, at the start of the creation narrative. See further discussion in Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 66–69.

just moistening but השקה, “deeply watering” the land, preparing the soil not only for vegetation but for God’s next creative act.

The second absence was that of האדם ("the human"). The tension created by the series of dependent clauses from v.4b is finally relieved when the principal clause begins in v.7 and introduces the creation of the human. The earth is unable to fulfil its created purpose without a human to work it. The use of the word עבד is an interesting one and will be discussed further under 2:15 where it is repeated.

The word אדם is related to דם ("blood") and through that, to a range of reddish colors. A band of rich reddish soil, derived from oxidization of iron particles from limestone substrata, runs through the central highlands and their western slopes in Palestine from Shechem to Hebron. The storyteller tells us that the human is created not just from such אדמה but from עפר מן-אדמה ("humus from the arable soil"). This form of אדמה is a moistened clump or clod, formed as a result of the saturated earth that was prepared in v.6. עפר is not well translated as dust, which would have been exceedingly difficult to shape, despite the appealing resonances of frailty and weakness. The clod, rather, is a malleable material ready to take shape under divine hands but still retaining (unlike bakeable clay) an ability to return to its original particles. Affinity to the earth is encoded in the simple stuff of which אדם is made.

In a further stage of creation, יהוה breathed into the nostrils of האדם ("the human"), נשמת חיים ("the breath of life"), and the human became לנפש חי ("a living being"). Commentators have noticed a striking resemblance to the mīs pī (mouth opening) rituals of sixth century BCE Babylon and Nineveh. In such
rituals, sculpted images of gods undergo physical transportation from workshop to garden through a series of stages in which the idol moves from inanimate to living, from material stuff to divine substance. This is an example of some of the rich cultural material to which the storyteller had access to tell the story. Here, נשמת חיים refers to the animating spirit in living humans and animals. In biblical usage, it inheres in blood, entailing the proscription on murder of humans and the enactment of rituals for animal slaughter. We will encounter the potency of this proscription in the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16).

Next, a garden appears on our stage, ובטע (“planted”) by יהוה. Because the type of garden will have implications for אדם, we will look closely at the text. This garden is established because of and for the human. The clause at the end of v.8 rounds off the long unit begun in v.4b, with the placement of the human who must be provided with the means to live. יהוה did not call this garden into being but ובטע (“planted”) it, a word bringing all the associations of manual labor needed to establish such a plot: digging and levelling, building terraces, digging out cisterns and water channels, planting and tending new trees. The garden is בעדן (“in Eden”). This name evoked the image of an agriculturally productive area, a place of bounty. Frequently attested in the HB, the garden of Eden was a traditional motif indicating a place of pleasure and abundance. This contrasts with the dryland agrarian landscape implied at the start of this narrative (2:5–7) and at the end (3:17–18). The Eden garden was a place of easy fruitfulness,


7. See Isa 51:3, Ezek 36:35, Joel 2:3. Eden was also known for its majestic trees: Ezek 31:9, 16, 18. See Stordalen, Echoes of Eden, 1–20. Carol Meyers points out that such gardens were the domain of élites and not where most people lived and worked. “Food and the First Family,” 137–57.
producing luxury foodstuffs (fruit) rather than the staple Levant diet of grains.⁸ Establishing its geographic location is a difficult task, although many have tried, often using the signifier of the four rivers of 2:10–14, discussed further below.⁹

For our purposes, the following seems significant: Eden was a known motif which conveyed abundance and beauty to the ears of the hearers. It was a real but distant place, located on the edges of the known world. That the intention was to nourish both body and spirit is indicated by the use of the expansive כל-עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל, (“every tree lovely to look at and good for food”). Food would not be hard to obtain as the abundant garden would give up its produce without resistance. The garden was the kind of walled place that rulers built for their pleasure (Song 4:12–5:1; 1 Kgs 21:2). Such a garden would not provide staple foods, in other words, grains, which would need to be cultivated outside the garden. Surrounded by rivers, both mythical (Pishon and Gihon) and real (Tigris and Euphrates), the place would never lack for water and in fact, would be a place from which the headwaters of great rivers would flow into the wider inhabited world.

The next scene is the installation of the human in the garden. The narrator tells the reader the purpose of this installation, לעבדה ולשמרה (“to serve and to keep it”).¹⁰ This is followed by further instruction relating to the human’s role, in

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⁸ Meyers, “Food and the First Family,” 141–44.

⁹ Zevit concludes that Eden was imagined as lying in the western part of Urartu, an ancient kingdom to the west of modern Lake Van in Eastern Turkey. What Really Happened, 96–113. For a fuller discussion of the way the geographic location has been understood, see Stordalen, Echoes of Eden, 250–70.

¹⁰ The common (e.g., NRSV) translation of לעבדה as “to till” hides some important semantic associations so the word is translated here as “to serve.” This will be discussed later in this section.
the form of a command of יהוה, with first, a strong positive word, מכל עץ הגן אכל ("from every fruit of the garden you may surely eat"), then a restrictive rider, ומען הדרת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנה ("but of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, you shall not eat"). Dramatic tension in the story is greatly increased with the portentous warning, כי ביום אכלך منه מות תموت ("for on the day you eat from it you shall die"). Will the human be able to work, enjoying the fruit of every tree except the one with the tantalizing name/purpose?11

While we are pondering this conundrum, a final character is added to our stage, introduced by an intriguing dramatic interlude. As if reviewing what has so far been made, יהוה, in direct speech announces a further absence from the assembled cast: לא טוב היה אדם לבדו ("it is not good for the human to be alone"), ואני יעשה לו עזר כנגדו ("I shall make him a sustainer as his partner").12

Here יהוה enters the story again. יהוה fashions the non-human creatures מני האדם ("from the arable soil") and brings them to the human for naming. In an action-response refrain, the naming text is repeated in 2:20 but this time with the addition of הבמה ("livestock"), indicating that not even husbanded animals were found suitable. This builds the suspense as the audience waits for the right one to be found through the naming process. The lack of correspondence between the animals and the human is stressed by the construction of v.20b: ולאbsites לא ימצא עזר כנגדו ("as for the human, he did not find a sustainer beside

11. Discussion of the meaning of the trees and their relation to the humans' transgression is deferred till chapter four.
12. Fuller discussion of the meaning of the term עזר כנגדו is to be found pp.54–61 and 162–65.

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him”). This significant piece of power-sharing by יהוה has not resulted in a satisfactory answer to what was לא טוב (“not good”). A key cast member, the עזר, זכר, is still absent.

In dramatic response, יהוה conducts a surgical procedure and fashions a creature from the human’s side, which results in dual beings. This time, the raw material is not האדמה but the flesh of the human being. The notable verb בנה arouses associations of building, a feature that becomes significant when probing the meaning of צלע (“side”).

The naming of the אשה (“woman”), leads to a reflexive recognition and self-naming of the איש (“man”). From אדם, a human of moom sex/gender, a plural humanity is established. The inauguration of the couple is the only part of the work of יהוה, work on which extended commentary is made (2:23–25). The first human speech in the Hebrew Bible is poetry, a triumphant song of recognition of woman and self-recognition of the man. Significantly, it is not יהוה who gives the final verdict on whether this is טוב (“good”). This significant role is given to the self-identified male human creature.

The word זווא (“this one”), occurs three times in his poem, a pronoun of unusual intensity in Hebrew. אדם speaks in the third person, as if addressing an

13. The subject of לא מצא is not clear. יהוה is too distant and אדם is a better fit for the plot but the preceding phrase is awkward. It is best to regard it as a way of intensifying the lack of correspondence between אדם and the animals giving the sense of “as for the human.” See discussion in Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnus Press, 1961), 32–33.

14. Cassuto notes that בנה is a verb employed in Akkadian literature for the creation of humans: Genesis, 134. צלע is discussed further on pp.58–59 below.

15. For the time being we will assume categories that are yet to be critiqued: notions of maleness and femaleness. See fuller discussion in chapter six.
audience and inviting them into the wonder of what has occurred. With the use of "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"), identifies this one as not only made of the same stuff but also as kin.16

The story is resumed in v.25, following the narrator's comment (v.24) discussed further below. The differentiated male and female couple are in focus as the narrator lets us in on an aspect of their inner life: "And the two of them were naked, the human and his woman, and they were not disconcerted").17 This short sentence describes a state of unity and freedom with each other that was soon to change (3:7). All is now in place for the story to progress in chapters three and four.

Order and Relationship

We turn now to look at how the narrator establishes order and relationship between components of the creation within the prelude (Gen 2:4b–25). This is important to the purpose of this thesis because establishing the relationship between the man and woman is critical to understanding the purpose of this creation story and the part of differentiated humanity within it.

16. See, for instance, uses of this expression in Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12, 13, where kinship is clearly in view. Walter Brueggemann argues for a covenantal meaning, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone, Gen 2:23a," CBQ 32, no. 4 (1970): 532–42. This is further discussed later in this study on pages 164–65.

17. Westermann has a discussion of the ways the adjective לא יתבששו, “not disconcerted” has been received by interpreters. Genesis 1–11, 234–36.
The non-P tradition, like that of P, is interested in establishing the functionality of the creation. The ultimate purpose of this exercise is to establish an environment where humans, the image of God, can fulfil the divine purpose which is their vocation. The P source summarizes this as: deprivation וֹדֵב וּדָבָא וָמָלֹא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבַשֶּׁה (“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it,” Gen 1:28a). The second creation story models the vocation as serving and watching the garden. In other words, the components of creation do not become meaningful until humans are put in place. Humans are the key to the functioning of the creation.

A functioning creation is not just establishing the form of the components of creation (earth, water, plants, animals, humans) but setting things in good, “good,” “suitable” relationship with each other. The P creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a) demonstrates this order in the patterning of the text. The non-P narrative does it differently. In non-P, the ordering and relationship of one component to another is inscribed in the narrative features of the text. They are disclosed by story, by distinctive vocabulary, by semantic associations, and little by structure.


19. The most common understanding in the HB of the lexeme טוב is its functional aspect, as being in proper order or suited for the job. For full discussion of HB and cognate usages of טוב, see E. Höver-Johag, “טוב” TDOT, vol. 5, 296–317.

20. Shimon Bar-Efrat notes the prominent structure of the narrative: “…the Creation story in Gen 1:1–2:3 is characterized by a very prominent structure. The unmistakable emphasis on structure and order in this case hints at the conception that the act of creation consisted chiefly in ordering, in making distinctions, in fixing boundaries, in arranging parts and establishing relations among them with the corollary that the universe is an ordered whole.” Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative,” VT 30, no. 2 (1980): 154–73, 173.
Verses 4b–6 describe the inceptive state of creation, a state not just of absence but of lack of differentiation and order. Water was not present in recognizable, harvestable form. There was not yet rain but rather an upwelling of wetness (v.6). Plants were thus lacking "shrub of the field" or "plant of the field"), vegetation neither cultivable or wild. Above all, there was no human ("to serve and to keep") the ground. The arrival of the human would bring all this together into an orderly whole. The human it is, who will arrange and order the spatial elements into functional completion.

One of the ways that the non-P source indicates relationship is through word association. The link between אדם and אדמה has already been noted. The wordplay is not mere punning. Names were not necessarily formal etymologies. Non-P source authors played with word associations to make a point, frequently employing assonance. The explanations given are often folk-etymologies based on associations with the text in which they appear. Lest we forget this association, this primary relationship between human and earth is emphasized


22. This relationship can be preserved in English by translating "earthling from earth" or "human from humus."


24. See, for example, the naming of קין, "Cain" in Gen 4:1, with its loose association with קנייתי, "acquired." For further discussion of this aspect of the Genesis text, see James Barr, The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality, 65.
by the repetition of the auxiliary phrase ממנה לקחת ("from which you were taken"), in 3:19, and אשר לקח משם ("from which he was taken"), in 3:23.

It is of interest that this verbal association is made with the vocation of Adam of serving the ground. The one who is from the earth is the one who will work it and in the fullness of time, return to it. The human’s relationship with the earth is further developed through the verbs that describe the human’s work (לעבדה ולשמרה discussed further below). This work preceded human differentiation and is characteristic of all humanity.

Although the word אדם is masculine in Hebrew grammar, it does not necessarily instate a male as first human. In the Hebrew language, grammatical gender is not sexual identity. The word אדם has three general meanings hidden in many English translations: humankind, an individual person, and finally, a male person. The being that is created from the earth has no obvious sex. It is only with the advent of the woman that אדם recognizes “his” difference and this transition is marked by the adoption of another wordplay: אשה and איש.

In the same way that אדם was differentiated from the material from which he came, woman was differentiated from man. This mysterious process of differentiation is marked by the pun, אשה from איש. This is not a naming process

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25. Phyllis Trible noted the significance of this in her work on male and female and the image of God. God and the Rhetoric, 81.


27. אדם occurs twenty-two times in Genesis 2–3, nineteen times with the definite article. The tradition of translating אדם with the personal name Adam, goes back to the LXX in the third century BCE, although it is not until Gen 4:25 that there is clear use of the word as a proper name.

28. This differentiation marked by the use of אשה and איש was noted by Phyllis Trible: Trible, God and the Rhetoric, 138–39.
but rather the encapsulation of a relationship in the form of a neat verbal pun. It says much and it says little. It hints at a deep unalterable relationship but also at a mystery which is hidden from the reader’s eye. It hints at the tension implicit in differentiation; two things, originally one, now straining toward a unity. In the same way that the human will return to humus (Gen 3:19), the woman and man will become one flesh again (Gen 2:24).

We are beginning to learn how important is the delineation of relationship in the divine creation, particularly that of male and female, to the author/s of the second creation story. To understand more, we need to understand the nature of the human’s relationship with the earth, and in particular, what was implied in the words: "God took the human and set him down in the garden of Eden to serve it and watch it"). Given that the human has not yet been differentiated, we can understand these words as applying generically to all humans, of whatever sex/gender.

An incongruence is immediately obvious in the charge to the humans: the infinitives have feminine suffixes indicating that what they are to serve and keep is feminine, yet גן ("garden"), the closest referent, is masculine. What, exactly, is to be served and watched? In two other places in our story, האדמה ("the earth"), a feminine noun (Gen 2:5 and 3:23) is the object of the verb עבד ("to serve"). We can surmise that this at least, was one association. The lexeme normally means to work for somebody. Less frequently it refers to work done on or with some material and in most cases that is soil (for example, Gen 3:23, 4:2). On its

29. Waltke and O’Connor suggest that this may be an example of the “be-heading” of the noun and the referent is "the Garden of Eden," with Eden being a feminine noun. An Introduction, 103–04.
own then, the verb would denote a vocation that was primarily agricultural.\textsuperscript{30} Paired with \uktav{lishmera} however, other meanings are suggested and these will be reviewed later.

The geo-spatial context of the second creation story is one of its distinctive features. The story begins in the general context of \uktav{adamah}, repeated four times in the opening stanzas. It is the substance lacking a human to serve it, through which wetness welled, from which the human was fashioned and from which \uktav{yehovah} makes trees to sprout. \uktav{ha'aretz}, also used four times, gradually gives way in the early verses, to the use of \uktav{adamah} as the human is created (2:5 and 2:7).

The link between human and humus could not be more obviously presented to the reader. The context of \uktav{adamah} is neatly rounded off with the reference, following the transgression episode, to the human sent again \uktav{le'aveid et-adamah} ("to serve the earth" 3:23). Within this general geo-spatial context is a more specific place, \uktav{ha'agan} ("the Eden garden"), planted by \uktav{yehovah}, in which the human is installed and from which, later, expelled. This garden is planted out with trees that were both beautiful and nourishing.

In a narrative piece so tightly constructed, the lengthy unit describing four rivers flowing around Eden seems out of place.\textsuperscript{31} Attempts to locate these four rivers and thus, the Garden of Eden, have been inconclusive.\textsuperscript{32} The mythic tones

\textsuperscript{30} See discussion of these terms in Ellen F. Davis, \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 28–33.

\textsuperscript{31} This unit is part of wider discussion about sources in Genesis 2–3. Wallace, \textit{The Eden Narrative}, 1–28, 10.

of the description of the rivers seem to be drawn from ANE themes which locate such gardens in liminal spaces between human and divine worlds.\textsuperscript{33} Although it contributes little to the plot, it does provide an image of a permanent and plentiful water supply emanating from the garden and spreading out to water the whole known world. Ancient Israel occupied a narrow ecological niche in an arid upland between an ocean and a barren wilderness. The civilizations that developed around the fertile banks of rivers in Babylon and Egypt must have seemed places of wonder and indeed, mythic bounty, to Israelite farmers. No wonder images of these places were drawn into service in the creation of this ideal garden.

Our story also has in view the realities of life in ancient Israel.\textsuperscript{34} The human is a farmer (2:15). Indeed, God is a farmer (2:8). Although the \textit{עזר כנגדו} is not yet realized in this text, what is known of the exigencies of life in Iron Age Palestine (ca. 1150–586 BCE) suggests that woman and man were equally involved in making a living. Much is therefore implied by the author for sex/gender anthropology in the human vocation of serving the earth. A contextual illustration of this comes from Carol Meyers, who suggests that the earliest Iron Age villages in the hill country could only have been established with high inputs of labor to clear fields, build terraces, create water courses and cisterns. When women participate in agrarian tasks, they do tasks related to hoe agriculture in vineyards, gardens and orchards close to the domestic base so they

\textsuperscript{33} Thus, Stordalen, \textit{Echoes of Eden}, 286, and Wallace, \textit{The Eden Narrative}, 83.

\textsuperscript{34} Ellen Davis writes: “The Bible as we have it could not have been written beside the irrigation canals of Babylon, or the perennially flooding Nile, . . . . For revelation addresses the necessities of a place as well as a people.” \textit{Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture}, 26.
can do child-care as well. The Eden garden however, is not upland Palestine and depicts an ideal far away from the dry fields of Palestine.

More subtlety in the human vocation is introduced through the pairing of העבד with שמר. The lexeme שמר does not elsewhere refer to care of land. The common sense of the word is to keep, for instance, a flock, household, or a brother. It also carries a sense of observation of things such as the working of the world and the rhythms of nature. This carries the interesting idea that the human is to learn from the garden, respecting its limits.

Another nuance in this lexeme is to observe moral rules, in some cases, torah. The verb is used in this way of Moses (Josh 1:7, 22:5) and also of David (1 Kings 14:8). In each case they are to observe the commandments of יהוה. The primary setting of this word is thus legal and cultic and not agricultural. The lexical ambiguity of these, seemingly, misplaced terms, may open up questions and new horizons of meaning, linking this primal story into Israel’s ruminations on its later history.

Apart from Genesis 2, the combination of העבד with שמר occurs only in three places, all in the book of Numbers (3:7–8, 8:26, 18:5–6) and all referring to


37. For this section, I am indebted to Ellen Davis for her insights into this pair of words. Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, 28–33.

38. See, for example 1 Sam 17:20, 2 Sam 15:16, and Gen 4:9.
the duty of Levites in guarding and serving in the sanctuary. This raises the possibility that these verbs are hinting at a metaphorical link between care of land and observance of torah.\textsuperscript{39} This ties the verse to the subsequent one in which יהוה issues a command to the human. The work of the humans was a religious and moral service to the creation represented by הגן—עדן, “the garden of Eden.” It is highly significant to our theme that this vocation of caring for the earth, one jointly held by man and woman, employs images of cultic and legal service, normally a male preserve, in the description.

It seems that there is more to the Eden garden than first meets the eye. The description of the garden contains many of the motifs common in the description of divine dwellings in Mesopotamian and Canaanite literature. This includes the unmediated presence of God (3:8), the council of heavenly beings (implied in the plural of 3:22, compare Gen 1:26), the subterranean source of life-giving waters (2:6), abundant fertility and trees with miraculous qualities (2:9).\textsuperscript{40} Gardens were sometimes the settings of temples although the archaeological evidence is limited.\textsuperscript{41}

Terje Stordalen demonstrates that the Eden garden was a literary trope in the early Persian period, extensively displayed in the Hebrew Bible. He notes at least forty HB passages applying the figurative field of the Eden story. Eden symbolism signaled blessing and happiness wherever it was used.\textsuperscript{42}

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were of great value in Israel, a fact reflected in legal and narrative material (Exod 22:5, Deut 20:19–20, 1 Sam 8:14–15, 1 Kgs 21:1–4). Flourishing gardens and agriculture were considered signs of peace. The fig and vine were symbolic of a secure and blessed life (Mic 4:4). Stordalen sums up by claiming that the primary metaphoric Edenic location is Zion – the city, temple or community.43

There are also similarities (not direct correspondence) between the Eden garden and the Solomonic Temple: in the use of the compound divine name יְהוָה where it is consistently applied in cultic situations (Exod 9:30, 1 Chron 17:16–17, 2 Chron 1:9, 30:19); in the wind (Gen 3:8) which hints at theophanies (Ezek 1:4); in cherubs which guard the Temple (Ezek 41:18–19a).44 As well as cultic resonances, sapiential concerns are reflected in the story, particularly in the tree imagery.45

The discussion above shows that the geo-spatial context is no neutral canvas to our story. Drawing on practical realities of life in Iron-Age Palestine as well as mythical elements from a common pool of biblical and ANE themes, a garden took shape under the author’s muse that he named Eden, knowing that it would create a rich palette of images for the story: cultic, legal, and sapiential.

43. Stordalen, Echoes of Eden, 452.

44. Stordalen concludes: “The implication of all would be that what happened to Adam in Eden could replicate what is known to happen to people in blessed situations, to Israel in the promised land or to priests and others in the Jerusalem Temple precinct.” Echoes of Eden, 459. Peter Thacher Lanfer also discusses the temple allusions in the Eden narrative and concludes: “Whether the interpreters of Eden refer to the former, present or future temple, it is clear that motifs and themes connecting the temple to the garden are prevalent. Through images of the transformed priesthood, the reconceived or reconstructed temple, and the re-creation of the entire cosmos, Eden is reinforced as a primary motif of the imagined ideal.” Remembering Eden: The Reception History of Genesis 3:22–24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 137–57, 156.

Above all, it was a place where the reader was encouraged to expect divine presence in the life of the humans and where the divine and human worlds might interact.46 The interaction of woman, man and God was going to be integral to the story. The storyteller has therefore given great thought to the way that they would be described, beginning with the account of their differentiation: אדם from אדםה and איש from אשה. Why was there need for woman and man? What was לא ת good about a single human? And what exactly was added by the discovery of עזר כנגדו, “a sustainer beside him”? This is a key part of understanding the order and relationship between elements of the second creation story. To these matters, we now turn.

Establishment of the Partnership

We are immediately confronted with a conceptual problem. This segment of our story is usually construed as a pericope about the creation of woman. If, as we have noted, the first human was of no sex, then this pericope is not just about the creation of woman from a pre-existing man but about the differentiation of man and woman from the ungendered human. On the other hand, the divine statement has set the scene for this event by describing it as the search for עזר כנגדו, “a sustainer beside him,” implying, through the use of the masculine form עזר and the masculine pronominal suffix on כנגדו that not only is the human male, but that the כנגדו עזר may be, too.47 Here we strike the entanglements of grammar and

46. Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 88–89.

literary form. It seems that, for the purposes of this exercise, we are to enter into this conceit and imagine the human as male. The Hebrew text gives clues to an important semantic transition by dropping the use of אדם and taking up the use of איש in order that the word-play of אשה from איש might be sustained. In this semantic exercise, order is important: אשה is from איש, just as אדם is from האדם. To assume from this word-play anything about the social priority of males, is to misunderstand the pericope. The word-play says something significant, but not about temporal or social hierarchy.

The same creative word use is obvious in the phrase עזרعنגדו. Common exegetical practice would suggest we need to look for its meaning in other similar examples in the HB but the expression is a *hapax legomenon* and the idiomatic use of language and the construction of the naming of animals’ story around it, suggests that we need to pay close attention to the proximal text. עזר is used extensively in the HB to speak of help and usually speaks of divine help at a time of mortal peril. Suggestions of female inferiority built around this term fail on the grounds that the term עזר is most often used of God. On its own, this lexeme does not contribute much to our understanding. In Gen 2:18, it is uniquely linked with הנגד, a compound word built around the lexeme הנגד, literally *front or face*

48. Phyllis Bird notes the overwhelmingly male language of the Hebrew Bible. Bird prefers to expose the androcentric and patriarchal nature of the biblical text and of the world which formed it: “Only then can we begin to deal at all adequately with the problem of how revelation can be conveyed through such flawed vehicles of grace as our Hebrew ancestors and our own prophets and teachers.” *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, et al., Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997), 247. The gendered nature of the Bible text is discussed further in chapter six.

49. Jean Louis Ska reviews all uses of עזר in the HB and notes the predominant use of God’s help. He notes that most uses are poetic and involve a situation of mortal peril. “‘Je vais lui faire un allié qui soit son homologue’ (Gen 2:18): à propos du terme ‘ezer - ‘aide’,” *Biblica* 65, no. 2 (1984): 233–38.
but as an adverb or preposition: *in front of, opposite.* Common renderings are “a help meet for him” (KJV), “a helper as his partner” (NRSV), “a suitable partner” (NAB). These renderings, along with some of those based on more abstruse philological analysis, do not elucidate the content as much as does the story in which it is embedded.51

The exercise of the creation and naming of the animals is presented as an attempt to find the גמר. It was presumably possible for יהוה to create the partner directly. We can assume that there is something to learn for the subject, אדם, and for the reader, from the exercise of recognition and naming of the animals. The first candidates were כל־חית השדה ואת כל־עוף השמים (“every animal of the field and every bird of the air”). As יהוה watches, אדם names them. The task of naming is an intellectual and artistic exercise involving skills like those displayed by the author/s of the non-P narrative. It involves close observation, identification of characteristics, sorting and categorization, then the creative process of application of a name. It involves sophisticated use of language, beyond the expressive powers of animals and birds. Above all, the naming process involves self-understanding on the part of אדם. The naming is closely tied with an appreciation of what was needed in a human counterpart.

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For the reader, there is a poignancy and even gentle humor in this. If the עזר is only for psycho-social support of the אדם then how could animals and birds ever be suitable? This device however, alerts us to the possibility that the עזר is conceived as someone who can assist the human vocation to serve the earth. If the central meaning was to assist with the tilling of the soil, then בהמה ("cattle") were viable candidates. They could pull loads, supply milk, graze down the weeds and provide fertilizer. But the narrator declares the verdict: ואדם לא-משא עזר כנגדו ("as for the human, there was not found a sustainer beside him/it"). Something more is required.

The relationship between the human and other living creatures is now defined for the reader. They are ordered by humans through the power of language and they are declared non-partners. Furthermore, the “single”-ness of the human in the vocational task is not answered by multiplying living beings. There is a missing social relationship only answered by self-knowledge and other recognition.

It is in the process of naming that it becomes clear that the animals are not suitable counterparts. This contrasts with the culminating scene when אדם recognizes the woman. The names for the animals bear no etymological connection with his/its own and until the human finds that, there is no counterpart. The animal names bear no relation to לא-משא אדם עזר. The awkward expression of v.20b reinforces this: "as for the

52. Not mentioned in v.19, בהמה "cattle," join the list as the human names the living creatures.

human, there was not found a sustainer beside him/it." The reader’s attention is drawn to the lack of correspondence between the animal names and אדם’s own. The divine intention to rectify that which was לא־טוב ("not good"), has not been fulfilled and the ordering process is not completed. We know now what an עזר כנגדו, is not. The next scene will help clarify what (or who) it is.

In a mysterious surgical procedure, יוהו builds the woman ויבן יהוה אלהים from "the side" of אדם. The word שלח is not best translated by "rib." In biblical Hebrew, it has wide reference to the sides of a structure (Exod 25:12–14), side rooms (1 Kgs 6:5), hill sides (2 Sam 16:13). It is hard to imagine a better way of depicting a relationship of complementary beings. The architectural image, reinforced by use of the verb בנה, depicts appositeness in the best possible way: through elements which are made of the same stuff, rely on each other for shape and form, are contiguous and interdependent yet also independent. The vocation of serving and keeping the created world must be

54. The construction לא־טוב לא מצא expresses the antithesis between the names of the animals and the name אדם. See Cassuto, Genesis, 132–33.

55. The translation rib developed from Jerome’s use of the Latin costa, meaning rib or side, in the Vulgate, this from the third century BCE LXX which used pleura also with the meaning of rib or side.

56. For a fuller discussion of etymology and use, see Heinz-Josef Fabry, "צלע" TDOT, vol. 12, 401–403 who concludes that J has portrayed the creation of man and woman in terms designed to evoke associations with the construction of a sanctuary. For a different understanding, see Ziony Zevit, What Really Happened, 137–50. Zevit postulates that שלוח is a euphemism for penis.

57. The verb בנה is regularly used in Akkadian literature to describe the creation of humans by gods. In biblical Hebrew it is used of building arcane objects and only once again of creation in Amos 9:6.

58. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, in her review of texts and their depictions of goddesses, notes that when powerful counterparts are required for gods, then a same-sex partner was found. Gilgamesh’s rambunctious behavior could only be countered by male Enkidu. Similarly, in the Saltu Hymn, fierce goddess Ishatar is balanced by the creation of Saltu, a woman. There was the sense that men and women could never be as like each other as man to man and woman to woman. Against this cultural background, it is notable that our piece of Israelite literature makes
done by a human partnership based on recognizable differences and correspondences.

A cry of triumph is given by the man who now calls himself איש even as he declares the woman אשה. The symmetry is expressed in the assonant terms איש and אשה which would signify unity and sexual differentiation to readers familiar with the Hebrew idiom of making female gender by adding the suffix ה. The counterpart, has been found even as the pair is created. Three times the expressive feminine pronoun אשה “this one” is acclaimed in jubilant recognition. The meaning of אשה, is therefore not given to us by divine declaration or by narrator’s definition but by subjective recognition of איש by אשה. Two key characters are present but silent at this point: יהוה who has ברא את האדום ("brought her to the man"), and אשה, ("woman"), whose reactions we can only assume. Both become active in the next scene of our unfolding story.

The narrator is ahead of the story as he steps outside of the action on the stage (2:24) to take the audience into his confidence: על־כן יעז ב־איש את אביו ואת אימו וpaque באשתו והיו לבר יחד ("Therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his woman and they become one flesh"). This is best not taken as a statement of the foundations of monogamous marriage but as a more general assertion of the strength of the urge that draws the couple together, a natural consequence (על־כן, “therefore,” 2:24) of the creative process which...

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formed them.\textsuperscript{59} The use of two verbs that are used regularly in the HB to cover ideas of abandonment (עזב) of the covenant God and the clinging (דבק) to foreign gods, suggests that this verse speaks of the strength of the pull to unions in opposition to those desired by parents.\textsuperscript{60} This sets up another point of tension with the ensuing narrative as the reader contemplates that a couple may work together with good or bad result. We also note the minor inclusio formed by the repetition of singleness (לבדו) in the word אتصف. From simple singleness (v.18), יהוה differentiates male and female, who then with social recognition of their relationship, become "one flesh" again (v.24). One becomes two, who will then become one.

The narrator rounds off the section with this: ויהיו שניהם ערומים האדם ואשתו ולא יתבששו ("and the two of them were naked, the human and his woman, and they were not ashamed"). This revealing sentence is another enigmatic summary showing something important about the relationship between the two. It deserves close attention not just because of its relationship to our theme but because it is a bridging verse which leads us into the next scene of the story, the subject of our next chapter.

\textsuperscript{59} The hermeneutical issue here is whether 2:25 is normative or aetiological. Westermann and von Rad are proponents of the aetiological argument. It is noteworthy that the man leaves his parents and not his parents’ home. Israelite marriage was generally patrilocal, where a man remained near his parents’ home. Westermann, \textit{Genesis i–II}, 233–34. See also Gerhard von Rad, \textit{Genesis: a Commentary} (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 82–83. Against this view is that of Angelo Tosato, who argues that the text is normative, depicting marriage as it should have been, not as it was (exposed to polygamy and divorce) in the late Persian period. Angelo Tosato, “On Genesis 2:24,” \textit{CBQ 52}, no. 3 (1990): 389–409.

\textsuperscript{60} See Megan Warner’s cogent argument. "'Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife': Marriage and Intermarriage in Genesis 2:24," \textit{JBL 136}, no. 2 (2017): 269–88.
Review and Conclusion 2:4b–25

We have reached the end of our review of Gen 2:4b–25 and have noted the artistry with which the author has delineated the order and relations between elements of the creation. The first order established is that of human to creation. The human is created by יהוה from the arable soil and will return to it. The humility encoded here is transformed by the fact of direct creation from the hand of יהוה and also by the revelation that the earth does not fulfil its function without human work. Human differentiation is tied to animating this earth with the discovery that the עזר כנגדו is a complement in the human vocation rather than a psychological support to the male.

For a brief time, the creation is scaled into a divine garden and the human work within it is characterized in cultic and sapiential terms. It turns out that the human work is not simply horticultural but has priestly and wisdom overtones. Grounded earthiness of task is married to grandeur of purpose. The human works within a temple garden inhabited by יהוה. Whatever the implications of human differentiation, it is implicitly tied to the human vocation to tend and observe this garden. This purpose, though, has limits and human reach does not extend to the whole garden. In our story the limit is expressed in one prohibited fruiting tree.

The next order established was that of humans to other living beings. A short pericope told us that animals and birds would not be partners to humans. They are for humans to discover, observe, sort and name but they are not the עזר anticipated by יהוה or recognized by the human.
The final order established is that of man to woman. Singleness, oneness is not good in humanity. The narrative context shows that this is not a statement about the benefits of marriage to mental health but about the unsuitability of a putative state of undifferentiated humanity for the human vocation of serving and keeping the garden. The human is thus differentiated into two. This is not a division and thus a depletion, but a multiplication from one expressed in an exquisite piece of biological story-telling. The two-from-one-substance brings an urge to oneness that encompasses sexuality and is socially recognizable in the leaving of the parental fold. No hierarchy is instituted and, in fact, the language of ‘helper’ points to a division of labor animated by friendship, not to a hierarchy of genders.

The non-P tradition responsible for the Eden narrative, therefore, is keenly interested in the way humans shape and are shaped by creation. The vocation of sex/gendered humanity can be described as moral and religious service to, and observance of, a Temple-like creation which inhabits with people. There is a divinely-instituted sex/gendered diversity in humanity. The concomitant urge to partnering which takes place is not dependent on morphological correspondences, essential differences or an established hierarchy but rather, is discovered in a collaborative recognition of self and other. Procreation therefore, is not the sole meaning of sex/gender difference.

The patriarchal, androcentric worldview reflected in much biblical material, and in much interpretation of this narrative, constructs woman as other.

to man, holding man as the definitive, original human. There is much in Gen 2:4b–25 that seems to uphold this model. A gender-critical reading in chapter six of this thesis, reviews this critically. A surface reading in English translation suggests males were created first and women derivatively from men. But, as we have seen in this prelude to the Eden narrative, there is a subversiveness at work. Masculine human is from feminine earth, long before feminine human is from masculine human. The first human is not obviously male until woman is created. The content of עזר כנגדו is sex/gender indeterminate. The stress seems to be on the nature and purpose of the partnership rather than sexual complementarity. In short, the predicament of loneliness is not resolved via friendship with other species, nor even through the solidarity of an extended family (the parents who may be abandoned), but through the intimate otherness of partnership. This is what provides the core relational strength to serve the earth.
CHAPTER FOUR: EXEGESIS OF GENESIS 2:25–3:7

The Partnership in Action

The creation scene has been completed and order established between the elements of creation. We move now into a rapid narratival arc comprising traditional story features: scene, crisis, denouement.

The narrator bridges the sections with this: יוהי שעון והם האדם ואשה ולא יתבששו ("However, the two of them were naked, the human and his woman, and they were not disconcerted").¹ This enigmatic summary hints at something important in the relationship between the two. Because it is all we get to know about the relationship between the pair before the crisis of chapter three is reached, it deserves close attention – not just because of its relationship to our theme, but because it is a bridging verse into the next scene of the story.

We note first the connective waw which links it to a preceding subject. It sits well with the tone and content of both v.23, the celebration of the complementarity of man and woman, and v.24, the statement of becoming לבשר אחד, “one flesh,” and could be taken as further development of those ideas by being interpreted as “Now . . . .” This does not, however, do justice to the strength of the particle which could equally imply a disjunctive relationship with the preceding subject, thus: but or however, signaling, for instance, a shift of focus.

¹. The choice of the word “disconcerted” instead of the common “ashamed” highlights the fact that the lexeme בוש does not carry tones of sexual shame. Horst Seebass, "בוש" TDOT, vol. 2, 50–60.
from their physical to emotional state. What follows will be a significant advancement of the story. It recalls the traditional creation narrative beginnings: “when... there was not yet,” a state of non-being that will be addressed by reading further into the narrative.

The Naked Partnership 2:25–3:7

This verse is also the opening of an inclusio that ends in 3:7 and as such, needs to be read with that in mind. It is the narrator’s view of a prior state from the internal perspective of the main subjects: naked and not ashamed morphs into naked and knowing, from naked and not disconcerted, into naked and sewing loincloths. That this action will have implications for their relationship, is flagged by the narrative insistence on seemingly superfluous relational vocabulary: ויהיו two of them, the human and his woman, “And the two of them [were naked],” “the human and his woman,” (2:25) ... לאישה עמה to her man who was with her” (3:7) ... ותפקחנה עיני שניהם “and the eyes of the two of them were opened” (3:7). Furthermore, the earlier use of the generic adam gives way in 2:25–3:7 to the related terms אשה/איש. Plural verbs and pronominal suffixes stress that they are in this together.

At the heart of this pericope, so minimally told, is a Hebrew wordplay centred on the polyvalent lexeme: עירום which carries two main connotations:


3. This formula sets the account to follow in the dimension of time and forms the introduction to the Enuma Elish and other Sumerian and Egyptian creation narratives. It is seen in Gen 1:1 and 2:4b–6. See discussion and other examples in Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 62–64; 93–94; 234–35.
naked, or wise. The latter meaning can also be split into positive and negative connotations: prudent, clever, or crafty, shrewd. It is well to keep in mind the various connotations as our story progresses, and ponder the possibilities as the events are recounted. Nakedness, wisdom, knowledge and awareness are all at play in the narrative.

Just as the immediate context will help us in interpreting this puzzling word, עָרוּם, it can also contaminate the intended subtleties. In 2:25, the translation naked seems initially correct when weighing both its paired word בוש ("disconcerted") and also later uses of the lexeme in 3:7,10,11, where the couple sew loincloths and hide to cover themselves. However, there are grounds to consider allowing some weight to the connotation of wise in 2:25. It sits well with announcement that the serpent is also ערומים in the next verse. In fact, the word is pointed as עָרוּמִּים (the plural of עָרוּם "wise," "shrewd") in 2:25 to make the link with עָרוֹם in 3:1. We ought to allow the possibility that there was a native wisdom associated with the couple's nakedness.

This conclusion is not confounded by the pairing of ערומים in 2:25 with בוש, a lexeme connoting shame. Wisdom and (lack of) shame are linked in biblical wisdom literature. Acting unwisely is paired with shame in Proverbs 10:5 and

4. Leon Kass suggests that the root sense of ערום is "smooth," someone who is hairless and clothingless. Someone who is clever, however, is also a smooth talker, one whose surface speech is beguiling and flawless, as with the serpent. The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis (New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 82.

5. Ellen van Wolde has a discussion of the polysemous use of the lexeme ערום in Words Become Worlds, 7–9.


14:35. It is not being suggested here that wise ought to replace the connotation of
nakedness. What is being suggested is the likelihood that nakedness, lack of
shame and wisdom are being linked together in some way through the
juxtaposition of these ideas.

The depiction of the naked woman and man in Genesis 2–3 is a full-frontal
acknowledgement that bodies, and sexual differences, are created realities,
woven into the contingent universe. Yet nakedness must be socialised into the
habits of the community of which the innocents are a part. Nakedness takes on
social connotations. It is the condition of the human at birth and in death, a state
when social meanings of clothing are irrelevant, and as such, a pristine state but
also one expressive of vulnerability (Ezek 16:4). Nakedness, or a symbol of it,
becomes also a symbol of mourning, an identification with the state of death to
which all will eventually proceed (Gen 3:19; Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:15).

In most of its characterization in the HB, nakedness is not a neutral term.
It conveys an assessment of deficiency, such as defencelessness or moral
impropriety, referring to exposure not of torso or buttocks but of pudenda. One
indicative set of uses of the term is associated with the prophetic tirade against
the flaunted uncovenantal behaviour of Israel in Ezekiel 16. Here, nakedness has
two main significations: one is the pubescent state of Israel over which God
spread the edge of the divine cloak to cover Jerusalem’s nakedness with a marital

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8. See for instance Gen 9:22–23; Ezek 16:36, 37, 39; Mic 1:11. See further discussion in Herbert
University Press, 1998), 83.
covenant (Ezek 16:8). The second is the nakedness of the practice of whoring\textsuperscript{9} and becomes thereafter the prophesied punishment of exposure (physical and metaphorical) for the whore (16:38–39). In the Ezekiel text, nakedness stands for blatant sexual expression, itself a metaphor for covenantal unfaithfulness. As such, it is linked with בוש in 16:52 and 63.

The state of the primeval couple of being naked without being disconcerted, then, is a state that demands explanation. It is unusual, a precarious and unnatural state that raises questions in the mind of the reader about how that could be so. It suggests the lack of an awareness of sexual difference and the social meanings attributed to nakedness. In particular, if nakedness is a state that exposes genitalia and therefore sexual difference, it suggests that those revealed sexual differences will play a part in subsequent events. Subtle allusions to the relationship of the couple nestle in the text. Allowing weight to the Hithpolel form ofolah יתבששו (“yet they did not disconcert each other”) foregrounds a sexual companionability which will also be threatened by subsequent events.\textsuperscript{10}

Some of the same themes of 2:25 recur in 3:7, rounding off the pericope. These include the stress on both of them, and the repeated idea of nakedness. The eyes שניהם (“of both of them”) are opened and they know that עירם הם (“they were naked”). Whatever else has been affected by the decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, it has had a profound effect on the partnership of woman and man, signified by the awareness of nakedness.

\textsuperscript{9} The condemnatory tone of the word whore in English grates on the ear but is used here because it seems to align with the tone of the prophetic discourse and is the word as translated by the NRSV in Ezekiel 16. The NRSV is a translation aiming to minimise linguistic sexism in English.

\textsuperscript{10} Sasson, “Weló’yitbōšāšû (Gen 2:25),” 418–21.
These verses are the pivot on which the narrative turns. The narratival climax of the story line is also confirmed by the structural patterns within the literary form.\(^{11}\) The steady unbroken recitation of Genesis 2 suddenly slows. Time itself seems suspended as we listen in on the dialogue between woman and serpent. With a wink to the reader,\(^{12}\) the narrator informs us that הנחש היה עروم מכל חית השדה אשר עשה יהוה אלהים ("the serpent was most shrewd of all the beasts of the field that the LORD God had made"). The image of the smooth-talking serpent is borrowed from a stock of mythical characters from the ANE world.

The serpent was an ideal candidate for the role. Linked explicitly with the חית השדה ("beasts of the field") declared unsuitable candidates for human partnership (2:20), he slides into view. Serpents were associated with wisdom and cunning.\(^{13}\) This serpent carries knowledge from a divine source: it knows that eating from the proscribed tree will make humans like gods. In ANE tradition, the serpent is associated with long life, perhaps linked with the observed ability to repeatedly slough its skin. In the HB as well as in the classical world, the serpent is associated with healing and life (Num 21:4–9).\(^{14}\) Furthermore, serpents were iconographically represented with naked goddesses,


\(^{12}\) Thus inferring the tone of the connective waw in 3:1.

\(^{13}\) See review of literary associations of the serpent in Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 159–61.

\(^{14}\) This case is strengthened by the association of various words for serpent with those of life in some Semitic languages. See Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 147–48; 159–60. Reuven Kimelman suggests the talking serpent is the inner Eve. This is supported by the awareness that her Hebrew name sounds like its cognates hivyah and hivvah, which mean serpent and speech. "The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender," in Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader, ed. Alice Bach (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1999), 241–69.
highlighting their association with fertility. All of these themes, wisdom, life and potential fertility, are present in our narrative, themes augmented by the unexpected appearance of the serpent.

Of greater significance, however, is the unmythical treatment of this character in our narrative. His creaturely status is stressed in 3:1. Any power he has is limited by his creaturely condition under God. Furthermore, what the serpent says is more important than the associations of his character. In this story, he is merely the slippery vehicle for progression of the tale, and one who quickly fades from view in a most antiheroic manner.

The serpent’s theme is the tree, specifically, that tree of the *knowing of good and bad*. With sly insinuation, he begins with an abrupt statement15 and a malign misrendering of the divine command. The woman, an active interlocutor, immediately corrects him with an expansive paraphrase of the command of 2:16 stressing first the breadth of the permission מפרי עץ הה桼 נאכל (“We may eat of the fruit of the garden’s trees”) but then tightening the permissible boundary around the tree in the midst of the garden by adding לא תגעו (“nor touch it”).

The woman’s understanding of the interdiction rests on העץ אשר внутри הגן (“the tree in the midst of the garden”), a tree specified in 2:9 as עץ החיים (“the tree of life”), while the serpent’s focus is the tree with the capacity to grant knowledge of good and bad.16 It seems that some fusing of the two motifs has

15. Reading the opening אף כי as “though . . .” or “indeed . . .”

16. Reading “good and bad” rather than “good and evil” lest it be understood as limited to the moral field. See Speiser, *Genesis*, 26. For a full discussion of the meaning of עץ הדעת וגם עץ see Howard Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 115–32. Reviewing also Gen 6:1–4 and 11:1–9, Wallace concludes that the narrative shows a broad prohibition against penetrating the divine realm.
occurred. The tree of life is not in view again until God links the two trees in the closing speech of 3:22.

Our narrative invests the tree of life motif with the particular meaning of the attainment of immortality (3:22). With this meaning, the tree of life has no exact parallel in the HB or in extra-biblical material. But as with much of the Eden narrative, ideas have been gathered from the wider literary environment. In the HB, the tree of life occurs in the book of Proverbs, associated with the seeking of wisdom (Prov 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, 15:4), imparting a range of healthful effects but not long life. Psalm 1 also uses an image of a healthful tree, this time associated with absorbing torah. In this case, there is a sense of rejuvenation and prosperity (Ps 1:3). The Hebrew root for life has a wide range of meanings alongside immortality: health, vigour, survival, long life.

The broader ANE literary traditions attest stories of heroes seeking immortality through ingesting some magical substance. This power sits with the gods and is not easily attained by humans. Our story however is more interested in the possibilities and powers of limitless knowledge than limitless

17. The description of the placement of the two trees in the garden in 2:9 is syntactically awkward. See the argument for the integration of the two motifs in Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 212–13.


20. Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 103–06. Both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the myth of Adapa, tell of the hero searching for a special substance through ingesting which, they will attain life beyond the normal allotment. None of these associate it with a tree.
life. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and bad which is proscribed by God
and the goal of the serpent’s seduction.\textsuperscript{21}

Any understanding of the \textit{tree of knowledge of good and bad} needs to take
account of four contextual features. The first is the fact that the human couple
already have the ability to discern moral good and bad in that God expects them
to obey the divine proscription. It must also take account of the fact that in eating
of that tree, the LORD God declares that the humans have become “like one of us,
knowing good and bad” (3:22). It must, further, take account of the nuances of the
changed state of the humans from \textit{naked and not disconcerted} to naked and very
disconcerted. It must also be consistent with usage of the phrase in other HB
texts. In the end, however, the reader must also come to terms with a certain
opacity in the text and the probability that there are several possible readings.

Several HB uses of the phrase indicate that טוב ורע ("good and bad") is a
merism.\textsuperscript{22} In examples such as Gen 24:50 and Jer 42:6, \textit{good and bad} could quite
easily be rendered as \textit{everything} or \textit{anything} with little loss of meaning. Our text
in Gen 2:17 and 3:5, could carry the meaning of universal knowledge, a depth and
range of meaning attributed only to God. This simple solution does not, however,
explain the profound change as the couple become knowing about their
nakedness. They clearly knew about their nakedness before eating. What was
missing was an evaluative comprehension of the meaning for each other and for

\textsuperscript{21} With the perspective of a Korean woman, Sun Ai Lee-Park links the forbidden tree with
deforestation in Sarawak which pits powerful lumber companies against subsistence forest-
dwellers. "The Forbidden Tree and the Year of the Lord," in \textit{Women Healing the Earth: Third World
Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion}, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis

\textsuperscript{22} Merism is common in the HB and in other Northwest Semitic languages and is a way
of expressing a totality by its two constituent parts. Webster, \textit{Third New International Dictionary}, ed.
wider human community. Furthermore, it does not explain the divine abhorrence of such knowledge in humans. Quantity of knowledge is not at issue. A quality of knowledge that touches on divine prerogative, is the point at issue.

Other examples in the HB associate טוב רע with a quality of discernment required of rulers. In 1 Kgs 3:9, Solomon asks for the ability to discern between good and bad, a gift that God is happy to bestow. Such discernment clearly does not tread on divine prerogative and seems in Solomon’s case to be linked with a judicial wisdom (1 Kgs 3:16–28). In another instructive text, the woman of Tekoa is sent to David and declares him to be like a messenger of God, discerning the good and evil (2 Sam 14:17, compare v.20 “knowing all which is in the earth”). In this case, David’s discernment has a breadth like that of a divine messenger. This piece of flattery from the woman of Tekoa shows both the association of good and bad with breadth of knowledge, and that it was regarded as a divine characteristic.

An instructive text which uses the same verb know with good and bad is the speech of Barzillai (2 Sam 19:36) where he recounts his reasons for refusing David’s offer of hospitality, הלא אני יודע טוב לרע (“Do I know good and evil . . .?”) along with his loss of taste and hearing in his old age. Here, moral judgement is not at issue and nor is extent of knowledge. Barzillai seems to be referring to the loss of ability to experience fully what was on offer. Age had blunted his appreciation of pleasure and pain, a reminder that דע carries connotations of experiential as well as moral, intellectual and judicial knowledge.

Some see here an allusion to Barzillai’s loss of sexual capacity as well, a thought that may well be implicit in the phrase under discussion. Building on the
associations of ידע with sexual experience (Gen 4:1; 19:5, 8; 24:16), the case has been made that the primary meaning of the knowledge that the primeval couple gained was sexual consciousness.\textsuperscript{23} Partaking of the tree of such knowledge would grant vicarious immortality through the production of children.

While there may well be such associations in the idiom, it does not exhaust the meaning in Genesis 2–3. The case founders on the fact that sexuality and the procreation that results from it are regarded as good, albeit painful, (Gen 3:16) things. In instructing the couple not to eat of that tree, God was clearly not proscribing human sexual consciousness in any sense.

The woman eats and gives to her man עמה ("with her" 3:6). Her reasons for eating are not those suggested by the serpent for why she ought to eat. He dangled immortality and likeness to God; she reached out for beauty and wisdom. The reader cannot help but notice the ambivalent judgement in the text. The qualities that made the tree’s fruit desirable to the woman are precisely those that describe God’s intended beautiful and productive garden (3:6 compare 2:9). The woman apprehends correctly the goodness and beauty of the trees provided by God. As well as this, she attributes to the fruit the capacity to contribute to her growth in wisdom, נחמ דהשלכלי ("coveted in order to become wise").\textsuperscript{24} שלכ is a highly desirable quality in the HB. What she desires is what God desires for God’s people (Prov 1:4). Her thinking links becoming wise with consuming fruit from


\textsuperscript{24} Adopting Speiser’s reading that the causative conjunction is often intransitive. Genesis, 23–24.
the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. She reaches out and eats and gives some to her man, standing all the time עמה (“with her”).

The Knowing Partnership: 3:7; 20–22

What happened when ותפקחנה עיני שניהם (“the eyes of both were opened”)? All the complex potentiality of כלארם ידעי טוב ורע (“like God, knowing good and bad”) becomes reduced to one signifier: ואידעו כי עירם (“and they knew that they were naked”). If ever there was a famous literary anticlimax, then this is it! The hope for wisdom and knowledge is turned to dross. This is signalled syntactically by the change of verb pointing to עירם (the plural of naked, as compared to the plural of wise/shrewd used in 2:25). All that remains to them is an awareness of their unclothed bodies and an intense desire for cover.

But this new awareness encompasses more significance than is obvious at first sight. Awareness of nakedness is something felt in relation to another, in this case between the woman and the man. In 2:25 they were ולא יתבששו (“not disconcerted regarding each other” 2:25), the Hithpolel stressing the reciprocal effect. In 3:7, they are clearly disconcerted. The eyes of both are opened and a new relationship between the couple is inaugurated in the text. The meaning of their nakedness vis-à-vis each other implies not only an awareness of personal vulnerability but also of sexual difference with all that that implies. The rush to cover and hide suggests new apprehensions about each other, and not just their own individual bodies. What could this encompass? The desire to control access to their bodies, the fear of predation, anxiety about the negotiation of sexual privilege, the setting of boundaries to others’ gaze on their own bodies, could all be at play here. For this reason, they sewed for themselves חגרת (“girdles”). A
new experiential depth of knowledge has changed their relationship with each other.

But there is another One with whom the relationship is also changed. The awareness of nakedness also affects the perception of God. Fear and anxiety characterize this relationship (3:8–10), engendering a desire to hide. The couple comprehend that what they do with their bodies also concerns God in some way. Far from god-likeness, the couple’s instinct is to flee from God’s gaze.

A coda is added to this incident by the Lord God’s reflection in 3:22 that the human couple had in fact become “like one of us, knowing good and bad”). The effect of this quality of knowledge joined with the possibility that humans may now reach for immortality as well, is not to be countenanced. Banishment from the garden is the only solution. The humans retain the knowledge of good and bad and take it into their new life outside the garden but the way back is blocked lest they combine this knowledge with immortality.

The odd placement of v.20 (“and the human called his woman’s name Eve for she was the mother of all that lives”) between God’s poetic pronouncements following the transgression, and the divine soliloquy about living forever, suggests a connection. The verse connects her name with all living. The name, however has a medial w rather than the medial y of the Hebrew verb חי (“to live”). Other options of original verbs tell us little about the meaning of Eve.25

25. Victor Hamilton suggests that the name reflects a primitive form of the verb “to live” evidenced in Ugaritic. With a Piel stem, it means to give life. The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17,
The position of this verse telling of the naming by שָׁם cannot help but suggest the ambivalent nature of such a title as אִם כָּל-חַי. On the one hand, it suggests the grandeur of participation in the divine work of procreation. As such, the withholding of immortality from humankind is balanced by a reminder that immortality will come in the form of the "begetting" of progeny. It counters the reminder of death and disintegration in v.19 and v.23. On the other hand, it is the poisoned chalice of the painful childbearing of women.  

Concealed in the terms of God’s soliloquy in 3:22 are hints of the reduced relationship between the couple and between the couple and God. God refers in the third person to אדם ("the human") without reference to the woman. She is invisible in the relationship. There is no doubt that she too, is expelled from the garden but the text sees no need to refer to her separately any longer. אדם is now the man who, henceforth, will stand for both of them. They are no longer

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26. Athalya Brenner evidences the En Gedi tombs report from the early Roman period. Of the 164 buried, the males were aged between twenty-five and forty whereas most of the women were aged between twenty and twenty-five. Assuming males and females shared the same climate, diet and living conditions, the difference can be attributed to female perinatal deaths. The Intercourse of Knowledge: on Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible, BibInt, 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 66–67. Carol Meyers comments: "The mortality rate for females in the childbearing years greatly exceeded that of males. In a population in which the life expectancy for men hovered around forty, women would have a life expectancy closer to thirty. The physical risks related to childbearing constituted a gender-specific life threat." Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 112–13. Meir Sternberg notes that, in biblical narrative, naming lays the ground for later plot developments which enhances their intelligibility after the event. As such, this naming hints at the grief to come as חוה gives birth to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), 338–41.

27. This writer acknowledges the many insights relevant to this thesis first brought to light by Phyllis Trible’s scholarship.
defined with reference to the other איש/אשה, but now take on names which bear no relationship to each other, אדם/חוה.

What can we conclude from this about the meaning of הדעת טוב ורע ("the knowledge of good and bad")? In the end it remains somewhat opaque. We understand it by its effects rather than by its substance. The couple understand new depths to their relationship, that they are exposed, vulnerable, with each other and certainly with God. Human community, seen in microcosm in the couple, is wounded by new depths of knowledge about self, the other and God. An anthropocentrism, wherein humans now perceive an alienation with each other and an enmity with the earth, is part of their new perception.28 The knowledge of good and bad gives the pair "the power to judge, to decide, to determine what is right and what is wrong in relation to self."29

The awareness of nakedness and desire for cover inaugurates another change in the human community: the beginning of cultural knowledge. The sewing of clothing introduces social meanings of clothing, establishing bodily boundaries, encoding class and ethnicity, roles, status, and style.30 יוהו אלהים fashions garments of skin, replacing the impermanent fig leaves, completing a play on words that refers back to the nakedness of the pair in 2:25.31


29. Callicott, “Genesis and John Muir,” 123

30. Tikva Frymer-Kensky points out that the ANE myths depict gods as providing all that is needed for human culture but in the HB, humans develop their own. In the Wake, 110.

The Troubled Partnership 3:8–19

The signifier *nakedness*, the effect of their newfound *knowledge of good and bad*, is carried into the narrative of the couple’s encounter with יהוה אלהים. The negative effect of that discovery on their own vulnerable relationship is carried through to their partnership with God in similar terms. They hide not because they fear punishment for disobedience but because of their awareness of their nakedness (3:10), signifying that something has happened to disturb their tranquility.

A great deal is suggested by the statement that יהוה אלהים walked about in the garden at the breezy (time) of the day. מהלך in the Hithpael form suggests repeated and habitual practice with a nuance of doing it for oneself. The reader imagines a divine professorial stroll after the heat of the day, during which conversation with the couple may have been expected: instead, the shock of finding co-inhabitants of the garden cowering behind trees!

Linguistic changes signal the change in tone in this part of the narrative. From 3:8 the dual subject disappears and the verb forms are no longer plural. The characters speak only in the first person, the only place in Genesis 2–3 in which they do so. From now on, the woman and the man act alone, narratively and linguistically. The man blames the woman and implicitly, God. The woman blames the serpent. The narrative assumes the shape of a trial. The interrogation focuses on constraining the man and woman to articulate what they did to bring about this new situation. Both finally get to the nub of the crime when in the last word

of their defence they say: אוכל ("and I ate").

The change from prose to poetic meter immediately marks this section (vv.14–19) for special notice. The prose framework which began at 2:4b with the formation of a garden and the introduction of the human to serve it, ends with punishment: expulsion from the garden (vv.23–24).\(^{33}\) Now the text focusses our attention on the divine pronouncements to the individual characters and we overhear, as it were, a three-part verdict and, together with the serpent, the woman and the man, ponder the implications of their disobedience.

In 3:14 the reader crosses the boundary from prose to poetic meter. This is characterized by a combination of rhythm and a structure of organization that alerts the reader that one is in the presence of poetry.\(^{34}\) The parallelism evident in vv.14–19 is not formal but still clear to the reader. To this syntactic form, we can add the repetition of key vocabulary that marks the themes of the pronouncements: עפר ("dust," vv.14,19), אוכל ("eat," vv.14,17,18,19), עצבון ("toil," vv.16,17), וכל־ימי חייך ("all the days of your life," vv.14,17). The form of vv.14–19 slows down the reading, adds a note of solemnity and invites the reader to participate. This participation is enabled through the memorability of the poetic rhythm and the consequent mental replay of phrases in the consciousness of the reader.

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33. See discussion in Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 256–57.

34. The Hebrew poetic form consists in what Robert Alter (following Hrushovski) calls "semantic-syntactic-accentual rhythm." Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1985), 8. The commonest form in the HB is parallelism, a two-line unit in which elements of the first line are mirrored in the second (and sometimes, third) as explication, intensification or contrast.
The inaugurating details of our story (Genesis 2) conform to the lives of the hill farmers so it is to be expected that the pronouncements will as well. In this context, the bearing of children and the toil of providing food are to be understood with the particular resonance of a subsistence farming community. The characters affected by the divine pronouncements face their futures in the distinct environment of the physical earth of the Levant. The pronouncements touch their lives intimately as lived within the imaginative time and place of Iron Age Palestine.

The Serpent Gen 3:14–15

The first subject of God’s speech is the serpent. His punishment is to return the animal to the status that the serpent sought to transcend through his conversation with the woman. Crafty he may have been, but now he is cursed. In a conscious echo of 3:1, the serpent’s status \( \text{מכל חית השדה} \) (“among the wild animals”), changes from more \( \text{ערום} \) (“crafty”) to more \( \text{ערור} \) (“cursed”) than them. He is semantically set apart from other animals by the particle \( \text{מן} \) (“apart . . . from”). His inferior status is depicted visually through his form of locomotion and supposed humiliating diet: \( \text{על גחנך תלך ועפר תأكل כל ימי חייך} \), “on your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.”

Each of the pronouncements has future resonance, with implications beyond the generation receiving the verdict. In the case of the serpent this

involves a lifelong enmity between the serpent’s זרע (“offspring”) and that of the woman. Not only is the serpent set apart from fellow creatures but also from humankind in perpetuity.

The striking detail of this aspect of the serpent’s curse (v.15) has promoted further reflection. Patristic and medieval tradition found an early allusion to the work of Christ in this verse.36 More important for us is the decisive ending of the illusion of serpentine wisdom, longevity and fertility. The potential partnership between animal and human worlds evinced by the dialogue of 3:1–7 is now reduced to combative enmity with no redeeming features. The possibility of creative partnership exists now only between the woman and the man.

The Lady Gen 3:16

Now יוהו אלהים turns to the woman. The transition to the woman has a number of unusual syntactical markers. Rarely does Hebrew narrative stray from the pattern of subject followed by imperfect consecutive but in 3:16 and 3:17 the significant pronouncement from יוהו אלהים is marked by a syntactic variation where the verb is in perfect tense.37 The speech is abrupt (preceded by no preliminary statement such as: “because you …”) and brief. It contains no curse. Cutting straight to the chase, it is a four-part unit containing two parallelisms.

36. This so-called protoevangelium is dependent on a view of the serpent as a figure of Satan, a device less likely than the fact that the motif of the serpent is borrowed from ANE mythical sources. That an early hint of the gospel is encrypted within, is the product of a type of exegesis based on allegory and forms part of the colourful reception history of the narrative.

37. Ellen van Wolde draws attention to this, quoting from Gesenius-Kautzsch: “One of the striking peculiarities in the Hebrew consecution of tenses is the phenomenon that, in representing a series of past events, only the first verb stands in the perfect, and the narration is continued in the imperfect.” A Semiotic Analysis, 77.
Before we look at that unit of text in detail, some background comments are in order. Arguably, no other HB verse carries such weight of meaning as this one, being thought by many to define the nature of female/male relations. No verse in Genesis 2–4 therefore illustrates the influence of ideology in translation and interpretation better than this verse. The co-location of motifs indicating pain, pregnancy, desire and rule have combined with the notion of the woman’s primary guilt to produce translations and interpretations that greatly disadvantage women, and skew the partnership, such that it is almost impossible to read the verse afresh.  

Several factors from the wider context need to be considered before we analyse the text. Against the idea of the institution of hierarchy, we note that there is an absence in the HB of directives for handling a disobedient wife, unlike those for disobedient children seen in Proverbs (7:24; 13:24; 19:18; 22:6; 29:17). The idea of a dominating husband seems not to be a prominent theme in wider HB and where it is, those examples are usually negative. The woman shows no sign of being subject to her man in Genesis 4. She gives birth and names two sons. The man, in contrast, beyond siring the two sons, remains invisible in the text of Genesis 4. Throughout the remaining Genesis narratives, women are portrayed as having significant agency and their actions often drive the narrative plot. While many may hold that Gen 3:16 inaugurates a new stage in human history and one

38. A fuller discussion of the reception history of the narrative occurs in chapters seven and eight. Traditions dishonoring to women are seen in the early second century in Sirach, deuterocanonical books such as Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, works of Jewish philosopher, Philo, and church fathers such as Augustine, and in modern “complementarian” movements.

39. Consider the Levite of Judges 19 who delivers up his concubine to sexual and physical abuse and is subtly condemned (19:30). Consider also headstrong Nabal whose dangerous behaviour is nullified by a wise woman, Abigail, in 1 Samuel 25.
which subjugates women, it is largely ignored in the ancestral narratives of Israel. This is not to deny the patriarchal features of the societies that produced these narratives.

A further caution against hierarchical interpretation is warranted by the consideration that it would be odd for a male-dominated society to produce a narrative which reflects negatively on its social arrangements.\textsuperscript{40} It is unlikely that a narrative showing the inauguration of a hierarchical relationship between the sexes as resulting from the judgement of God on human disobedience, would be produced and canonized by a ‘patriarchal’ society. Such social arrangements as sex hierarchies are usually seen as natural and are largely invisible to those who hold the predominant position. If this text inaugurates in any way sex/gender hierarchy, then the authors have noticed the arrangement and consider it attributable to a divine pronouncement following disobedience. This is a highly unstable basis for a foundational social arrangement in which ruling males had so much at stake.\textsuperscript{41}

With these considerations in mind, we turn now to the text. An emphatic \textit{רָבָה ארַבָה} (“greatly increase”) begins 3:16a. This unusual infinitival form adds emphasis to an already emphatic construction.\textsuperscript{42} This expression occurs in only

\begin{itemize}
  
  \item \textsuperscript{41} It is possible that these verses are the work of a subversive tradition, as suggested by Susan Lanser: “Might not the tension between inference and form signify a deep ambivalence on the part of the Jahwist writer or his society about the place of woman? . . . Might this not make Genesis 2–3 the document of a patriarchy beginning to be uncomfortable with itself?” “(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2–3,” \textit{Semeia} 41 (1988): 79. The absence of other supporting material in the HB suggests that this is unlikely.
  
\end{itemize}
two other places in the HB, each a portentous divine promise of numerous offspring both to Abraham (Gen 16:10) and to Hagar (22:17). This, along with the association of numerous progeny with divine blessing, suggests the possibility that the numerous conceptions to come are not necessarily a curse.

Some have regarded the following phrase עצבונך והרנך ("your toil and your conceptions") as a hendiadys⁴³ but this is unlikely because of the lack of association of the verb עצב (“toil”) with the commonest vocabulary for childbirth.⁴⁴ The woman’s labour in the subsistence of the household in the dry uplands of Palestine is to be added to that of her reproductive capacities. 3:16b intensifies this emphasis by repeating the idea of toil and developing the motif of conception into actual birthing. Toil will accompany both.

Sections 3:16c and d both begin with waw. The effect is to separate these two parts of the verse and link both with the previous parts v16a and b.⁴⁵ The ambiguity of that connection is attested by the many different translations of the particle: since, yet, for, and, that all give different nuance to the connection. What exactly is the connection being expressed between the pregnancies and toil of the first half of the verse and the man/woman relationship? In 3:16 is one of the four uses of the word איש (“man”) in Genesis 2–4. The sense of its use here, as in other places, rather than the more generic אדם, is to foreground the relationship

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⁴⁴. Meyers, “Gender Roles,” 118–41. חיל, ציר צרה, חיל, are more often found in connection with the suffering of childbirth.

⁴⁵. Contra Athalya Brenner who argues that the syntax of the verse suggests that procreation is superordinate to desire. Intercourse of Knowledge, 54.
between the couple (see also 2:23, 2:24, 3:6) and to recall the time of unity and contentment: תשוקה ומשלש ("naked and not disconcerted" 2:25). To summarise, here we have two cola linked somehow with the previous two in v.16a and 16b which focus on increased toil and conceptions. Married to this, is the use of the word for man (not human).

With these resonances in mind we can now tackle the contentious main words of these cola: תשוקה and משל. תשוקה has engendered a plethora of interpretations based around the idea of female sexual desire. There is some textual support for this interpretation. This colon follows clearly from the previous two, which highlighted parturition, normally preceded by sexual desire. Moreover, the object of this sentence is expressed as man not the generic human. A relationship of some sort is in view.

It is unlikely that the text would be singling out female sexual desire in the context of a society with little discourse of female sexual expression. In all strands of the HB, males are the agents and subjects of love and loving more often than females. They are almost exclusively the active agents in sexual intercourse, whereas women are the love objects or recipients. Female capacity for general loving and female desire are suspect and need regulating by a knowing

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46. Laurence Turner, for instance, writes: “The process of reproduction will become a painful affair, but the woman’s continued sexual craving for her husband will negate this seeming disincentive to human reproduction.” Genesis, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 33. Similar conclusions can be seen in the commentaries of Hermann Gunkel, Gordon Wenham and Gerhard von Rad: Gunkel, Genesis, 21; Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 81; von Rad, Genesis, 93.


We may also note here the protests of queer critics who query the universalism of opposite sex desire. We should also exercise caution with interpretations which assume that women necessarily find their greatest joy in the relationship of spouse and mother.

These complications to the quest to find female sexual desire in the word, give us permission to look for other understandings of its meaning. Other occurrences of the word help us only a little. Bible references are only three: Gen 3:16, Gen 4:7 and Song of Songs 7:10. Closest in textual terms and probably by the same source, is Gen 4:7. Speaking of sin to a dismayed Cain, Yahweh God says: "ואליך תשוקתו ואתה ת珅של בו ("its desire is for you, but you must master it")." The inappropriateness of the idea of sexual desire is clear in 4:7. Interpretation of this verse is complicated by the corrupt text. Whatever it is which is crouching by the door, a sexual meaning is unsuitable. The idea of a lurking menace which turns or returns repeatedly to Cain on the other hand, makes clear sense.

The last of its three occurrences in the HB is in the Song 7:10. Sexual desire is at play here but the word is used of the male for the singer of the song so it is not an example of use of the word for female desire but the ideas of sexual longing or turning both make sense.

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51. Thus Westermann: “… just where the woman finds her fulfillment in life, her honor and her joy, namely in her relationship to her husband and as mother of her children, there too she finds that it is not pure bliss, …” *Genesis 1–11*, 263.

52. See more detailed exegesis of this passage below pp.107–10, 172.
An alternate field of meaning for תשוקה is that suggested by the LXX translation of the word in Gen 3:16 as ἀποστροφή (“turning”). The translations of Jerome, Philo and Genesis Rabbah, all indicate that the word had a wider semantic range than simply desire. They reveal notions like turning or returning. Qumran non-biblical manuscripts contain seven new instances of תשוקה which all make good sense translated by return. In some cases, commentators assume that these early translations mistook תשוקה for תשובה but this need not be the case.53

These readings suggest that we can consider other meanings which do not tie v.16c and 16d so literally to the pregnancies and birthings of v.16a and 16b. The notion of a turning or returning of the woman to the man is strengthened by the otherwise awkward particle (אָל “to”) used with the verb. This begins to suggest the idea expressed in 2:24 and 25 of the urge to a return to union of the couple seen in their unabashed comfort in each other’s presence. A wider idea than sexual desire is being mooted which can only be understood with reference to the next part of the stanza.54

We turn now to the final part of the verse (3:16d) and find ourselves ambushed by another controversial verb from the lexeme, מָשֹּל. Any piece of literature given scriptural weight, containing words like man, woman, pregnancy, birth, desire and rule, expressed as a divine proclamation, cannot be read with equanimity in this era. It carries the freight of forced compliance, of unequal power and even of sexual violence. We have established the unlikelihood of

53. See, for instance, Hamilton, Genesis, 201.

54. Joel Lohr suggests that the woman turning to her איש forms an inclusio with the אדם returning to the אדמה in 3:19. “Sexual desire?: Eve, Genesis 3:16 and תשוקה,” JBL 130, no. 2 (2011): 246.
female desire as being the focus of v.16c and so turn to examine its paired word in the parallelism, 

Unlike נְשֻׁקָה, מְשֻׁל has many attested usages in the HB covering a range of meanings which can be summarised into three in BDB: מְשֻׁל 1: to represent, be like (Niphal, Hiphil and Hithpael); מְשֻׁל 2: to use a proverb, speak in parables (qal and piel); מְשֻׁל 3: to rule, have dominion over (Qal and Hiphil). Contemporary translations show that מְשֻׁל 3 is the common understanding of the lexeme in Gen 3:15d: “and he shall be your master” (NAB); “yet you will be subject to him” (NJV); “and he shall rule over you” (NIV); “and he will dominate you” (NJB). LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate all translate the verb with κυριέω “to rule,” showing a consistent understanding over many centuries. As we have noted, however, the LXX translates נְשֻׁקָה in v.16d as ἀποστροφή “turning” indicating a different understanding of the parallelism operating in the verse. The idea expressed here is that the woman turns to the man who then rules her.

There are many examples of the use of מְשֻׁל for the rule of a king. The book of Daniel has an extended prophecy about the coming of a warrior king (Dan 11:3–5). The books of Chronicles use the lexeme to describe the rule of Solomon (2 Chron 7:18, 9:26) and the rule of God (1 Chron 29:12 and 2 Chron 20:6).

It is significant that there are no uses of the lexeme to describe a relationship between a man and woman, or in fact, any human social relationship (parent or partner). If 3:16d is to be translated and he will rule over you, it will be a unique use for the man/woman relationship.

There are, however, many figurative uses of the lexeme where the notion of *rule* seems to be an over-translation and the idea of *predominance* rather than *rule* may be at play. A sample of these indicate the tone: “The hand of the diligent will משל, while the lazy will be put to forced labor” (Prov 12:24). “A slave who deals wisely will משל over a child who acts shamefully and will share the inheritance as one of the family” (Prov 17:2). “It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to משל over princes” (Prov 19:10). “Keep back your servant from the insolent; do not let them have משל over me” (Ps 19:13). These are instances of an overturning of social convention and sometimes, the usurpation of power by those not normally entitled to it. Other uses suggest the idea of *marshalling* or *disciplining*: “One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one who משל ברוחו (rules his spirit) than one who captures a city” (Prov 16:32).

Carol Meyers draws on this figurative use, preferring the translation *predominate* in v.16d. Her argument draws heavily on her socio-archaeological approach, suggesting that the man will predominate in toil, in other words, the labour related to subsistence, given the woman’s child-bearing role highlighted in 3:16a and b. While there are different renderings of משל evidenced in the HB, it

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56. Carol Meyers’ argument rests on an understanding that in the three main functions of subsistence farming: *protection, production* and *reproduction*, equality can be measured by the balance of work contributed by women and men in the function of *production*. The other two functions are determined by sex (males: *protection*; females: *reproduction*). Meyers’ interpretation of Genesis 3:16 is that women’s contribution to the toil of *production* will be less than that of men because of her reproductive responsibilities. “Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited,” 134–35.

57. John Schmitt presents the translation “he will be like you” (משמל). He shows examples where the lexeme has proven ambiguous for interpreters and suggests that Gen 3:16d allows similar choice in interpretation. Although Schmitt’s reading is linguistically possible, it fails to convince...
seems that the third meaning of משם offers the best fit for 3:16d in the context of the verse and the wider narrative in which it sits. Something negative is being described, something which impacts on the woman’s reproductive life. Within משם 3, we have found a range of tones from marshal to rule. It now remains to test these renderings with the rest of the verse.

Of interest, is the syntactic emphasis given to the personal pronouns in v.16c and d by their pre-verbal position. This is captured in the translation: “To your man is your turning; and he shall predominate over you.” The pronoun הוא in v.16d is assumed to link to “man” in v.16c but this need not be the case. In the Pentateuch it is not uncommon for masculine pronouns to have a feminine antecedent. More important is the example in Gen 4:7, the parallel verse to 3:16, where a masculine pronominal suffix refers to the same feminine noun תשוקה. The verse could then read: “To your man is your turning and it (i.e. that turning) will predominate over you.” This reading makes sense of other elements of the verse. God’s pronouncement describes a life of multiplied toil, pregnancies and births.

Whether we use this rendering (“it shall predominate over you”) or stay with the traditional (“he shall predominate over you”), the overall effect is the same. The link with her man is inescapable. With him she will need to toil in order to live and eat. That shoulder to shoulder partnering will result in

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intimacies that will produce children in joy and in sorrow, because the two will go together. That partnering will *predominate over* her, in the sense of being the major focus of her life.

We are aware that such a rendering of the verse goes against many readings that find male dominance and gender hierarchy in this verse. In defence of this reading, we suggest the following considerations. We have noted that if הַשָּׂם 3 is used here to describe male dominance, then it is a unique social context for this word, usually used to describe political rule. There is, moreover, no evidence in wisdom literature of the HB of instructions to aid the ruling of women by men. While we note plenty of examples of legal material implying control of women and many examples of the mistreatment of women suggestive of hierarchical attitudes, we do not find didactic material enjoining control. HB material disadvantageous to women remains the default position of a literature written and compiled by men in 'patriarchal' times. The hierarchal attitudes remain invisible to those in predominant positions. To find material enjoining control would thus be as surprising as finding texts eschewing it.

This is borne out by the fact that *the man* in Gen 3:17–19 is given no pronouncement of rule over the woman. It is odd indeed if this new reality inscribed in God’s words to the woman (that she would be ruled by the man in a distinct hierarchy), is not matched by a similar instruction to the man. This suggests that Gen 3:16 makes no new statement about the relationship between woman and man. It remains as it was: subject to the prevailing cultural attitudes of the times, as modified by the exigencies of Iron-Age upland subsistence

59. *HALOT*, 647.
farming. The woman is inextricably bound to the partnership which alone will provide for their future in the form of the production of progeny and the production of food and shelter. This is an elucidation of the meaning of עזר כנדה in the context of their lives, not a reversal of that state. The woman’s (re)turning to the man is the dawning of an awareness of all that it involves for the first time.

The Man: Gen 3:17–19

Genesis 3:17–19 takes up the divine words לאדם. The pronouncement to the man is preceded by an ominous summary of the cause which has two parts: כי שמעת להולא אשתך (“because you listened to the voice of your wife”) and והאכל מן העץ אשר צויתיך ולא אמר לא תאכל (“and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it’”). The first part (“because you have listened . . .”) is not necessary to the flow of the story and thus raises a question: Does it describe another component of disobedience (that is, the fact of listening to the woman) or is it to be regarded as simply an elaboration of the circumstances of the eating (that is, listening which led to eating)? We note the possibility of interpretations of this first phrase as heaping further acrimony on the woman as the instigator of the man’s disobedience.

The narrative, however, does not indicate that the woman spoke at all as she gave fruit to the man (3:6). This suggests that we are not dealing with just an elaboration of the circumstances of the eating but something more significant.

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60. Noting that the MT vocalises this word without the definite article, “the man,” some have argued that humankind is the subject of this section. Cassuto has shown that the prefix lamedh is often vocalised with the shewa, as if without the definite article but can still imply it. See Cassuto, Genesis, 166–67; van Wolde, A Semiotic Analysis, 183.
The preposition ל (שמעת קול) is used instead of the more common ב (שמעת בקול) with the noun קול. Preceding text also plays with the motif of קול. After hearing the קול של אלוהים walking in the garden, the man and woman hide (3:8). When challenged, the man declares his fear on hearing the קול של God (3:10).

What is being described in 3:17a is God’s rebuttal of the man’s snide dismissal of the woman as an errant gift of God (3:12). Wrong she may have been, but that did not lessen the responsibility of the man for following her voice instead of that of God (2:16, 3:8, 10). Each member of this partnership will be equally responsible for listening to God’s voice.

The relationship between man and earth is explored in these verses (3:17–19). The ground is ארורה (“cursed... because of you”). What is the nature of this curse? Is the act of pronouncement performative? Does it enact what it declares? Traditional understanding of curse in English would have it mean a solemn pronouncement invoking vengeance on a person, place or thing.

ארור carries an original meaning of “to restrain (by magic) to bind (by a spell),” but HB usage shows more nuance. People subject to ארור were

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61. There are three other occasions in the HB where this expression is used in a situation where there was no antecedent voice or sound (Ex 4:2–8; 4:8–9; Jer 18:19). Zevit, What Really Happened, 220–21.

62. “A prayer or invocation for harm or injury to come upon one.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 307.

63. Speiser, Genesis, 24. Josef Scharbet also notes the use of the curse formula in Gen 3:14, 17 and 4:11 to deny close fellowship with the community of which the subject had been a part. TDOT, vol. 1, 408–18.
restrained or lessened. Although Israelites and other ancient peoples believed that words could have malevolent power, few examples suggest that such power was associated with a worsening of a situation. Deut 27:15–26 lists so-called curses with the implication that those engaging in certain behaviours are simply by that practice. Other examples show that the one subjected to אָרָור, did not necessarily suffer ill effects. Jonathan, for instance, was ransomed from the breaking of Saul’s curse-framed declaration against any member of his troops eating food before sunset (1 Sam 14:24, 36–46).

אָרָור interacts with its opposite, בְּרָכָה, “to bless.” Both Job and Jeremiah retrospectively declare the day of their birth אָרָור. Cursing that day clearly has no retrospective effect but does shows a fluidity of use in the word as one which can be used to narratively reframe a situation from אָרָור to בְּרָכָה (Jer 20:14–15, compare Job 3:1–16).

The prepositional phrase, בעבורך, which attributes the action of the verb, can be read as “because of you” or “on your account.” This reading repeats, unnecessarily, the cause of the אָרָור already clearly denoted in the previous phrases. It could also have a more neutral sense, thus: “in regard to you,” or “for your sake.” This is a preferable reading, sitting well with the theme of vv.17c–19, which is describing the impact on the man of his struggle with the earth.

64. Herbert Chanan Brichto, following on from Ephraim Speiser, argues on the basis of Akkadian and Hebrew usage that the sense of אָרָור is “to bind, hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist.” The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible (Philadelphia, Pa.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), 83–87, 113–15.


ארור, then, is a performative utterance. In Gen 3:17, a change is brought about by a declarative act. This is not, however, because of a magical change in the state of האדמה but through reframing it for the man, as a place of toil. The earth is ארור in regard to the man, because he followed his woman’s action in eating of the proscribed fruit. The earth is also diminished, handicapped, in regard to the man. It will not give up its yield without his toil and struggle.

That this struggle will take place in a particular upland landscape is brought into focus by the detailed description of the man’s adversaries. He will eat עשב השדה (“plants of the field”) but contend with קוץ ודרדר (“thorns and thistles”). Hiebert identifies עשב השדה as grain crops, as differentiated from tree crops, and probably, wheat and barley as noted in the Exodus narrative (Exod 9:22, 25, 31, 32; 10:12, 15). Although there are many examples of the use of צק (“thorns”), there is only one other use of the paired words קוץ ודרדר. The example in Hosea 10:8 describes an altar overgrown with thorns and thistles, a sign of Israel’s apostasy.

The easy living of the enclosed garden is now changed, a sign noted in the repeated use of the lexeme אכל (“eat”) in vv.17,18,19. Turned away from a blissful plucking of fruit in an orchard planted by someone else, the woman and man now face life as grain growers, in places without assured water and with only human muscle (בצלע אפיין “by the sweat of your face”) to wrest a living from a resistant earth.

The declaration ends with a wisdom saying which stresses the earthy stuff

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from which human is made. This not only defines their life but also their death: כִּי עַרְפֶּךָ אַתָּה וּלְעַרְפֶּךָ תְּשׁוּב (“For dust you are and to dust you shall return”). Like the שָׁלוֹם לָךְ who (re)turns to her אֲדֹנָי, this man returns to the אֲדֹנָי from which he was taken. Work is framed by knowing mortality.

Genesis 3:22–24

We have noted above how these verses reprise the opening to the narrative in 2:4b–9 but with a number of significant changes. The human was מעש (“placed”) into the garden (2:8,15), and now the human is גרש (“driven out”) from it.

The reprise noun אדם is noteworthy after the active and independent roles of woman and man in previous verses. It seems that the reversion to אדם is a deliberate closing of the narrative circle with the banishment of the linguistically undifferentiated human creature. The woman is again subsumed within the אדם.68

The final motif of cherubim and flaming sword reminds the reader of what has been lost. We noted above that Eden is the garden of God which borrows themes from ANE literature about divine dwellings. These include the unmediated presence of God (3:8) and the presence of the council of heavenly beings (implied in the plural of 3:22, compare Gen 1:26). The most profound change faced by the humans at the end of Genesis 3 is the separation of their daily life from the realms of God. Armed with the knowingness that has reframed their understanding of their existence from harmony to enmity, from reproduction to

pain, from production to toil, they go forth to serve the ground (3:23, compare 2:5) from which they were taken, with mortality and contingency forever inscribed on their existence.

**Review and Conclusion: 2:25–3:24**

What has changed as a result of the transgression of the divine edict? What effect on the partnership is evidenced in the telling of the story?

We have noted the delicate ways that the story links the two humans. The use of dual pronouns (2:25, 3:7) and paired subject (“the human and his woman” 2:25) has made sure we understand that they were not functioning separately. From 3:8, the dual subject disappears and verbs are no longer plural. In these subtle ways, the narrative has made sure the reader notices the couple.

The divine pronouncements of vv.14–19 are best read not as punishments *per se* but as aetiological fragments taken from lives of exacting toil and difficulty and attributed to a time when both knowledge and autonomy were wrested from the divine hands. Outside of the garden, a time of imagined ease, work will be experienced as toil and birth as pain. Animals will be experienced as enemies rather than companions. Woman/man relationships will be experienced as fissured. Life will become tinged with inevitable death.

Outside of the garden, away from God’s presence, the humans’ life will be re-framed into new depths of knowing, much of which will be painful. The awareness of nakedness is the clue to an awakened self-awareness and a new
capacity, “the privilege and responsibility of interpreting their world.” The conditions of existence outside of the garden now stand revealed with all their ambiguity.

We also note, however, that טוב (“good”) remains. Work, childbearing, human relationships remain good in the divine world. Even the cursed ground is relieved by God’s grace (Gen 5:29 and 8:21–22). The pronouncements of vv.14–19 give expression to what every Israelite farmer knew: that life as they experienced it is an exacting balance of טוב ורע (“good and bad”).

We conclude, further, that Genesis 3 makes no new statement about the ontology of woman and man. They remain as they were: subject to the prevailing cultural attitudes of the times, as modified by the exigencies of Iron-Age upland subsistence farming. The woman is inextricably bound to the partnership which alone will provide for their future in the form of the production of progeny and the production of food and shelter. The woman’s (re)turning to the man is the dawning of an awareness of all that it involves for the first time. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad has done its work.

What Genesis 3 has done is frame that life in tension with divine intentions. The narrative has served to ensure that God remains unblamed for the harshness of life. The negative effects are the consequence of the human search for deep knowledge beyond the divine limits and the results will be seen in disharmonies in the couple’s life and the pain with which their life is established.


In chapter one, one human became two. In chapter three, the two who became one have become a discordant two again.

In the meantime, the story has some further time to run. Genesis 4 is a coda to the story to which we now turn.
The Brothers’ Partnership 4:1–26

The Cain and Abel narrative presents the reader with another example of a partnership, this time a fraternal one. The two men are one flesh born of the same parents and, possibly, twins.¹ Their example of troubled filiation provides a perspective with which to view the woman/man partnership of the previous chapter. The text hints at the continuity of the two brothers’ story within the wider Eden narrative, linking the two parts with the waw in 4:1: והאדם ידע את אשתו ותהר ותלד את kino יידע את יהוה (“Now the man knew his woman, Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain saying, ‘I have got me a man with whom I will lie’”).

The text in 4:1 describes the intercourse between the man and woman using the indirect verb ידע (“knew”). This lexeme carries the idea of an intimacy directed at deep knowledge in preference to terms which foreground the idea of reproduction or satisfaction of desire.² As such, it links back to the gaining of knowledge from eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, an opening of the couple to a deeper understanding of the meaning of their nakedness. The anxiety engendered by their awareness of nakedness (Gen 3:7)

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¹ André LaCocque makes this suggestion. Onslaught Against Innocence: Cain, Abel and the Yahwist (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2008), 2.

² Athalya Brenner discusses the semantic terms used to denote intercourse in the HB, noting that most are euphemisms and made up of compound terms: בוא אל know plus accusative marker; כבש אל “come near to”; ידע “know” plus accusative marker; יידך אל “lie with.” Men are almost exclusively the active agents in sexual intercourse and women are the love objects and recipients. Intercourse of Knowledge, 21–30.
had been overcome to the extent that they were able to proceed to sexual knowledge of each other. Nevertheless, we note the unilateral expression of the verb: the man knew his woman. They did not know each other. The sexual relationship is expressed from the perspective of the man and carries overtones of ownership and control (“...knew his woman, Eve ...”). The man does the knowing and the woman does the conceiving and bearing of the child. By consciously reprising the two terms concerning childbearing first seen in the pronunciation of יהוה in 3:16 (וַיָּרָא מִיהוּ “conceive”; יִתְדַו “bear”), 4:1 and 3:16 are brought into conversation with one another. The reader is alerted to expect further development of the partnership and to see the effect of the divine pronouncement at work. How will the relationship of the couple play out?

The narratival passivity of Eve in this conception is balanced by her surprising acclamation following the birth: קֹנֵית אֱישׁ אֵלֶיהָו ("I have got me a man with יהוה"). Whereas in 2:7, יהוה is the one who fecundates the אדמת ("earth") so that it bears the אדם, in 4:1 יהוה does the same with Eve and she bears an איש ("man"). The meaning of קָנָה here is much contested. Is Eve claiming co-creatorship with God? The word normally carries the idea of acquire or possess but in places, the higher meaning of create or produce is inferable (Gen 14:19, 22; Deut 32:6) and it seems likely that Eve is making a claim as co-creator


of the first birthed human being. Ilana Pardes makes a strong case that the woman here makes a counter-claim to the notion of creation out of the side of man (2:22). This time, together with יהוה, she has been the vehicle of new life.

In doing so, Eve makes a very bold claim. In the chapter two event, אשה may have been a product of איש and the surgical work of יהוה אלהים, but this time איש has come from the cooperative work of יהוה and אשה. This explains the unexpected use of the word איש (“man”) rather than ילד (“child”). This point is further emphasised by the unusual use of the particle ואת-יהוה (“with יהוה”) where one might expect כ or עם. The particle את is not elsewhere used of God in the HB so various other meanings have accumulated around this phrase. The context suggests that the idea of together with is a credible reading. Eve’s triumphant declaration is both humble and bold. On the one hand, she is confessing the work of God in this new being she has birthed; on the other hand, she is claiming her own rightful part in it. She is the one who has endured the pain and toil of this child-bearing and her own achievement is not to be overshadowed by pious deference. There is also the fugitive idea that Eve may be claiming a marriage-

5. In Ugarit, the same verb is used to designate the mothering of gods as seen in one of the titles of Asherah. See Cassuto, Genesis, 200.


7. This reading of Eve’s role redeems her from the aspersion that, compared to Hannah and Mary’s birth songs which ascribe the birth only to God, Eve is claiming “synergism” with God as per Bruce K. Waltke, Genesis: A Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 96; Cassuto, Genesis, 198.

8. See the full discussion in Bokovoy, “Did Eve Acquire?” 31–32.
type partnership with יהוה here, a possible allusion to a mythological tradition that Eve was a creative deity taking part in the production of humankind.9

Robert Alter draws attention to the importance of direct speech in the depiction of character in biblical narrative. Direct speech is the chief means of revealing the relations of people to the events in which they are implicated.10 In the HB, although children are born into the house and lineage of the man, it is generally women who give naming speeches.11 In this case, the name קין may be an example of popular etymology based simply on assonance but it also carries resonances of one who fashions metal objects.12 Cain’s name carries not only the idea of being acquired but also hints at the creative work of mother Eve in his coming into being.13

Naming speeches following birth are a genre of text employed mainly by women so the impression of Eve’s voice here in our story is significant. S. D. Goitein argues that although women may not have authored many biblical texts, their voice is heard in oral songs and speeches linked with their roles in public life. He says, "It is in the nature of popular oral literature that it does not retain its

11. The book of Ruth gives an example of this phenomenon where children born to Boaz and Ruth are seen to be of his house (4:11–12), but with the naming done by the community of women (4:17). In the HB, men give names seventeen times, in eight of which a speech is made. Women give names twenty-seven times and eighteen of these are embedded in speeches. Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3,” 178.
12. From the Aramaic qēnaya or qena’a meaning “smith” or “worker in metal.” Hamilton, Genesis, 220. See also discussion of the name in Cassuto, Genesis, 199–202.
original nature but is poured from one vessel to another. Yet the original imprint is not erased. And thus, it leaves a recognizable impression in literature which has reached us after many metamorphoses. 

Naming based on the circumstances of birth is often a feature of such speeches. Eve’s speech (which may be a remnant of something longer) testifies to her self-awareness and her partnership with both יהוה and אדם in the creation of life.

Of note in Eve’s declaration is her reference to יהוה without the associated term אלהים. The adoption of this term throughout the remainder of this story is of interest because it is the name revealed to Moses and thus, Israel’s own tribal name for the divine. For Eve, it is the term which highlights the role of יהוה as life-giver because in Hebrew language convention, יהוה is a verb form of יהי. There is sweet symmetry here with her own name, probably derived from the same verb stem. When the story concludes in 4:26, it is the God known by this name who will be invoked by the people.

The grand announcement of Cain’s arrival contrasts with the spare announcement of the birth of Abel (“Abel”). Abel’s presence is ominous from the start and this is marked in three ways. First, his nameABEL connotes insubstantiality, transience, and secondly, in this first use of the relational term

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15. Examples are seen in the speeches of Rachel (Gen 35:16–18, naming her son Ben-Oni on account of her hard labor) and Eli’s daughter-in-law (1 Sam 4:19–22, naming her son Ichabod on account of the glory departing from Israel).
16. For a discussion of the names used of God in the Garden narrative, see van Wolde, Words Become Worlds, 45–47.
indicating that, for the sake of this story, he is a brother before he is a son. The frequent uses of the word אחין (vv.2, 8a, 8b, 10, 11), speaks of the narrator’s insistence that we notice the filial relationship. The frequent uses of the word אחין (vv.2, 8a, 8b, 10, 11), speaks of the narrator’s insistence that we notice the filial relationship.19 Third, Abel never speaks. He is spoke to and spoken of but, beyond bringing an offering, is never accorded an active role in the narrative.

The lives of Cain and Abel are sketched in two brief livelihood designations: ויהי הבל רע ה צאן וקין היה עבד אדמה¹⁰. From their spheres of life, each brings their offering to God and in so doing, meet the discrimination of God for the first time. יהוה has regard for Abel’s offering yet not for Cain’s. The text gives little clue to the reasons for this, yet many reasons have been elicited by commentators for this discrimination. Some find the reasons in the attitude of the two men, suggesting that Abel’s offering מברכות צאנו ומחלבנ ("of firstlings, the fat portion"), suggests greater devotion.²¹ Others find reason in the cursing of the ground from which Cain’s offering comes.²² Another reading suggests that Abel, through his offering was

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19. In vv.2, 8a and 8b אחין ("his brother") occurs three times. In יהוה’s speaking to Cain אחיך ("your brother") occurs three times.

20. Palestinian archaeology shows there were two types of population divided by a line running horizontally between Jerusalem and Shechem, with the north dependent on agriculture and the south on migratory herding. LaCocque, Onslaught Against Innocence, 27. Hamilton comments that earlier commentators saw in this text a clash of culture between pastoralists and agriculturalists. He comments that the more likely clash was between city/town dwellers and steppe nomads. Genesis 1–17, 222. Carol Meyers argues against this, noting that both grain cropping and animal husbandry were dual components of food production in ancient Israel. “Food and the First Family,” 152.

21. See, for instance, Speiser, Genesis, 30; Gunkel, Genesis, 42.

challenging the primary status of his elder brother and making a bid for that role. The lack of detail in the text suggests that it does not want us to dwell here. It is more interested in the response to the divine lack of regard than the reasons for it. We note, nevertheless, this first example of what will be a feature of future encounters with God: the divine disregard for the social predominance of primogeniture. Here, as in many other places in the HB, the last shall be first.

Cain responds with יוחר לקין מאד يופלו פנין ("great anger and a falling of face"). These locutions of anger are picked up and repeated in enigmatic poetic meter voicing God’s response (4:6). The story does not move on until we hear a challenge from God about Cain’s physical and emotional posture. Cain is looking down and is fiercely angry. What exactly is God’s challenge to him? Our reading is greatly complicated by a Hebrew text that resists simple interpretations: למה תשוקה לך ולמה נפלו פניך הלוא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתח חטאת רבץ אלייך תשוקה ואתה תמשל בו.

"Why are you so incensed, and why is your face fallen? For whether you do well, or whether you do not, At the opening sin crouches, And for you is his longing But you will rule over him." 4:6–7

We note here the recurrence of two verbs from God’s pronouncements of the previous chapter (3:16): נשחק ומשל. Not only are the verbs repeated, but the syntactical frame is the same:

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23. Andre LaCocque argues that sacrifice is normally the prerogative of the first-born son (Gen 8:20; 15:9–10; 22:1–14) and this may be an example of the subversive tendencies of tradent J to overturn social norms. Onslaught Against Innocence, 59–61.
It is a reasonable assumption that their paired recurrence in a text by the same tradent is not accidental. At the very least, we can say that repeating such striking verbs gives a sense of unity and continuity to the story, reminding the reader that this story of Cain and Abel is related to that of the woman and man in the garden. There could also be a more substantive reason for the reiteration. After all, both times they issue from the mouth of God.

At first glance, there seems little in common with the usage of the verbs. In Genesis 3, the terms are used in a pronouncement following the transgression rather than a forewarning. They are God’s words directed to the woman and have clear subjects: she will long/turn and he/it will predominate [over] her. They describe the relationship with her man: it will be characterized by longing/turning and predominance. In chapter four on the other hand, the words are directed to Cain before the transgression happens. The antecedent of תשוקתו is unclear. The pronominal suffix does not agree in gender with חטא (“sin”). It is not unknown for Hebrew masculine pronouns to have a feminine antecedent but...
the stumbling block here is the abstruse idea of sin having a human emotion like longing/turning.

A less strained reading is provided by Kessler and Deurloo who suggest that תשוקתו relates to Abel. They therefore translate as follows: "For to you [Cain] is his desire [Abel's] and you shall rule over him." This reading articulates well the central theme of the story as the relationship between the two brothers. God gives voice to the younger brother's strong orientation toward his elder brother and the predominant role of Cain as elder brother.

The challenge of providing a credible reading of this pronouncement is not just understanding the words but understanding the tone of the speech. Is it a command ("You must predominate over him"), an invitation ("Rule him") or a promise ("You will predominate over him") or something else? The context suggests that this is in the nature of an invitation. The choice lies ahead for Cain.

This puts 4:7b into an intriguing relationship with 3:16. It is clear that the issues of power and control that will play out in the relationship of woman and man will also play out in the lives of siblings. Both 3:16 and 4:7b, are placed within stories highlighting familial relationships: heterosexual partnership and male sibling relationship. The vulnerability of the female/male relationship to abuse of power is also the vulnerability of the system of primogeniture. Both link to male privilege in the ANE context. It is possible then, that just as 3:16 is an example of the result of heedlessness of God's law in heterosexual partnership, so also 4:7b is a statement of such outworking in fraternal relationships. Sin is

inevitable if Cain does not תיטיב ("do well"). It is not a divine instruction to Cain at all; it is an expression of the lurking sin: brotherly longing from a younger sibling confronted with the possibility of elder brother jealousy and domination. In that pregnant, present moment, Cain considers his options and makes his choice.

The narrative moves on to present the reader with another perplexity: the gap in the narrative about what Cain says to his brother Abel. In the MT, there is no clue to what he says to his brother so some ancient versions (for example, the LXX, the Samaritan Bible, the Vulgate and the Palestinian Targums) and many translations (RSV, NRSV) supply it as follows: “Let us go out to the field.” Some translate v.8a to give the sense that Cain spoke against his brother.25 The narrative gap created by the absence of what is said by Cain to Abel is, however, consistent with the absence of Abel from the text and prefigures his final elimination at Cain's hands.26 Away from witnesses, while they were בשדה ("in the field"), Cain rose up and killed him.

The divine interrogation of Cain in vv.9–10, parallels that of 3:9. The rhetorical questions: אני אתיך איכה ("Where is your brother?") and מה עשית ("What have you done?") demand reflection in the same way as the previous interrogation: מי הגיד לך כי עירם אתיך ("Who told you that you are naked?"). Humans are held to account by God for their actions and stinging questions bring the interlocutor to face the key issues. In this narrative, the sibling relationship is under the microscope, signalled by Cain's disingenuous and impertinent retort: השמר אחי אנכי ("My brother's keeper, I?").

Playing on the fact that Abel was a keeper of animals, Cain’s question asks whether he must in turn keep the keeper. It is a good question, seeing that the term is nowhere else used in connection with human responsibility one for another. The key lexeme here is one reintroduced from 2:15 and describes humanity’s responsibility for the garden: שמר (Gen 2:15). East of Eden, responsibility to keep the garden must also encompass keeping one’s brother.27 When a human person is the subject of the verb שמר, its object is usually an obligation, a physical object, or an animal.28 In the few cases when the object is a human person, it refers to a relationship between superior and inferior, not to relationships among equals. Again, partnership of older and younger siblings is in view and the reader is left in little doubt that the expected keeping of the אדמה has human elements as well.

The אדמה adds its own witness. In anthropomorphised language, the earth opens its mouth and receives the blood of Abel. In tones of a person in extremis, the blood of the murdered brother cries out to God.29 The אדמה which was to be served and kept, is now ravaged by the lack of keeping of one person for another.

In Genesis 2–4 the close relationship between יהוה–אדם–אדמה–אחי, is extended to


29. The verb צעק is elsewhere used of starving people (Gen 41:55), those expecting a violent death (Exod 14:10), and a raped woman (Deut 22:24, 27). Wenham, Genesis 1–15, 107.
that of human partnerships. The violent severing of ties with one's brother, also
leads to the severing of ties with the earth.\footnote{30}

With poetic justice following on from the theme of the insult done to the
earth, Cain is בורא ("cursed from the ground"). The content of the
curse is filled out ("when you till the
ground it will no longer yield to you its strength"). The further consequence of
this is that Cain will become נער ונד
("a restless wanderer on the earth").

In a marked departure from Genesis 3 where only the serpent is cursed,
here a human suffers the same fate. We note again that the word does not carry
the same resonance as traditional English understandings of curse as an
immediately harmful, performative utterance.\footnote{31} Here, the sense is that of being
handicapped, bound by a resistant force.\footnote{32} יהוה is not cursing Cain but declaring
that the earth is both cursed and cursing. The particle ממן ("from the
earth") declares that it is the ravaged earth which is the resistant force. This is a
further stage of development of the troubled relationship between humans and
earth. In 3:17, האדמה is the site on which humans must exact a difficult living.
In 4:11, following the soaking with blood, the האדמה will no longer yield its
productiveness to Cain's effort at all because blood desecrates the land (Num
35:33). Settled agrarian pursuits are ruled out for him; Cain now must wander.

\footnote{30. This connection is drawn convincingly by Kristin Swenson: “The agricultural vocation of humanity extends to a responsibility toward people, especially those with whom we interact closely and intimately. No neat distinction exists between responsibility toward the ground and responsibility toward Abel.” “Care and Keeping East of Eden,” 381.}

\footnote{31. \textit{Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary}, 307. Refer to the earlier full discussion of the lexeme ארור pp.94–96.}

\footnote{32. Brichto, \textit{The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible}, 13, 113–15.}
Cain laments his punishment as "too great . . . to bear". The two participles that describe his fate "a restless wanderer" do not simply condemn him to a nomadic life. These unusual words bespeak a future like that of those murderers expelled from tribal societies. Cain’s loss is not just the loss of an agrarian life-style but loss of “nourishment, prosperity, security, protection.”\(^{33}\) He is driven further away than the woman and man, his parents, in Genesis 3. He is now prey to others and rightly identifies his vulnerability to attack.

The strong rejoinder of יהוה depicts God’s continuing superintendence of Cain: "Therefore, whoever kills Cain will suffer sevenfold vengeance" with *sevenfold* most likely indicating a *full* vengeance. It is the prerogative of יהוה to inflict vengeance and woe betide the one who takes this on him/herself. To attest to this, יהוה put a mark on Cain") so that no one would kill him. The nature of the *mark* has exercised scholars with no consensus yet established. It may have been a physical mark, such as a tattoo or scar, but the particle ל, instead of the expected על suggests that it is not such a mark. Moberly has drawn attention to the saying-like pronunciation ("Whoever kills Cain will suffer sevenfold vengeance") referring to Cain in the third-person, adducing the idea that this would become a well-known saying that would protect him from random violence.\(^{34}\)

Cain’s murderous behaviour with his brother has alienated him from the ground and also entailed his banishment מלפני יהוה ("from the presence of יהוה"). We note the coalescence of two ideas here: of banishment from arable soil and

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also alienation from the presence of God. Both in Genesis 3 and Genesis 4, the result of transgression of the law is expulsion from closeness to God. From a daily walking with God in a productive garden, humans have been removed to a place of physical distance in graduated stages away from ease of production, from located settledness and from the divine presence. A physical and relational scattering has been narratively inaugurated in Israel’s primeval history.35

The Cain and Abel narrative is now complete and their story is embedded in a genealogy. The genealogy that began at 4:1 resumes in 4:17 to complete the story of the family of Cain in 4:24.

Cain’s Line

The same Hebrew phrasing as the birth of Cain (4:1) records the conception and birth of Cain’s first child (4:17). The subsequent genealogy of chapter five will record the begettings of fathers and pay no attention to the mothers but here, as the Eden narrative concludes, we note again the knowing which results in conception and birth (הרה “conceive”; ילד “bear”) echoing the birth of Cain and the theme of the divine pronouncement to Eve of 3:16 for a second time. Other interesting features of the genealogy of Cain’s line are the naming of Lamech’s two wives, עדה and צלה (“Adah” and “Zillah”) in the significant seventh place, and the attention to sibling relationship: "ושם אחיו יובל" ("His brother’s name was"

35. Cynthia Edenburg comments on the patterning of the Garden of Eden and the Cain and Abel narratives, noting that they share similar structures and language and deal with similar themes. She suggests they are prototypes for the relation between יהוה and Israel, showing that breach of God’s commands and norms results in exile and alienation. As such they are archetypal examples sketching what is to come in Israel’s history. J’s narrative can be seen as an inclusio with its termination in 2 Kings 24 and 25. “From Eden to Babylon,” 162–67.
Jubal ("the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah"). We note here the beginning of a biblical pattern of women and maternally-aligned children interrupting the patriline. The salient partnership adumbrated in Genesis 2–3 is exemplified in the attention to the female, lateral lines of the Cain genealogy. The women introduce social divisions among men with Adah’s descendants becoming pastoralists and musicians, and Zillah’s becoming workers of metal.

Cain’s descendants are city and culture builders, but Lamech is noted for all the wrong reasons. His bombastic saying recorded here in poetic form, attests an unravelling of partnership, with multiple wives called to witness a violent boast. At this point, Cain and his progeny exit the story, the brief excursus within the bigger genealogy now complete. The genealogy of Adam will resume until it reaches another Lamech, one whose son, Noah will bring relief from the curse of the ground. The fresh relationship with the land is foreshadowed in his birth speech: "Out of the ground that Yahweh has cursed this one will bring us relief from our work and the painful toil of our hands." Gen 5:29).


The narrative now reverts to a time following the death of Abel. Adam again knows his woman and she bears another son, naming him Seth. The origin of that name is no longer known, and like other namings in Genesis, relates to assonance more than meaning. In this plangent cry, the emotional responses hidden in the earlier story of Abel’s death surface, as Eve names her third son. This son stands instead of Abel whose remembrance will never leave his mother as long as Seth lives. Similarly, the murdering by her other son Cain, will be remembered in this new child. The life of Seth thus carries the memories of her two lost sons.

Seth fathers a son and names him אנוש ("Enosh"), a collective noun meaning human being. At that time, we are told, אSED הוחל לקרע בשמות יהוה. Full discussion of this intriguing note is beyond the scope of this thesis. This detail marks the regression of humanity from a time of more intimate interaction with God. Far from the intimate walking in the garden, humans must now call upon יהוה.

Eve’s death, unlike those of other Genesis matriarchs, is unrecorded by Genesis tradents. Seth’s son has no recorded mother and is named only by his father. Eve, 39 Among the intriguing elements is the idea that these pre-Abrahamite people began to worship a tribal god long before they were constituted as God’s people by the act of rescue in the Exodus. It also is in tension with the fact that offerings to יהוה were clearly happening long before this (4:3–4). Robert P. Gordon, “Who ‘began to call on the name of the LORD’ in Genesis 4:26b? The MT and the Versions,” in Let us go up to Zion: Festschrift for H. G. M. Williamson, ed. Iain Provan and Mark Boda, VTSup 153, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 57–68; Robert P. Gordon, “Evensong in Eden: As It Probably Was Not in the Beginning,” in Leshon Limmudim: Essays on the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of A. A. Macintosh, ed. David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, LHBOTS 593 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 17–30.
however has left us with a strong impression. She has been an active player in the tale that has concluded, testing the boundaries of relationship with God and bringing three sons to birth. Her voice, recorded in four direct speech acts (3:2–5; 3:13; 4:1; 4:25), is second in frequency only to that of יהוה. Where Adam is silent (especially around the death of Abel), she raises a mourning voice for her lost son (4:25). If direct speech is the mark of narratival significance, then this has been Eve’s story.

The non-P tradent has produced a narrative that challenges norms. The voice and character of Eve, with her bold assertion of co-creation with God, her preservation of the memory of her dead son, set against the silence of Adam, enlivens the narrative with the perspective of a woman. The author has created space in the narrative for her to act and speak. Whatever the challenges there may be in a post-transgression configuration of partnership, this tradent ensures that Eve will not remain a silent helper.

Her presence and voice as recorded in the narrative also attests to the interest of the tradent in developing the theological anthropology begun in Genesis 2–3. The partnership between “Adam and Eve” has driven the story, giving it texture as well as tension.

**Conclusion**

We have found in Genesis 4, an extended reflection on the ambiguity of human partnerships. There are three correspondences that link Genesis 4 to the earlier narrative. The lexeme ידע (“know”) links with the theme of knowledge acquired from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. The link is not a simple one of equating that eating with sexual relations (4:1). The eating of that fruit
involved the inauguration of a depth of understanding that directly challenged a knowledge based on simple obedience to divine commands. The man’s knowing of Eve led to knowing experience of the evil propensities of human behaviour.

The second correspondence is the recurrence of אדמה as an active player in the story. The אדמה that was to be served (2:5) becomes a resistant witness to human evil, crying out in testimony, withdrawing its cooperation in food production, and denying Cain a resting place upon it. The question of how the earth is to be served (Gen 2:5) is raised again.

The narrative speaks of the breakdown of the fraternal partnership but the association with the woman/man partnership is brought to our attention by the deliberate employment of two paired lexemes, תַהֲרָה וּתָלְדָה (“conceive and bear”) and מַשְׁלָה,نشוקה (“turn/long”) and a third lexical correspondence, מַשְׁלָה (“predominate”). This brings the bearing of children into direct association with the complexities of partnership. In 3:16, the turning/longing of the woman to the man allows a male tendency to predominate. In 4:1–7, the two children born of that partnership enact the same tendencies, with the turning/longing of the younger leading to dominance of the elder. The fraternal partnership in serving the earth, where one grows crops and the other husbands animals, the dual tasks of the agrarian food system, becomes the site of jealousy and contestation. Gen 4:1–7 has become a commentary on 3:16 by showing how the tendencies of flawed heterosexual partnership carry on through future begettings (2:4).

We find in these partnerships, resonances of other flawed partnerships. They attest to mishearings and miscommunications, joint connivance in evil and avoidance of blame, shared loss and grief. The tragic partnership between Cain
and Abel has also spoken to us of the things that mar human society. Contestation for supremacy continues to damage families and ravage the earth. *Longing* and *ruling* play out in myriad ways in married and non-married partnerships of all kinds.

And behind it all stands יהוה, the God active in displacement of expected verities, unsettling notions of hierarchy in heterosexual partnership and in familial relationships by attesting to the possibility of a different way (4:6–7) and the redemptive possibilities of new beginnings (4:25–26; 5:28–29). The surprising inclusion of two women in the genealogy of Cain, the "man" produced with the help of the LORD (4:1), hints that women will not be just passive procreating subjects but active agents in what is to come.
CHAPTER SIX: A PARTNERSHIP READING OF THE EDEN NARRATIVE

The emerging theme from our exegesis of Genesis 2–4 has been the intentional enactment of a partnership of gender difference as part of the human creational vocation. This chapter aims to deepen this reflection with a literary reading that takes account of the way the woman and man are presented as sex/gendered subjects and in their interactions as a pair.

We suggest that those differences between the woman and man are not essential fixed gender characteristics but differences of behaviour in relation to the divine imperative. The woman and man are not solo actors in the narration. They are created from each other, named with reference to each other (איש/אשה), act together, are punished at the point of their relationship and leave the garden together. This story is a pas de deux, and the choreography of their dual dance is the work of a masterful narrator. Any analysis therefore is incomplete unless it illuminates how the partnership is depicted as well as the individuals.

As we begin this task, we wish to enter two preliminary caveats. The first concerns the undisclosed assumptions that a researcher may bring to such a study. As a point of comparison and caution, therefore, we will begin with a brief review of Western twenty-first century conceptions of sex/gender. The second caveat relates to the gendered nature of the HB text. The canonical HB text itself carries sex/gender assumptions through formation and translation. A preliminary task will be to review the gendered nature of HB texts.
As interested twenty-first century readers, we raise particular questions that the texts were never written to answer. It is therefore important that we pause here to discuss the kind of understandings of sex/gender that exercise us, noting that modern categories of sexual behaviours such as ‘homosexuality,’ ‘adultery,’ ‘prostitution,’ or ‘rape’ do not correspond to ancient categories. Our task is not to provide a comprehensive account of sexuality in current Western thinking but merely to note a few characteristics of modern discourse on the subject that may distort readings of our ancient text.

The work of gender theorists such as Michel Foucault, Thomas Laqueur, Judith Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling has reminded us that sexuality does not exist as an objective reality but is created in the relationships between people in particular societies and discourses. Foucault’s work on sexuality and gender took the perspective of a history of discourses. Discourse, he noted, becomes constitutive of the social reality it portrays.

According to Foucault’s analysis, a particular form of discourse around sexuality only began to form in the seventeenth century. During the eighteenth century sexuality became an interest of the state that required people to submit
themselves to surveillance. He charts the development of ideas in the fields of pedagogy, medicine and economics that categorized and problematized certain sorts of sexual behaviour. Essentialist sexual norms of homo- and heterosexuality were the result of social and medical discourses of the Victorian period. 4

Nevertheless, Foucault found much evidence that Greek and Roman culture reflected on, and sought to regulate their sexual conduct. He drew attention to the paradoxes of seeming freedom within a discourse of prudence and regulation. 5 He noted that in antiquity, sexual ethics were an ethics for men and not for the two sexes in common. 6 Foucault important conclusions drew attention to sexuality as the site of deployment of power. 7

Thomas Laqueur’s work was also concerned with showing how attitudes to male and female sex/gender have changed over time. 8 He charts the movement in three broad stages from views that males and females are versions of one, hierarchically-ordered sex (antiquity to end of seventeenth century), the “one-sex


5. Michel Foucault noted that the Greeks valued relations with boys yet their philosophers developed an ethics of abstention. They granted that men would have extramarital pleasures yet moralists conceived of the principle of fidelity. They never imagined sexual pleasure was evil yet their doctors worried over the relations between sexual activity and health. The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2, 97.

6. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley, “It was an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to their behavior”(emphasis original), 22–23.

7. “Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check . . . but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.” Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley, 105–106.

8. Laqueur, Making Sex.
model,” to perspectives that they were horizontally-ordered, incommensurate opposites (eighteenth to twentieth century), the “two-sex model,” to deconstructionist views that query the existence of any publically relevant difference (from late twentieth century). These broad changes of attitude were not brought about through biological or sociological discoveries but came about through epistemological and social changes that forced rethinking about female and male bodies.9

Judith Butler is an example of deconstructionist views. She argued that the performance of gender-appropriate behaviours precedes and indeed is constitutive of being a gendered subject. Gender then is not a stable identity but rather, is constituted through repeated performance. Taking issue with the notion that there is ever a moment when one is not gendered, Butler dismantled the idea of an essential sex prior to the creation of a person’s gender.10 For Butler, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created the appearance of a natural binary which is, in reality, an act of domination that both creates and legislates social reality.11

Anne Fausto-Sterling’s work has queried the notion of genetically-caused behavioural difference between women and men and revealed the political nature of much work to find biological differences.12 She dissected the debates on

brain lateralization and queried the science that asserts that differences in athletic performance and in division of labour by sex have a foundation in genetic adaptation over millenia. Her work reveals the bias in gender research design, funding, and findings.

The works of Foucault, Laqueur, Butler, and Fausto-Sterling, and the studies generated by them, have opened up the area of gender criticism, an endeavour committed to exploring the range of human sexualities and overcoming the heteronormative framework. Such work has revealed the investment of patriarchy in dimorphic heterosexuality and the entailed marginalization of women and sexual minorities.

The notion of the heterosexual binary with its concomitant gender essentialism, remains highly contested in current Western society. In determinations of sex, the anchor of chromosomal and DNA-encoded female/male binary differences has been shown to be suspect. Maleness and femaleness often elude simple determination at birth and assignment to one of two sexes in many cases is influenced by the cultural assumptions of parents and medical professionals. Neither sex nor gender therefore, have immutable connections to bodily anatomy. We live in an age of plastic sexuality, where sexual enactments are divorced from integration with reproduction and kinship.

13. See, for example, Guest, Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies.


Curiosity about the basis for sex/gender difference has engendered research into brain differences in females and males.\(^\text{17}\) While there are some sex differences obvious in brains, it is less clear that these are innate. The human child is raised as a particular gender from birth and this fact exerts an influence on the brain.\(^\text{18}\)

Our intense interest in such questions is testimony to a post-Enlightenment society greatly wedded to 'science.'\(^\text{19}\) It also bears witness to the arrangements and contestations of power. The existence of patriarchy is largely acknowledged yet sex/gender disparities remain acute. That these matters exercise our academies and public squares would be at once amazing and perplexing to ancient Israelites.

We enter textual study of the Bible then, alert to our own presuppositions of sex/gender and to the knowledge that Western twenty-first century sex/gender culture is only one point of reference in a plethora of social systems that have sought to frame these issues.


\(^\text{18}\) A 2015 study suggests that the typical brain is a “mosaic” combining both features more common in males and some that are more common in females. Only 2.4 percent of the brains studied had features from one (male or female) extreme. Such a study suggests that rigid dimorphism is an unhelpful way of conceiving sex/gender difference. Daphna Joel et al., "Sex Beyond the Genitalia: The Human Brain Mosaic," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 112, no. 50 (2015): 15468–73.

Text, Language and Culture

The text of the Eden narrative has passed through many interpretative processes before it reaches the printed form in which we read it. Translations struggle to carry linguistic subtleties into the receptor language and cannot help but make culturally-influenced interpretations. This is particularly obvious in matters of gender.

Hebrew is a gendered language: every noun and adjective and most verb forms have a designated gender. Unlike English, there is no neuter to employ. This means that there is much that is left to the judgment of the translator. For an English reader of a translated MT text, for example, the gender of certain nouns is hidden. This becomes theologically significant in such matters as the translation of רוח ("spirit") in Gen 1:2 where the feminine noun and linked feminine verbs suggest that this expression of divinity was seen as female. Similarly, the inclusive gender significations in a term like בני ישראל ("sons/offspring of Israel") in Exod 1:9 for instance, when correctly translated, reveals that women and girls were also counted among those who left for the promised land.

20. The primary position of the MT is adopted for this study but there is a plurality of extant texts, from hints of unrecoverable Vorlagen, paraphrases and translations in multiple early languages, to manuscripts such as those of Qumran. Ronald S. Hendel, The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).


22. This example is from the translation of Wilda C. Gafney, Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 287.
Even the divine name itself is not immune from translation selectivity. LORD is the most common choice for the tetragrammaton יְהֹוָה, but this rendering imports patriarchal and hierarchical notions into a lexeme that otherwise simply connotes “to be at hand, exist (phenomenally), come to pass.” Medieval translators fused the unpronounceable tetragrammaton with vowels from another term, יְהוָ֑א (“lord,” “master”) ending up with Jehovah, “which even God had never heard before the Middle Ages.”

In the Eden narrative with which we are primarily concerned, the fluid line between translation and interpretation becomes obvious in some critical examples. The word אדם (Gen 1:27) although grammatically masculine, and employed with masculine verbs and pronouns, can be translated in English as a generic class (“human”), a person of the male sex (“man”), and a proper name (“Adam”). The choice of translation of this word in the creation story before the creation of the woman at Gen 2:8–17, determines whether one asserts male priority in the story or not, a decision based as much on ideology as linguistics. The woman, active in the story of 3:2–24, loses her independent semantic existence by being subsumed within אדם by the end of the tale. Although she


partakes equally in the sentence of expulsion, according to the text only one human (אדם), usually translated the man,26 leaves the garden (3:22–24).27

Similar fluidity of translation choice is revealed in other significant words. The LXX, a third century BCE Greek translation favoured by early Christians and Greek-speaking Jews, translates ראות in Gen 3:16 and 4:7 with ἀποστροφή, a word connoting turning or returning, thus eschewing words that could suggest desire.28 The LXX also translated ἡμέρα in 3:16 with κυριεύω ("to be lord and master"), despite its other strongly attested translations of to be like or to speak a proverb or in parables,29 indicating an emphasis on hierarchy in the relationship.30

Translation selectivity also occurs at the level of omission of important words. In Gen 3:6b, omission of the word עמה ("with her") creates the impression that Eve was alone and thus solely to blame for giving in to the serpent’s wiles. In fifty translations over six centuries, more than one-third (eighteen), leave it out.31

26. For example, NIV, NRSV, NKJV, ESV.

27. Trible, God and the Rhetoric, 135. “... what God described to the woman as a consequence of transgression [that is, that the man would rule over the woman], the story not only reports but actually embodies.”


The etymology of the words for male, זכר, and female, נקבה (Gen 1:27), betray differentiated understandings of the sexes. Male, זכר, is conjectured to derive from a root meaning be sharp, pointed supporting the idea of reference to penis or phallus. The connection is also made between זכר and the root meaning to mention, name, remember. נקבה, on the other hand, derives from a lexeme to pierce, make a hole. What one makes of these differences depends on prior assumptions, often based on beliefs about essential male/female characteristics. Some find a complementarity implicit in the words while others find inscribed ideology. While it is undeniable that vocabulary carries implied meaning, of more importance is the narrative of which it is a part and the reflection engendered between different parts of the text. While זכר and נקבה carry originary meanings in Gen 1:27, they are balanced by the use of איש (“man”) and אשה (“woman”) in Genesis 2–4, a playful, alliterative pun which suggests unity and difference. It draws the reader’s attention to the story of which the words are a part rather than the original content of the words. The same artifice is at work in the words אדם and אדמה. The focus is on the ordered relationship of human from earth and not on prior content of the word אדמה. Many of these word-plays,

35. André LaCocque notes the complementarity of the concave/convex senses of the words. The Trial of Innocence, 132. Athalya Brenner finds gendered asymmetry in that זכר presents males as the bearers of community memory, a “gendered” category, while נקבה presents females as passive orifices, a “sexed” category. Intercourse of Knowledge, 12.
36. The pairing of אדם instead of אשה becomes significant in interpretation of Lev 18:22, as we will see below in the discussion of homoeroticism.
so significant in the Hebrew, are not translatable in other languages (for example, in LXX Greek and in English) and thus, missed.

The MT of the Hebrew Bible uses masculine pronouns and verb-forms for God in the vast majority of cases.\(^{37}\) This irreducible fact bears witness to the conceptions of early writers that Israel’s God was to be differentiated from the male and female models in the pantheons of the ANE. God is depicted as various male figures: e.g., king (Ps 93; 97, 99), shepherd (Gen 48:15; Ps 23; 80), father (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1; Isa 63:16), husband (Hos 2; Jer 2; Ezek 16; 23).

As some scholars have made clear, however, we also note many feminine descriptors of God in the HB. Most are to do with birthing and nurturing of the young. Phyllis Trible explored the use of the lexeme רחם with its association with the female womb, in association with God and noted the tendency to translate it with the gender-neutral “compassion.”\(^{38}\) There are four places where בִּרְחָם (“to bring forth in pain”) occurs in the HB (Prov 8:22–26; Ps 90:1–2; Isa 45:9–11; Deut 32:18) with God as actor. In each case, the vast majority of translations deflect the idea that God may have given birth.\(^{39}\) While the fatherhood of God has been

\(^{37}\) This is a sticking point for many feminist writers, “The supreme manifestation of patriarchy, that is, the power of the male God, is triumphant and remains assured.” Deborah Sawyer, “Gender Criticism,” 6.


widely accepted, the idea that God may also be a mother, is regarded with no little suspicion.40

We start, then with no neutral text that awaits our interpretation. Interpretation has already taken place by the choice of manuscript, its pointing, and the features of the receptor language of translation (in our case, English). In the case of Christian Bible readers, the influence of the LXX is seen in the NT usage of OT narrative, to be discussed later. A male perspective and coloration have already affected the text before we open to our selected page and begin to read.

**Man and Woman**

We will begin by looking at the woman and man paying attention to their different portrayal. There is a danger of circularity of argument in this investigation. In order to highlight feminine and masculine characteristics, one must have an idea of what they might be. To name a feminine or masculine trait, is to presume an essential stock of contrastive female and male behaviours and, as we have noted, a risk of importing modern gender norms into ancient texts. The method adopted here is to anchor our discussion to some consistent behaviours described in the HB as pertaining to *man* and *woman*. It is possible to sketch some consistent ideals of gender seen in HB texts with the caution that these have been largely refracted through male eyes.

Masculinity

While most societies reveal multiple masculinities that exist on a spectrum, one ideal is usually pre-eminent and that one particular ideal appears to have been predominant in the majority of biblical texts. This “hegemonic masculinity” is the standard for all men, even those who fail to live up to the ideal. In the HB, this ideal is tied to that of male strength and evidenced by particular vocabulary (גבור,חיל,זרוע,כח,עז). Physical strength involved skilled performance in war. Sexual strength was demonstrated through the production of many children. Inner strength was shown in self-discipline and courage.

Susan Haddox develops this idea and summarises four main characteristics of masculinity in the HB. The first is avoidance of being feminised. This, in turn, is defined by avoidance of excessive engagement with the realms of women. Second, a man is defined by his display of sexual potency: namely the ability to father children. This characteristic is intertwined with that of military and political potency. Third, a man must maintain his honor, and this includes generosity and hospitality as well as ensuring his women are protected


42. Lipka, ”Masculinities in Proverbs,” 88–93.


44. Jacob Wright argues that biblical authors give priority to procreation as a means of making and perpetuating one’s name ahead of heroic death. “Making a Name for Oneself: Martial Valor, Heroic Death, and Procreation in the Hebrew Bible,” JSOT 36, no. 2 (2011): 131–62.
from sexual predation. Fourth, a man must show persuasiveness of speech, and
wisdom in his dealings.

David Clines characterizes the avoidance of association with women as
“womanlessness,” a label which overstates the case, given that procreation
required the founding of a house and the association with women.45 A more
nuanced understanding would be that men inhabit realms that were “womanless”
and defined themselves against women. Stephen Wilson suggests that, given the
probable absence in ancient Israel of a system of maturation rites that prove to
society that one is a man, the young Israelite man must be forceful in asserting his
transition to robust masculinity on his own and an important way of doing so is
to avoid the company of women.46

It is true that these norms are often destabilized in the depictions of
Genesis patriarchs. Frequently the patriarch favoured by God displays the least
masculine qualities.47 The subordinate masculinities are often characterized as
feminized, displaying qualities more often associated with women.48 It is
debatable that these destabilizations necessarily challenge heteronormativity.49

45. Clines, David the Man, 226–27.

46. Stephen Wilson, Making Men: The Male Coming of Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible (New York,


48. Jacob is depicted with feminized characteristics, such as “living in tents,” the province of
women. (Gen 25:27). Chapman, The House of the Mother, 177. The man in Judges 19 is repeatedly
called “old man” to emphasise his lack of ability to defend his women (Judg 19:16, 17, 20, 22).
Also, Lot appears as a weak patriarch unable to protect the women or men under his care when
king of Sodom took them captive. Sonia E. Waters, “Reading Sodom through Sexual Violence

49. Amy Kalmanofsky argues persuasively that they serve as warnings, thus upholding the
hierarchical norm. Gender Play in the Hebrew Bible: The Ways the Bible Challenges Its Gender
We notice the same inversion at work in prophetic texts that ridicule enemy armies about to be defeated. Claudia Bergmann notes that these texts (for example, Isa 19:16; Jer 50:37–38; Jer 51:30; Nah 3:13) are based on a dualism that associates men with strength and women with weakness, subjugation and defeat.\(^5\) An enemy characterized as a woman need not be feared.

Of a different order are those texts that compare men to women giving birth (for instance, Ps 48:6; Isa 13:8; Jer 6:24). Such a metaphor has a different intention than the aspersion of weakness. On the contrary, the main point of the metaphor is reference to a situation hovering between life and death. It describes a point of crisis involving monumental struggle and is meant to elicit feelings of sympathy rather than ridicule from the reader.\(^6\)

In HB narratives, men are seen to inhabit particular realms. These include the agricultural and pastoral domains where tribal and household livelihoods were sustained. Examples include Adam (Gen 2:15, 3:17); Cain and Abel (Gen 4:2); Jabal (Gen 4:20); Noah (Gen 9:20); Abram (Gen 13:2); Esau (Gen 27:5); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Job (Job 1:2).\(^7\) Males as judges, kings and prophets, predominate in

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50. Claudia D. Bergmann, “We Have Seen the Enemy, and He is Only a 'She': The Portrayal of Warriors as Women,” *CBQ* 69, no. 4 (2007): 651–72.

51. Bergmann, “We Have Seen the Enemy,” 672. Bergmann also notes the interesting fact that in ancient Sparta, tombstones were not inscribed except for warriors who had died in battle and women who had died in childbirth. Death on the battlefield and death in childbirth were both thereby honored as deserving public acknowledgement.

52. Don Seeman helpfully explores the poetic use of metaphors such as interiority/exteriority to delineate female and male spheres. The tent is an overwhelmingly female space that men may enter only as guests (Gen 18:1, 6, 9; 31:33–35). Men are confined to the field (Gen 24:63–65). Subtle allusion conveys Jacob’s association with the realms of women (Gen 25:27–28) in another example of sex/gender destabilization. “Where is Sarah Your Wife?” Cultural Poetics of Gender and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible,” *HTR* 91, no. 2 (1998): 103–25.
HB narratives and men are described as sitting in the city gates, where community decisions are made (Ruth 4:1–2; Prov 31:23). Another important male domain was that of the cult.\textsuperscript{53}

Fear of God (or fear the LORD), is an overarching essential virtue of leading males. This is the subject of the didactic book of Proverbs focussed on young men (Prov 1:1–7; 3:1–8; 8:12–21) and a leading trope across all HB literature: the Pentateuch, the Writings and prophetic works.\textsuperscript{54} Inner strength expressed through qualities of self-discipline, humility and righteousness, qualities built on a fear of the LORD, are a highly-regarded masculine ideal in Proverbs, providing a counter to the more aggressive expressions of strength.\textsuperscript{55}

Extrapolating an ideal of masculinity as evidenced in the HB, the following qualities can be offered: males predominate in womanless public realms where community decisions are made, covering domains from agriculture to cult, the city-gate to tribal rule. They are owners of the means of production and the disposers of property. They are the warriors who defend the land. They are the leaders of the cult, mediating the presence of God in public Israelite life. The qualities of masculinity required in these realms are sexual, political, religious and military potency moderated by fear of יהוה, self-discipline, generous hospitality and astute wisdom in all dealings.

\textsuperscript{53} See Num 1:2, 48–50, but note that male leadership did not preclude the significant role of women in domestic religious observance. Meyers, Discovering Eve, 160–64.

\textsuperscript{54} These give a sample of the injunctions to fear the LORD relating to men: Gen 42:18; Exod 18:21; Lev 25:17, 36, 43; Deut 6:2, 13; Josh 24:14; 2 Sam 23:3; Neh 5:9; Job 2:3, 28:28; Qoh 12:13; Isa 8:13; Jer 5:24; Mic 7:17.

\textsuperscript{55} Lipka, "Masculinities in Proverbs," 94–100.
Femininity

Is there an equivalent ‘hegemonic femininity’ revealed in the HB? It is much harder to find an equivalent figure because women are not often the leading subject of narratives and their activities are largely harnessed to the projects of male actors.

A place to start our enquiry is the text that consciously describes what seems to be an ideal of womanhood: Prov 31:10–31. This woman is the manager of a complex endeavour: a household with multiple dependents. She plans and organizes for the provision of food and clothing, as well as producing and trading items. She is described in terms that recollect ideal manhood: she is an אשת־חיל (“woman of valour,” 31:10), the lexeme חיל denoting strength and capacity and more often used of armies, landowners and leaders. Another unusual word for the woman’s activities is שלל (“profit,” 31:11) which refers to booty, spoil or goods that have been plundered. The woman provides for her

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56. Athalya Brenner’s 1985 book provides a helpful summary of Israelite women in family and public contexts as well as the literary representations of female types (mother, queen, and so on). *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

57. Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes borrows from Shirley and Edwin Ardener the idea of a muted group to describe the presence of women in the HB. This muted group (here, women) have a voice that less audible than that of the dominant group. The language they speak contains both a dominant and a muted story. Brenner and van Dijk Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 27.

58. I note the dearth of studies of femininity in the HB, in contrast to the volume of work on masculinity in the HB. The use of this Wisdom text therefore may be seen as an attempt to fill that gap. It is also justified by the shared interest of the non-P Eden narrative with the creation focus of Wisdom texts. Crenshaw, “Prolegomenon,” 26–27.


60. *HALOT* vol. 1, 311–12.
husband what the victor brings home from a conquest. Not only that, but she is also an aggressive procurer, rising while it is yet dark to provide for the household. As a noun, the connotation of "טרף" is of prey – animals eaten by other animals.61 She חגרה בעוז ("girds her loins," 31:17) after the manner of men preparing for physical toil, a difficult journey, or war.62

Furthermore, she is commended for her mental qualities, her wisdom and fear of the LORD (31:16, 26, 30), all features of hegemonic masculinity in the HB. There is doubt, therefore, whether this poem bears much relationship to the real lives of women, and feminist scholars have rightly pointed out its male orientation. Her endeavours are directed toward the well-functioning of her husband (31:11, 12, 23, 28–29). She is an unattainable ideal, a fact hinted at in the opening phrase, אשת חלil מי ימצה ("A woman of valour, who can find?").63 We must be aware of the possibility that this poem may be a male ideal and therefore of limited use in our quest to find the social reality of womanhood.64 On the other hand, being an acrostic, we may surmise that this text has a didactic purpose and therefore could also be an example of a mother’s teaching to a daughter or a mother-in-law’s to a daughter-in-law.65

61. HALOT vol. 1, 380.
62. HALOT vol. 1, 291.
Against this ideal picture must be balanced the other image of the woman in the book of Proverbs: the seductive vamp (Proverbs 5–7). Discussion of the place of this alternate woman in the book of Proverbs is beyond the scope of this thesis but it is important to note the following for our purposes: that woman can be an inducement to do evil. The power of these texts, even if the woman is a metaphor for not fearing the LORD, lies in the known trope of the seductive woman who wreaks havoc in the lives of men. We can extrapolate from this an ideal of womanhood as one faithful to husband and kin.66

What is noticeably lacking in conceptions of womanhood in the HB is the negative indictment of women for behaving like men. Qualities of being proactive (Abigail, Esther), artful (Rachel, Tamar, Ruth), wise (the woman of Tekoa), valiant (Deborah), qualities more often associated with male figures in the HB, are generally rewarded, paralleling the picture drawn in Proverbs 31. These male qualities are regarded positively, producing the impression that behaving like a man is an honorable thing.

These figures reveal the difficulty of our quest to find an essence of womanhood in androcentric texts. At a surface level, each of the prominent Genesis heroines reveals her true heroism in furthering the projects of her man: Sarah, Rachel and Rebekah, despite complications, each bear the child that carries the patriarchal promise. Similarly, the midwives and the Egyptian princess, Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Ruth and Hannah, show intelligence and wisdom but again, are furthering goals promised to the patriarchs. Under the monarchy, royal

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66. The faithless, promiscuous wife is an image used by prophets to describe Israel’s apostasy from following יהוה. See, for instance: Hos 1–3; Ezek 16; Jer 3:1–3; 5:7–8.
women such as Bathsheba act to further the advancement of their sons. The account of the reign of Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11) shows by negative inference that such forward women were not to be countenanced.67

A conclusion we can draw is that the ideal of femininity from the point of view of androcentric narrative sources, is to bear sons, protect them and advance their fortunes but not seek leading roles.68 Given the precarious nature of childbearing in those times, and the predations that constantly beset Israel, this was no mean feat. The character of Ruth must be considered to embody an ideal here, using great pluck to guarantee the future of the house of Elimelech in the face of great odds.69

Closer study of the narratives, however, reveals a more nuanced picture than that given above. The female characters in the Genesis narrative, for instance, often drive the plot and shape the future of Israel through their actions. Their role is not limited simply to furthering the projects of men. This will be the subject of chapter nine when female/male partnerships are discussed. HB narratives reveal the complexity of achieving Israel’s faithful life under God


68. The story of Esther may seem to contradict this conclusion but is an exception in the HB. Queen Esther’s deeds consisted of countering the negative rule of the king in favor of her people. She remained an instrument of her uncle, Mordecai and full credit for the salvation of the Jews was given to Mordecai (Esth 10:1–3). We note too, the exceptional place of female leaders (e.g. Deborah, Judg 4:4–10), called into gender-neutral roles at particular times of Israel’s history.

69. The text makes clear that Boaz acquires along with Ruth, Elimelech’s property, and his inheritance, “that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place…” (4:9–10). We will also later see that Ruth works to establish her own “house” within that of Boaz, p.252.
through female and male cooperation. Through the window of male ideals for women we catch glimpses of female perspectives.

We have few independent HB texts that portray women's lives. A possible exception, as we have already noted, is the Song of Songs, a narrative that expresses female sexuality. Certainly, large parts of the Song are voiced by a female and reflect a strong female self. The woman is active in pursuit of her lover and in love-play (Song 7:10–8:4). On the other hand, there are patriarchal restraints on her: her brothers guard her sexuality (1:6b; 8:8–9) and the sentinels of the city restrain her wanderings (3:2–3; 5:7). Levitical precepts show an inclination to control the sexuality of women more strongly than that of men.70
The quality of sexual expressivism, while recognised in the HB, is not a signal quality of femininity but instead, one regarded with suspicion and one to be controlled.71

Even the quality of beauty has ambivalent significance for women in the HB.72 The ideal of femininity does not include beauty.73 The vocabulary that describes female beauty is similar to that which describes men. Joseph and his mother are described in near identical phrases: Joseph is יפה תאר ויפה מראה (Gen 70.

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70. Athalya Brenner comments: “Hebrew Bible females are reduced for the most part to biologically procreativity-oriented behavior – if they want their behavior to be approved of, and unless they inhabit the magical garden of love (in the Song of Songs).” Intercourse of Knowledge, 178. This conclusion is not one that the findings of this present study supports.


73. See, for instance, the cautions on beauty in Prov 31:30.
His mother Rachel is יפת־תאר ויפות מראה (Gen 29:17). Although usually translated with gender-differentiated phrases, they could both be rendered by *comely and attractive in appearance*. Female beauty is narratively significant in that it often signals a situation of vulnerability such as when Abraham twice attempts to pass off his wife, Sarai, as his sister (Genesis 12 and 20). The beauty of Queen Vashti makes her vulnerable as well. Her refusal to let herself be commodified for male prestige (Esth 1:11) sets the scene for the rise of another beauty, Esther, in the book of the same name. Beauty therefore is not a mark of essential femininity but a highly ambivalent, even dangerous, quality.

To sum up, the qualities of ideal womanhood as found in the HB are mainly constructed patriarchal renderings: faithfulness and commitment to husband and kin; reproductive capacity and proactive ability to advance the lives of husband and sons. There seems to be no intrinsic female identity, only social roles and those are centred around the maintenance and furtherance of Israelite identity. This gives rise to derivative qualities of strength and cunning. Given that women are directly, but perhaps not equally, addressed in law-codes, they have a responsibility to fear God and follow torah. There is no hint, however, of the attributes that developed around femininity in the Hellenistic period: passivity, emotionality, and subjection. We will later discuss a subversive, even

74. For example, NRSV translates Gen 29:17: “... and Rachel was graceful and beautiful,” Gen 39:6b is “Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking.”

75. We note, however, evidence that suggests a difference between ideal and reality of womanhood. See chapter nine, especially 246–47.

76. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 141.
agonistic quality to some narratives in which women assert their place in the story of Israel.\textsuperscript{77}

A Gender-Critical Reading

Having drawn out what qualities represent the feminine and the masculine ideal in the HB, we turn now to look at how the Eden narrative presents the woman and man. What questions is a gender-critical reading of Gen 2:4b–4:26 seeking to answer?\textsuperscript{78} The first task is to examine how the female and male are identified, how they act differently from one other, and whether these conform to the norms we have identified in the HB. If they do not conform, in what ways do they not, and what is the significance of this for the story? Looking deeper, we also want to establish the dynamics between the female and male of the text. Finally, we want to know if identified gender characterizations affect our understanding of this narrative.

This gender reading will therefore work in three sections: firstly, to illuminate the unmarked\textsuperscript{79} subject of the man of the story, filling in the picture of masculinity therein depicted; second, to review the depiction of the woman, alert to the gender significations in the story; and third, to discuss the relationship between the pair.

\textsuperscript{77} See pp.246–53.

\textsuperscript{78} I draw here upon some questions formulated by gender critic Beatrice Lawrence, \textit{Gender Analysis}, 335–36.

\textsuperscript{79} Gender-critic, Deryn Guest notes the tendency of masculinity to appear as a natural feature of the text, where it “covers its tracks.” \textit{Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies}, 126. This section attempts to bring this maleness to accountability as a constructed feature of the story.
The Man

The Autochthonous Male

We face the initial conundrum of the elusive status of the first human created in Gen 2:7. The author uses the Hebrew term אדם which, as we have noted above, can mean a human being, a male human or a proper name, Adam. It seems as if the status of being of the earth (אדמה) is the most important signifier at the initial stage of the story and the sex/gender status is left undetermined. Both Phyllis Trible and Mieke Bal argue strongly for a sexually-undifferentiated human at this point. They point out that grammatical gender is not sexual identification and that sex assignment is not the point here. The male pronouns and the fact of the assignment to agricultural work, however, allow, and perhaps encourage, readers to assume a male person.

Is this ambiguity intentional on the part of the author? Are we meant to assume maleness of this first person? Susan Lanser and David Jobling both make much of narrative inference at this point: אדם is used of the male as soon as 2:25 and the creature created from the side of the אדם is female so, by inference, the original creature is male.

Another possibility, arguably more likely, is that we are seeing here an

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unconscious male bias on the part of the author. While desiring to make creation of woman a salient part of the narrative, and perhaps being aware of myths of androgynous creatures sectioned into male and female beings, the author wrote this narrative untroubled by the confusion caused by prior Hebrew male pronouns. It makes no logical sense for maleness to be created without femaleness. The one only has meaning in relation to the other. This feature of the text is likely to be an example of an assumption that the natural state of the human is male, a truism held until femaleness makes semantic acrobatics necessary. Femaleness is created, noted and marked in the narrative in a way that maleness is not. This insistent unmarked quality of autochthonous maleness is inscribed in this story from the very beginning. Yet this is not the only thing to be said about the story.

For the reader, this ambiguity gives rise to ponderings about whether humanity has any logical meaning without sex/gender, whether there is any prior nature, any pure form of being that is not sexed/gendered. Whatever this form is, and we have only brief moments to consider it, the narrative quickly declares it not good in divine eyes (2:18), and steps are taken to remedy it.

There is an ingenuousness about the text: a guileless assumption of male priority but at the same time, a rather bold attempt to account for femaleness not just as an afterthought but as a critical complement to complete humanity. We are stopped in our tracks by God’s verdict that the ambivalent human/unmarked male isolate is not good and that something will be done about it. The human

vocation is not to be served by a single model of human. The answer lies in a new
stage of creation anticipated by the enigmatic locution ("sustainer as his
partner"). The woman enters the story and immediately her presence is noted by
the change of terminology in 2:23 to איש/אשה, the terms of sexual
differentiation. This significant change, and the significance of will be
discussed later as we look at the relationship between the pair.

The autonomous, ‘womanless’ state which we noted as an ideal of
masculinity in the HB, is here challenged. The self-sufficient Hebrew male is
forced to note his incomplete self and take account of an Other. Being created
from the earth (אדם of the אדמה) is not all that is to be said about humanity. Its
existence in male/female (איש/אשה) forms is an insistent reality that challenges
male self-sufficiency. We note the tension that this narrative creates with
another key role of the male: the need to demonstrate his potency with the
production of children. It is curious and significant that this key attribute takes a
back-seat to the focus on the relational impact of the creation of the woman (Gen
2:23–25). It is not until chapter four that the man demonstrates his potency.

84. N.P. Bratsiotis, "איש" TDOT vol. 1:222–35. See further discussion of this declaration pp.147–50.
85. David Clines writes: "The ideal man does well to steer clear of women, a man does not need
women, a man is not constituted by his relationship with women." "David the Man," 226–27. See
also Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 4.
86. This observation is strengthened by the consideration that the tradent may have deliberately
added the creation of woman to an original tale about a Garden of God in Eden, remnants of which
are seen in Ezekiel 28:11–19. This is consistent with the observation that other creation
narratives of the ANE that have been compared to Genesis, have no such attention to the separate
creation of woman. Helen Schüngel-Straumann, On the Creation of Man and Woman, 65. For a
nuanced discussion of the place of women in ANE literary themes, see Adrien Janis Bledstein, "The
The Worker of the Soil

The man is presented as a tiller of the אדמה ("arable soil"). This is most clearly associated with the man in 3:17b–19 but until that stage of the narrative, the reader is unsure of whether it is a joint task. The lack of an אדם to tend the אדמה is noted at the start of the story and the more detailed commission to the אדם לעבדה ולשמרה ("serve and keep") the garden is given to the creature before woman and man are clearly differentiated. If we assume that the prohibition against eating of the tree of knowledge of good and bad that immediately follows, applies to both woman and man, then it makes narrative sense for this commission also to apply to both sexes. Just as it was not the role of the man alone to obey the divine edict in relation to eating, in the same way, the woman shares the joint task of serving and keeping the earth.

As we noted in an earlier chapter of this study, this commission to serve and keep the earth carried not just a basic meaning of agricultural and pastoral production, but also a metaphorical meaning of cultic and legal service. As Ellen Davis has noted, the pairing of the terms occurs elsewhere in only three places, all of them in the book of Numbers (3:7–8, 8:26, and 18:5–6) referring to the duties of Levites serving in the sanctuary.87 This commission to serve and keep the garden, with all of its physical banality, is the joint vocation of woman and man. We once more encounter a questioning of masculine prerogatives of cultic and legal leadership as well as sole responsibility for cultivation of the soil. By metaphorical association, it also carries a grand vocational vision for gendered

humanity: the earth could not fulfil its creational ideal until the creation of humankind (2:5).

In Genesis 3, the association of man and farmer is more clearly expressed. The divine pronouncement strikes the man harshly in his relationship to the אדמה. The production of food (stressed with the five-fold occurrence of the lexeme אכל, “eat”) will henceforth be toilsome as he contends with the cursed soil and its thorns and thistles.

Again, however, we encounter a discordant note with the notion of man as the sole worker of the arable soil. The divine pronouncement to the woman of Gen 3:16, shows an awareness of her role in subsistence production work. First, the same key word, עצבון (“toil”) is twice used of her punishment just as it was used of the man’s efforts to produce food (3:16a compare 3:17b). The word is twice paired in a non-synonymous parallel with the task of carrying pregnancies and bringing forth children (3:16a). 

88 This suggests that her work is not only that of bearing children but also that of joining the man in his agricultural work. This need not, of course, deny the man the main role of production of food, shelter and clothing, but it does suggest that a rigid sex/gender differentiation of life tasks is not being described or inscribed here.

The Signifying Subject

The prerogative to signify, to use language to declare what is and what is to be, is a most powerful masculine quality in the HB. It is at once a wielding of power and

88. This interpretation draws on Carol Meyers’ work. She translates Gen 3:16a as: “I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies; (Along) with toil you shall give birth to children.” Meyers, “Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited,” 129–35.
a shaping of circumstance. Here, in Gen 2:23, is a significant example. It is not the first use of poetic meter in Genesis. Gen 1:27 and arguably, 2:4b–6, are prior examples but the poetic form gives rhetorical flourish and declares it a significant point in the narrative.

The author of the narrative shows his colors here, giving to the hitherto sexually ambivalent creature a male voice and role which effectively trumps the story. To this point, the narrative has shown an attempt to render sex/gender inscrutable. By hiding the sex/gender of the first creature, the narration has allowed focus on the connection between humanity and earth. In a second stage, sexuality has emerged with the fashioning of the woman. At the point of inauguration of the female/male partnership, the author has the man make a bold move to declare his priority. Firstly, he assumes his priority in time, that he was there all along awaiting this new creature (זאת הפעם “This one, at last”) when the text tells us that he was unconscious and took no part in the project (2:21–22). Secondly, he declares the woman as taken from man, when the text says only that she was formed from material that יהוה אלהים took from the undifferentiated creature. Thirdly, he names this new creature in relation to himself (איש/אשה). It is impossible to say whether this significant gendering of the male human is intended by the author, but the “outing” of the man, evinces a multilayered and complex piece of textual gender engineering.

89. This sense of “at last” for the particle מפעם, is seen also in Gen 29:34,35; 30:20; and 46:30.

90. See discussion in Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, 101–102. Cassuto notes that the expression איש אשת “taken from”峁ש is paralleled with that of אדם אדמה “taken from” in 3:19, 23, reinforcing the idea that the woman was formed from the same material as the man. Cassuto, Genesis, 136.
Much has been made of the trope of naming and whether this implies male superiority. Gordon Wenham is among those who believe it does. "Though they are equal in nature, that man names woman (compare 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him, an important presupposition of the ensuing narrative."\(^91\) In this passage, however, there is no mention of שם ("name") nor its usual accompanying verb קרא ("call"). What we have here in 2:22 is a signifying speech, an act of discernment rather than a personal naming.\(^92\)

A more typical example of naming, using traditional vocabulary, follows in 3:20 with the man naming the woman, חוה ("Eve"), כי הוא היתה אם כל חי ("for she was the mother of all that lives"). Naming of others, typically children, in the HB is more often the role of women.\(^93\) Here the man (who remains himself unnamed) takes it upon himself to name her important role, less an act of power over an individual (the woman) than one of asserting a right to signify what would happen through her: the birth of subsequent generations.

In summary, the man in the Eden narrative is acting very much according to masculine characterization when he claims the right to make a signifying speech about the woman in 2:23 and 3:20. As we shall see, however, when we look at the feminine characterization of the story, this is directly challenged when

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91. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 70. Robert Alter says the entire sequence is designed to constitute the man’s authority to name: “Eve has been promised. She is then withheld for two carefully framed verses while God allows man to perform his unique function as the bestower of names on things.” *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 30. David Clines also sees the naming of the woman as an act of domination. *What Does Eve Do to Help?* 39.


the woman claims the right not only to name her sons (Gen 4:1,25) but to give a theological framework to it.

**The Patriarch**

A most important mark of masculinity was the siring of children. This entailed other qualities needed to ensure the survival of the next generation: the formation, fruitful superintendence, and protection of a household. Participation in decision-making at community and tribal levels was also the responsibility of males.

The man of the Eden narrative shows sexual potency late in the story. It is not until 4:1–2 that this important role is completed in the birth of Cain and Abel. The narratival delay is a product of the focus on the account of the transgression episode and has thus given rise to questions about the sexual status of the partnership to this point.

The location of the narrative within the Edenic garden carries suggestions of sexual potency. The lexeme עָדָן, from which the garden takes its name, carries notions of blessing and fertility. Although it has been the subject of much patristic and rabbinic speculation, the text is moot about whether sexual intercourse took place within the garden.

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94. See for instance, the use of עָדָן in Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; Sir 40:27; S. Kedar-Kopfstein, "עָדָן" *TDOT* vol. 10, 481–90. Sarah’s mirth at the suggestion that she will bear a child arises from her perception that עָדָן ("sexual pleasure") is no longer to be hers.

95. Church Fathers, as we will see, believed the garden was an allegory of either the world to come or the Church. Sexual intercourse was not to be a feature of either and celibacy was the epitome of faithful discipleship. Rabbinic writers, on the other hand, held that the garden was the site of humankind’s first sexual encounter. Gary A. Anderson, "The Garden of Eden and Sexuality in Early Judaism," in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 47–50.
The narratival delay in producing the next generation suggests that, from the point of view of the tradent, the partnership between woman and man was not just for reproductive purposes. The account of the couple’s relationship with God and the divine will, the subject of Genesis 3, was critical to the masculine role. Nevertheless, the man does his patriarchal duty and sires the three sons of chapter four plus “other sons and daughters” (Gen 5:4).

The male figure of the story exhibits a silent persona. Having asserted himself at the arrival of the woman, he is curiously silent for much of the subsequent narrative. Despite being with the woman when she was addressed by the serpent, he was quiet. He defends himself in order to blame the woman after the transgression (3:9–12), a strange response that plays against expectations of patriarchal agency. He names the woman (3:20) then quietly acquiesces in his banishment.

The strength, dominance, and even aggression that we see in patriarchs of later chapters of Genesis and beyond, is not present in the man of the Eden narrative. Although an argument from silence has only limited value, we note the absence of Adam in the Cain and Abel episode of Genesis 4. In this account, the patriarchal role is taken on by יְהֹוָה is the one attempting to diffuse Cain’s anger and to strengthen his moral resolve (4:6). יְהֹוָה is likewise the one who claims the right to protect Cain from vengeance attacks (4:15). In contrast, the text portrays the bombastic Lamech as acting out the hyper-masculine role of the taking of unlimited revenge (4:23–24).
The God Fearer

We move cautiously here noting that this story purports to be about a time before the Law and devotional habits of Yahwistic religion are established. It is a narrative about a time when humans interacted with God in an unmediated way. Nevertheless, the characters are depicted as spiritual actors with choices to listen, obey and follow. The man shows no spiritual leadership nor commitment to following the way of יהוה אלהים throughout the Eden narrative. Although he was present with the woman during the dialogue with the serpent, he makes no attempt to intervene. Instead, he passively takes the proffered fruit then blames the woman for it.

His transgression is directly named but not that of the woman, whose punishment is not prefaced by any explanatory rubric. The man’s charge is detailed in 3:17: כי שמעת קול אשתך ותאכל מנר עץ שאיתך לא אמר לאותך לא תאכל ממנה (“Because you listened to the voice of your woman and ate of the tree that I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it’”). The man’s sin is in putting his partner’s voice ahead of that of God. It is a subtle shift of compass that hears the proximal voice rather than that of the eternal God. In this, the man casts aside his patriarchal responsibility to model adherence to the ways of יהוה אלהים. As noted above, when it came to direction for his son, Cain, Adam’s erstwhile paternal role was played by God.

Summary: The Gendered Male

The picture of the gendered male of the Eden narrative is an interesting one. He comes closest to the hegemonic masculine stereotype when, after the woman is
created, he steps up to declare and name the significance of her arrival. He sires children, thus ensuring future generations, only late in the narrative.

In other ways, his is but a weak approximation of the ideal:

- He makes no claims to being an autonomous male, that is, a person committed only to his own projects and to the friendship of other males. On the contrary, he clings to the woman, potentially eschewing parents and other male friendship.
- He is a farmer working resistant soil to produce food but that role he shares with his partner who jointly toils to produce offspring and sustenance.
- He is no warrior, preferring to remain in the background when Cain took to Abel with violence. Unlike his avenging descendant, Lamech, he threatens no retribution for the murder of his son.
- He is a silent patriarch when an important spiritual decision was being made and yet spoke up to blame the woman when challenged by God.
- He is no God-fearer, apparently even preferring his partner's voice to that of God. He will need protection and guarding from God lest he disobey further.

The most gendered male character in the story is in fact, יהוה אלהים. God speaks up (3:9–19; 22; 4:6, 9–15), commands (2:16), and warns (4:7). He clothes (3:21) and protects (3:22–23; 4:15) people. In a startling development יהוה is even attributed with participating in the production of a child (4:1).96

96. See earlier discussion of this speech, pp.102–105.
The male of the Eden narrative is, then, an ambiguous one. It seems that the author wants to make clear that the hegemonic male is not original in human history or divine intention. There are certainly indications that the nature and quality of the partnership was of more significance that any one part of it. The enigmatic locution "עזר כנגדו" would suggest so but further development of these ideas awaits us.

The Woman

What of the woman? To what extent is her character gendered according to HB norms? As noted above, the first priority of women was faithfulness to husband and kin and determination to further his name and his line. This primary gender role forms an interpretative lens to assess the woman’s behaviour in Genesis 2–4.

Faithfulness to Husband and Kin

We are given a few phrases to see into her motives for eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad (3:6). Narratively, the story would flow well without these interpretative phrases. In terms of the plot, the significant thing is that she was tempted and she ate. The reader then is encouraged by the narration to ponder the reason that made her overturn an edict that she knew well and was keen to protect.\footnote{This is arguably the reason for her extension of the prohibition to include not touching the fruit (3:3).} She observes not only that it was “delight to the eyes” (תא atr) but also that it is טב למאכל, “good for food.” This phrase is a direct quote from 2:9, where God’s good garden is described. When she eats, she...
immediately gives some to her man. Given that a woman’s role was directed to the wellbeing of her husband, and includes the production and preparation of food, it is well within her gendered role to be the one initiating good eating for her kin by testing then offering food.98

Furthermore, she interprets the serpent’s assertion that once she eats of this tree she will be like God, knowing good and bad, as a step to wisdom. She sees the tree as "and desirable to make wise."99 This is the goal of the instruction of the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:3) directing children toward right living.100 The lexeme is also on occasion specifically used of the roles of women.101

We see signs of this womanly orientation toward the welfare of the house in the divine pronouncement of 3:16b. The woman is told: ואל אישך תשוקתך הוא ימשל בך ("to your man will be your turning and he will predominate over you"). As we noted earlier in this study, the meaning of this verse is far from agreed. As well as her more obviously sexed role of child-bearing, the woman will also carry


99. The lexeme שכל encompasses a range of meanings, all positive. They include understanding, insight, comprehension and achieving success. HALOT, 1328–29.


101. Prov 19:14 records: "House and wealth are inherited from parents; but אשה משכלתfortune ("a wise wife") is from the Lord." The same lexeme also describes Abigail: טובת שכל יפת תאר ("wise and beautiful"), in contrast to her husband, Nabal, קשה ורע ("hard and bad").
a toilsome load of work along with her man, directed to the sustaining of her household. Verse 13b then declares her *turning*\(^{102}\) toward her man. This will encompass concern for the maintenance and thriving of his household, his name and his clan. This verse then is less about sexual attraction and inaugurated hierarchy than about the lived gendered role of woman’s orientation toward the wellbeing of the man and his line ahead of her own autonomous life. It assumes gendered roles, rather than creates them.

**The Production of Sons**

The woman furthers that goal by producing sons. Two repeated lexemes link 3:16 to 4:1. She *conceives* (`הרה`) and *bears* (`ילד`) a son. That this is a gendered portrayal is shown by the small note in 5:4 that Adam also had daughters. These do not get the naming and attention that the woman, now identified as Eve, gives to her sons. Two of her new-born sons are given naming speeches.\(^{103}\) Cain’s is the most impressive and shows a sophisticated grasp of the theological implications of child-bearing. While it may seem that Eve is simply getting on with the job of producing sons, her extraordinary naming speech makes a strong case for her own agency: "קניתי איש את־יהוה ("I have produced a man with יוהו")."

The discordant features of this short speech are the use of the verb *קנה*, the unexpected particle `וא`, and the striking noun for the child, `איש`. Used with a

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102. Using this reading of `תשוקתך` against the idea of sexual desire. See earlier discussion in chapter four.

103. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes argue that naming speeches are a product of women’s culture. In the HB, women name children twenty-seven times compared with fourteen times for men. They typically consist of a pun creating a phonetic link between the name and the interpretation. *On Gendering Texts*, 97–103.
human subject, קנה refers to the acquisition of property or a wife. With God as subject, it carries the idea of creating.\textsuperscript{104} Is she noting that she has merely \textit{acquired} a man \textit{with} יהוה or that she has \textit{created} a man \textit{with} יהוה?\textsuperscript{105} At issue is whether she is exhibiting \textit{hubris}, claiming synergistic work with God,\textsuperscript{106} or whether she is making a rightful claim for feminine participation in the process. Cassuto, citing Ugaritic parallels such as goddess Asherah’s mothering of the gods, asserts that it is a hubristic claim to be co-creator.\textsuperscript{107} The ambiguous particle את does not help to clarify the matter of the role being ascribed to יהוה.\textsuperscript{108}

There is no doubt that Eve is here making a connection between her procreation and the divine creator. Whether her speech is regarded as hubristic synergism or as a fair assessment, is in the eye of the reader. Motherhood, as presented in the HB, is a powerful patriarchal mechanism, ensuring the continuity of the husband’s name and family possessions through patrimonial customs and patrilineal inheritance patterns.\textsuperscript{109} Anxiety that the sexuality of women could be a threat to social boundaries, had resulted in detailed legislative

\textsuperscript{104. HALOT}, 1112

\textsuperscript{105. Claus Westermann sums up possible readings into these two. Westermann, \textit{Genesis 1–11}, 394–97.}

\textsuperscript{106. As, for instance, Bruce Waltke avers: \textit{Genesis}, 96.}

\textsuperscript{107. Cassuto, \textit{Genesis}, 198.}

\textsuperscript{108. Victor Hamilton, citing Akkadian parallels, translates it as “from”; Claus Westermann notes it as an associative use, thus “together with”; August Dillmann sees it as interchangeable with \textit{with}, so “with.” Hamilton, \textit{Genesis}, 221; Westermann, \textit{Genesis 1–11}, 290–92; August Dillman, \textit{Genesis: Critically and Exegetically Expounded}, trans. W.B. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 183–84.}

controls seen in Leviticus and elsewhere. Underneath this heavy ideological and legislative architecture, it is rare that we see a personal reflection from the mother that does not echo the party line. Genesis 4:1 is one such example. Instead of gendering her reproductive event with a discourse of patriarchal significance, in Gen 4:1 the woman insists that she has achieved something with יהוה. Ilana Pardes sees in Eve’s naming speech, a claim to have created a *man* (איש) in a direct challenge to the man’s claim to have created a *woman* (אשה) out of his own body in 2:23. “First in the garden of Eden and in her naming speech, the primordial mother challenges the attempts of both God and Adam to be the sole subjects of creation.”

In the context of the HB, this hints at a gender reversal, a determination to interpret her own experience from her own perspective, and not simply that of the patriarchal interests. We see this again in 4:25, in her second naming speech. She uses that occasion to memorialise her dead son, Abel and to name the culpability of Cain. This mother insists on giving her own significance to her birthings beyond that of the simple turn of generations depicted in priestly genealogies (compare Gen 5:3).

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112. Pardes, ”Beyond Genesis,” 185. Moreover, the earth has also been addressed in divine discourses: “Let the earth grow vegetation” (v.11), and “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds” (v.24). Even if Elohim is the focus of creative agency, the earth is a full participant in the process; the earth is an agent, a co-creator, not just the object of divine manipulation. Brett, “Earthing the Human,” 77.
While few would claim Eve was the God-fearing wife of, for instance, Prov 31:30, she exhibits a theological reflectiveness that again challenges gender expectations. Various aspects of Eve’s behaviour in the story have caused strong negative reactions. As our review of the reception history will show, she is widely regarded from Hellenistic times as a seductress who led the man astray. Those who instigate others to sin are roundly condemned in the HB, with wayward women attracting special opprobrium.

Yet, the primordial woman shows a theological reflectiveness which suggests that she knows that God-fearing is more than just simple obedience. As such, it shows a knowledge of God on which much Hebrew literature has been built. As writings such as Job, Ecclesiastes and Psalms attest, Yahwistic faith has an element of discursiveness, debate and even contestation with the divine. When the serpent approaches her with his challenge, the woman stops and reflects. As we have seen above, her reasons for eating transcend simple personal appetite (3:6).

Similarly, her naming speech on the birth of Cain shows a sophisticated understanding of how God works through human agency. It shows a grasp of God’s hidden ways in the world akin to that of the wisdom narratives such as the story of Joseph (Gen 50:15–21). By the time of the birth of her grand-son, Enosh, “people were beginning to call upon the name of Yahweh” (113. See chapter seven, pp.188–197.

114. See, for instance, Neh 13:26; Prov 5:20–23.
The narration of the story has seen the transition in two generations from a daily communion with God to a more distant formality. Nevertheless, Eve has begun to show the way that descendants of Adam might relate their lives to the presence of an exacting, transcendent God.

**Summary: The Gendered Female**

Like that of Adam, Eve’s character displays gender ambivalence. Her primary tasks of faithfulness to husband and kin and furthering the prospects of subsequent generations have been minimally achieved. She has birthed sons but only after an episode in which she threatens the whole enterprise by acting independently, risking the wrath of God. Deciding to eat and sharing with her man, while decidedly within the ambit of her role, was also an act of disobedience. The *knowing* that she gained thereby, was to be now aware of her co-opted orientation to her man and his predominance over her (3:16). Like that of Adam, Eve's character betrays features of its creation in a male mind. Despite some interesting deviations from the gender norm, she is still primarily the ideal object of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, her performance of this role is mixed with independent flourishes. She thinks theologically, she insists on naming her sons according to things that matter to her. There is a *voice* here that defies total suppression in the patriarchal project. The couple partnership is founded not on strong male leadership but on an independent, thinking woman.
The Partnership

There is more to be said about the woman and man than can be encompassed by a study of gender significations of those individuals. Through strategic use of the word pair איש/אשה, the author has alerted the reader to moments of significance in the relationship of the pair.

Attempts to find a verbal root for איש have failed and it may be that this and its counterpart, אשה, are primary nouns. The connection between them made in Gen 2:23 is another example of popular etymology. The word איש, has a primary meaning of someone of the male sex especially in contrast to the female sex, denoting one who begets (Qoh 6:3). It can be used in parallel with other terms to depict manly qualities (Jer 22:30; 1 Sam 4:9) or with the sense of mankind (Isa 2:9; Jer 2:6). It also denotes husband (Gen 29:32) where it frequently occurs in association with אשה (Gen 16:3; Lev 21:7; Judg 9:49; Num 30:7–15).

Similarly, the word אשה can refer simply to the female sex (Gen 18:11; Qoh 7:26) but has primary resonance when used with reference to the sexual relationship between woman and man (Gen 29:21; Deut 22:24; 1 Sam 25:43; Prov 6:26). Importantly, this word pair is often used to depict figuratively the relationship between God and the people of Israel (Hos 2:2; Isa 54:6; Jer 3:3).

The word pair איש/אשה is used together only four times in our story: in the creation of woman and man (2:23), at the narratorial announcement of their

115. A primary noun is one not based on a verbal root. N. P. Bratsiotis, "איש," TDOT vol. 1, 222.
bond in one flesh (2:24), at the moment when the woman shares fruit with the man (3:6), and in the divine pronouncement following the transgression (3:16). We may characterize these moments as inauguration, consummation, communion and contestation. Each is a narrative moment of great significance in the woman/man partnership and so we will look at each in turn.

**Inauguration: 2:23**

With a poetic exclamation, אָדָם recognizes that he is איש to the woman’s אשה. The counterpart עזר כנגדו has been found even as the pair is created. They do not find each other, but rather, “they come to each other from each other.”¹¹⁷ In an important sense, their creation is not sequential but simultaneous. The jubilant recognition borrows the notions of covenant commitment to attest the kinship of one to the other in the common task of serving and keeping the earth. Something significant is being said here about this relationship that suggests it is unique and original. We turn now to explore it further.

In our earlier exegesis, we established that the meaning of the locution עזר כנגדו was not fully described by the text.¹¹⁸ It was left to the man through the process of reflective naming of animals to identify the one suitable. At this point in our study, it is time to review this term in the light of our focus on the woman/man partnership. The divine decision to create an עזר כנגדו was made in response to the human being ‘alone,’ a situation that was לא טוב “not good.”

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¹¹⁸ Refer to pages 42, 54–63.
This word, הָבָד יָד, is used in similar contexts in relation to tasks that one cannot do alone (Exod 18:17–18; Num 11:14; Deut 1:9,12). What is it that the human cannot do alone?

As noted previously, most translations of עזר כנגדו vary only with respect to the second word, כנגדו. Most are convinced by the rendering of עזר as helper. David Clines studies uses of the lexeme עזר in the HB and concludes that the term does not connote equality. Enlisting contextual clues, Clines suggests that Eve’s help consists of bearing children, a conclusion that does not take into account the narrative as a whole.

J. David Freedman has queried the traditional rendering of procreative helper and offered a sophisticated argument for translating the phrase a *power equal to him*. His philological argument for introducing notions of strength and power into the term are reinforced by the narrative context wherein it may be supposed that the counterpart is one who could share the physical load of tending the earth. It is important to note that the masculine form, עזר, is used and

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120. NRSV: “a helper as his partner”; NKJV “a helper comparable to him”; ASV “A help meet for him”; CEB “a helper that is perfect for him”; NIV “a helper suitable for him.”


123. He suggests two root meanings for עזר: “to save” and “to be strong” and argues that the second root meaning is evident in Deut 33:26, 29 as well as in our text, Gen 2:18b. Freedman, “Woman, a Power Equal to Man,” 56–58. This alternate reading of עזר, noted in HALOT, 218 as III עזר.
not the feminine, עזרה, indicating that the outcome of the experiment, a woman, was not essential to the narrative logic.\textsuperscript{124}

That אדם may be claiming more for this counterpart than a strong co-laborer, is noted by Ziony Zevit in his rendering of זכר.\textsuperscript{125} Zevit noted that in the Mesopotamian creation text Epic of Gilgamesh, the powerful counterpart for a male was another male and for a female, another female. Drawing from an Ancient Ethiopic cognate, he proposes that נדב is a kinship term indicating kin related horizontally (in other words, cousin, sibling, as opposed to parent, child).\textsuperscript{126}

The kinship nuance of the term עזר כנגדו is reinforced in 2:23a when the man declares woman to be עстан מעצמי ובשר מבשרי ("bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh"). Walter Brueggemann suggests that traditional interpretations of the phrase, such as that it indicates physical properties or the sexual union, miss the kinship aspects of this phrase.\textsuperscript{127} He sees it as an oath of loyalty and responsibility, through times of weakness and strength, for care of the earth.\textsuperscript{128}


\textsuperscript{125} Zevit, What Really Happened, 132–36.

\textsuperscript{126} Zevit builds a case for a translation a helper like his kin. He notes first the unique use of the preposition כ with נדב in Genesis 2. Other prepositions used with the lexeme such as ל and מ indicate spatial relationship with degrees of physical proximity. Highlighting the Masoretic accent under the first word, a tiphāh, indicating a pause between the reading of the first and second words, he surmises that נדב is a modifier, clarifying what sort of helper is required. What Really Happened, 135–36.

\textsuperscript{127} Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone," 532–42. See, for instance, Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12; 1 Chron 11:1. Cynthia Chapman argues that this is kinship language: The House of the Mother, 82; 194–96. No other couple is described as sharing the same bone and flesh. Post-Eden, kinship happens through marriage.

\textsuperscript{128} Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone," 539–40
He adduces examples of uses of the word-pair, which he takes as a merism, encompassing all that lies between the twin poles of flesh-weakness and bone-power. 2 Sam 5:1 and 19:13–14 are both examples where the phrase is an appeal for covenant loyalty. Gen 29:14 and Judg 9:2 have more links to birth-ties but nevertheless appeal to covenant loyalty. “In summary then the central teaching of the formula concerns fidelity to vows, constancy in purpose, acceptance of responsibility which are appropriate to our humanness.”129

The woman/man partnership then, is inaugurated in terms that bring the notion of a unique, divinely-shaped relationship to the fore. It stands apart from the vertical relationships created by reproduction (child: parent) and the relationships created by fragile attestations of loyalty (subject: ruler). A new social entity is inscribed. Womanless man will not be the normative actor in Israel’s history except by abandonment of this creational ideal.

The Eden narrative’s depiction of the inauguration of human partnership is unique. A new kinship is being created that will be directed toward the goal of human creation: serving and keeping the earth. In the next occurrence of the word-pair, the meaning of this social entity is further developed.

Consummation: 2:24

In this second occurrence of the word-pair איש/אשה, the narrator steps into the story to take the reader into his confidence. עליך יעזב איש את אביו ואת אימו ודבק באשתו והיו לבר אחד (“Therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his woman and they become one flesh.”)

The link with what immediately preceded is forged by the strong particle 
(“therefore”). This presents us with a problem of knowing the precise 
conceptual link with the previous verse. What does “therefore” refer to? Is it the 
simple existence of humanity in binary form? Is it the nature of the division 
process that will always create a force for unity? Is it a less specific notion of 
passion or love that seems implicit in the man’s response to seeing the woman? 
Or is there something in the nature of 
that impels union? We will 
postpone resolution of this conundrum until we have looked further at the 
meaning of the verse.

We note first that this verse is a gloss somewhat detached from its literary 
context. The verse implies the existence of parents in a story of primary human 
creation. This hints at a later ideological imperative in the editing of the text. The second part of the verse further develops the idea of the pair becoming kin 
with the re-use of the notion of united flesh (“and they shall 
become one flesh”). The verb here 
denotes a progressive becoming, from 
one state to another, implying that the leaving of father and mother and clinging 
to the woman inaugurates a new kinship pattern.


carries a range of meanings, both literal (skin, meat, food) as well as 
metaphorical (pubic region, living flesh, transience, humankind). As noted 
above, it also can be used of family or kin, as when Judah refers to Joseph as 

131. Megan Warner suggests that the presenting issue of the time was the intermarriage question 
132. HALOT, 164.
"our brother, our own flesh" (Gen 37:27) and the Lord speaks of not approaching kin: 
(Lev 18:6).

We can conclude that this narratorial observation is in fact speaking of the precurative conditions of marriage. We observe examples of the strong desire for endogamous marriages (presumably, those that please parents) in Ishmael’s marriage to a woman of Egypt (Gen 21:21), Isaac’s marriage (Gen 24:3–4), and Jacob’s marriage to Leah and Rachel (Gen 28:1–2). In our passage however, a subversive phenomena is observed: the adumbration of a partnering that forsakes the social ends desired by parents and creates new possibilities. Jacob’s sons Simeon, Judah and Joseph, the only sons whose marriages are reported, all marry foreign woman and no word of censure is noted in the text.  

There is a sense here too, of mutual attraction as a primary impulse of the partnering. It is far from a cold etiological statement. We concur with the summation of Claus Westermann: “It is amazing that this one word [דבק] presents the basic involvement of man and woman as something given with and rooted in the very act of creation. The primary place is not given to propagation or to the institution of marriage as such. The love of man and woman receives here a unique evaluation.”  

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134. Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 234.
The next occurrence of the word pair איש/אשה tells of the joint act of eating, the first joint action of the human pair. This is the only segment of the Eden narrative in which the noun אדם does not occur. The human is characterized only as woman and man, the plural verbs and pronouns reinforcing this togetherness.\(^{135}\)

The serving and keeping of the garden that is the joint vocation fails at this first step: the failure to observe the divine limits. The qualities that made the tree’s fruit desirable to the woman are precisely those that describe God’s intended beautiful and productive garden (3:6, compare 2:9). The woman apprehends correctly the goodness and beauty of the trees provided by God. As well as this, she attributes to the fruit a capacity to contribute to her growth in wisdom, ונהמד העץ לשכלי (“desired in order to become wise”).\(^{136}\) She desires what God desires for God’s people (Prov 1:4). Her thinking links becoming wise with consuming fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. One tree however, was not good to eat. Choosing only in relation to self and not heeding the injunction to serve and keep the earth nor apprehending the divine creator behind it all, is her temptation.

She reaches out and eats. Standing silently all the time אמה (“with her”) is the man and she offers fruit to him. Tradition may have this as an act of seduction and deviousness.\(^{137}\) In so far as we have insight into her motives in eating, the act

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135. In 3:1–7, plural verbs and pronominal suffixes occur twelve times.

136. Adopting Speiser’s reading that the causative conjunction is often intransitive. Genesis, 23–24.

137. See, for instance Cassuto, Genesis, 147–48 and von Rad, Genesis, 90. See also the chapter below on the reception history of the Eden narrative, pp.177–222.
of giving fruit to her partner can also be seen to be an act of kinship and commitment. She wanted for him the things that she wanted for herself: a sharing of the goodness of the fruit and access to its wisdom. While notably a transgression of the divine edict, it is also an act of communion and as such, an act of partnership.

The story makes much of the fact that the man and the woman were together in transgression. The end of the sentence in v.6b: יָתְנָה נְבֵדָא יָבֹא עַל אִישְׁתּוֹ וַיֵּאָכְלָה ("and she gave also to her man, who was with her, and he ate") contains detail unnecessary to the flow of the story. Arguably, עַל אִישְׁתּוֹ וַיֵּאָכְלָה ("who was with her, and he ate") is superfluous. What can we make of this deliberate inclusion? Our sense of its significance is reinforced by the structure of the verse, the six doubled consonants and three waw-consecutive imperfects slowing the tempo of the reading. Furthermore, the concentric structure of vv.6–7 highlights the last words of v.6.138

Attention has been focussed on the way that translation has often omitted the word עַל אִישְׁתּוֹ, isolating the woman in the transgression139 but there is more here than just a desire to ensure that the man takes his fair share of the blame. In their joint vocation to serve and keep the earth, attention to limits was critical and a task that required the two of them to ensure it. Through the dialogue with the serpent the man stood silent. The conclusion we can draw here is that obeying divine limits requires the collaborative work of others. To follow divine ways is not a solo project. The silence of the man as the woman deliberated was the

undoing of them both.

This reading of the climax of the Eden narrative highlights some of the ambiguity of the narration. God arranged a garden of trees pleasant to the sight and good to eat, attractive qualities to human senses. The woman acts in response to these qualities (2:9 compare 3:6). They may freely eat of all of the trees except for the ambiguous one in the middle of the garden. They will die on the day they eat of it but the only obvious result is not death but a knowingness. They become like God knowing good and bad (3:22), a fact that bothers God only in association with their possible immortality, but the only result is banishment from God’s garden.

There is a narratival puzzle here that suggests that the transgression was in some sense intended by God. We earlier posed the question of what Eve did to help. Her help can be seen to be the leading of the pair into knowingness about themselves and their world. This ambiguous result, at once a disobedience and an empowerment, is possibly a narratorial intention.\textsuperscript{140} She helps them gain knowledge and God-likeness. The human couple’s vocation takes on a whole new depth of significance because of her agency.

\textit{Contestation: 3:16}

The final occurrence of the word pair is in God’s pronouncement to the woman. Again, the partnership between the woman and man is the focus of the divine pronouncement to the woman following the eating of the fruit.

\textsuperscript{140} Karalina Matskevich notes two narrative strands, a shadow plot behind the main plot, that simultaneously oppose and resonate with each other. She persuasively argues that this plotted ambiguity shows that God intends Eve to lead the couple into knowledge. “Double-Plotting in the Garden,” 167–82.
In an earlier exegetical chapter of this study, we analysed this verse and concluded that Gen 3:16 inaugurates no hierarchy between woman and man. It makes no new statement about the relationship between woman and man. It remains as it was: subject to the prevailing cultural attitudes of the times. In line with cultural expectations of the woman within a patriarchal household, she is inextricably bound to the partnership which alone will provide for their future in the form of the production of progeny and the production of food and shelter. This is an explication of the meaning of עזר כנגדו in the context of their lives, not a reversal of that state. The woman’s (re)turning (תשוקה) to the man is the dawning of an awareness of all that it involves for the first time. As we have seen elsewhere, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad has done its work.

We also argued that the man through the relationship, will משלי ("predominate") over the woman, not necessarily in a malevolent sense through the crude exercise of male power but through the exigencies of a patriarchal subsistence society. In the gender framework of the narrative, both woman and man work along gendered lines to preserve and further the fortunes of the household.

The new kinship model established in chapter two, was tested in 3:6 and is now subject to strictures resulting from their disobedience. It is characterized by the tones of the two words of 3:16b, תשוקה and משלי. As we have seen, neither verb can be definitively translated but together, they suggest the entwining of female and male roles in ways that lead to contestation. We can test this further by comparing this verse with the only other two places where תשוקה appears.
Both references occur in the context of an intimate relationship: Gen 4:7 describes God’s injunction to Cain to forbear with his younger brother; Song 7:10 describes an intimacy between lovers. In Genesis 4, as argued previously, Cain is enjoined to note Abel’s תשוקה for him and, in response, משל (“marshal,” “discipline,” “control”) his desire for revenge. Tones of filial rights and responsibilities dominate this narrative. Both 3:16 and 4:7b are placed within stories highlighting kinship relationships: heterosexual partnership and male sibling relationship. The vulnerability of the male/female relationship to abuse of power is also the vulnerability of the system of primogeniture. Both link to male privilege in the ANE context. It is possible then, that just as 3:16 is an example of the vulnerabilities of heedlessness of God’s law in heterosexual partnership, so also 4:7b is a statement of such outworking in fraternal relationships. Either way, we note the dangerous interplay of notions of dependency and control in both types of kinship relationship.

Song of Songs 7:10 has the word תשוקה on the lips of the woman but its reference is to her lover: אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו ("I belong to my lover and his desire is for me"). This sentence is a formula of mutuality noted in three places of the book in the voice of the woman: 2:16a, 6:3 and here in 7:10: אני לדודי ודודי לי ("I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine"). It expresses a deep contentedness in a reciprocal relationship. It may be a model expression for a committed

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relationship because the inverse may be the formula of divorce, and very similar in pattern and vocabulary. In 7:10, however, the formula is slightly changed. The latter half is replaced with ועלי תשוקתו (“his desire is for me”). In the context of the poem describing love-play, here a sexualised understanding of תשוקה is appropriate but does not encompass all that the word may convey. Intense belonging is a feature of the lovers in Song of Songs, signified by the frequent use of the appellation sister by the man. This is not just a metaphor for family tenderness but as usage in other cultures’ love-poetry shows, is a common relational formula for lovers. This does not exclude erotic expression, as shown here in Song of Songs.

The new and dangerous complication in the heterosexual partnership of 3:16 is that of procreation and it is explosively foregrounded in God’s pronouncement to the woman in 3:16a. An emphatic expression stresses the multiplication of toil and child-bearings that is the woman’s lot: ארבה (“I will greatly increase”). In the first person, this expression occurs in only two other places in the HB, each a portentous divine promise of numerous offspring both to Abraham (Gen 16:10) and to Hagar (Gen 22:17). This, along with the association of numerous progeny with divine blessing, suggests the possibility that the numerous conceptions to come are not necessarily a curse. In Gen 3:16a, however, the child-bearing comes with multiplied עצבון (“toil”) as well. Linked as

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143. Hosea 2:2 is an example of this formula used by God of Israel: היא לא אשתו ואנכי לא אישה (“She is not my wife; and I am not her husband.”) See N. P. Bratsiotis, “איש TDOT vol. 1, 231.

144. Tamara Eskenazi writes: “These lovers have many different ways of being with one another, friendship among them.” “With the Song of Songs,” 180.

145. Keel, The Song of Songs, 163.
it is, with 3:16b with the interwoven notions of longing and predominance, the scene is set for marital complexities. Adumbrated here, many of these complexities play out in subsequent chapters of Genesis.

Verbal correspondence links this verse with 4:1 (הרה “conceive,” ילד “bear”), in which Eve gives birth to Cain. The birth is preceded by Adam’s knowing of Eve, (ידע) an expression that betrays male agency and female passivity. This first conception, then, begins to explain something of the complex relationship foreshadowed by God’s pronouncement over the woman. Cain and Abel’s subsequent history brought grief to Eve (4:25) even as the promises of multiplied births continued. With a nod to the future, Eve’s use of the word איש (“man”) as she names her first child, hints at the continuance of patterns of dominance found in her own relationship.

Conclusion

Four moments in the woman/man relationship, those of inauguration, consummation, communion, and contestation, marked by the word-pair, איש/אישה, have shaped our appreciation of the narration of the couple relationship in the context of primeval history. Foundational to the human vocation of keeping the earth, yet deeply marked by the decision to disobey the divine edict, the human couple venture forth to an uncertain future.

We have noted the attention given in the narrative to the creation of a pair from the sexually-ambiguous first creature. The intention to write human interdependence into the structure of creation is clear in Genesis 2–4. Sexual
differentiation is the ground and precondition of human community that requires individuals to reach out to others for their basic needs. \textsuperscript{146}

A new kinship system is created that will surmount other social ties with its insistent mutual attraction. This pairing, this complex phenomenon of joint human endeavour, will be salient in all of Israel’s history and often will be the fulcrum on which many a narrative turns. \textsuperscript{147}

Sexual differentiation is integrally tied to the wider human vocation to serve and keep the earth. In their first recounted act of partnership, an ambiguity is narratively inscribed. The woman’s help is to question and disobey the divine edict yet also lead the pair into a future equipped with the instrument of the knowledge of good and bad. The pair has acted together to shape a future with God that will be marked by the awareness of enormous resources and capabilities yet also the risk of hubris and overreach.

This sexual differentiation goes partly according to script with male priority and rule both assumed and described. A subversive worm (or perhaps, serpent), however, is at work. Heroic, autonomous male virtues are trumped by

\textsuperscript{146} Mary Midgley writes: “Mutual dependence is central to all human life. The equivocal, unrealistic dismissal of it does not just inconvenience women. It distorts morality by a lop-sided melodrama. It causes the virtues we need for giving and receiving love and service (and indeed for catering for everyday bodily “needs”) to be uncritically downgraded, while those involved in self-assertion are uncritically exalted – except, of course, when they are displayed by women.” “The Soul’s Successors: Philosophy and the Body,” in Religion and the Body, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58.

\textsuperscript{147} Some HB examples include Jacob’s quest for Rachel, David’s conquest of Bathsheba, Ruth’s stratagem for Boaz. Phyllis Bird comments: “It is the Yahwist’s contribution to remind us that the good gift of sexuality may become the means and the sign of alienation within the species, that what was intended for fulfilment and self-transcendence may become the occasion and instrument of deprivation and oppression.” “Genesis 1–3,” 44.
the necessary acknowledgement of an agential partner. The ‘passive’ female debates and acts. The mouse roars. The earth trembles.
PART ONE: PRE-CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

The three short chapters of the Eden narrative have a theological and cultural footprint disproportionate to the size of the narrative and its residual importance in the Hebrew Bible. Onto this story has been engraved a palimpsest of theological themes marking every age since its commitment to writing. Genesis, and, in particular, the narrative of the woman and man (‘Adam and Eve’) in chapters 2–3, has been the arena on which major theological and anthropological debates were contested within and without the church.\(^1\) From these debates have come doctrines which continue to form the architecture of Christian theology.\(^2\)

Part of the reason for this is that this narrative contains themes of interest to every age and culture: human existence and mortality, gender and sexuality, sin and sorrow. In midrash, commentary, sermon and treatise, the Eden narrative tracks through the ages like a restless epic theme in need of resolution. Both reflecting the interests of the symbolic capital of the age and, at the same time, affecting that capital, the narrative continues to be invoked, particularly in

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1. These include the debates around human origins, the origin of sin, the existence of an historical Fall, the institution of marriage and value of celibacy and more recently, feminist and queer theologies.

2. Conceptions of a one-time “Fall” shape evangelicalism in Western theology and the theologies of the church in post-colonial settings in Africa and Asia but debate continues about whether such a universal Fall is a necessary conclusion from Genesis 2–3. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 275–78; Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 79–92.
conventions of sex/gender and their reflex in church polity and in broader western society.³

The task of this section of the study is to selectively chronicle this epic narrative journey noting the different ways that the primeval couple have been imagined, portrayed and interpreted. From an early stage, intense interest has focussed on particular motifs, such as the woman’s role, the character of the Fall, and the nature of the sin. We can detect through the writings a discourse about sex and gender forming and re-forming into shapes that we recognise today. Tropes such as the strict binary of female and male, the priority of males, the essential characteristics of female and male, the adversarial positioning of male to female, are all recognizable themes which can be marked in nascent forms in the reception history of the Eden narrative. With special attention to the influence of the LXX, we will see the occlusion of the partnership theme by interpretations that isolate and suppress the female in the narrative.⁴

The notion of a reception history assumes a visible difference between text and interpretation when in fact, the two notions are blurred. An earlier section of this thesis has argued that there is no pristine original text.⁵ The ‘final’ editing of the MT is just one of a series of interpretative moments that began with the

3. Stephen Greenblatt describes the story as “both liberating and destructive, a hymn to human responsibility and a dark fable about human wretchedness, a celebration of daring and an incitement to misogyny.” The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve, 6.


crystallization of oral stories and continued in the serial written depositions based on these oral stories. Later interpreters of the text we now know as Genesis 2–4 determined the position of the narrative within the book of Genesis, and thus, its preceding and subsequent neighbouring texts. Thus, Genesis 2–3 is read after Genesis 1, although it may be an earlier composition. Subsequent interpretations took place through Masoretic pointing, translations into Greek, Latin, and other ancient languages, then later English and most other modern languages, along with the addition of chapter and verse divisions, sub-headings and book separations. The reception history of our narrative is a rich and dynamic story. As Timothy Beal has suggested: “...biblical literature is not a fact but an event, a dialectic relationship of production and reception.”

6. For instance, Gen 2:24 can be seen as a later “interpretation” of the Eden story in that it speaks anachronistically of the first man’s parents.


8. Examples include the pointing of הָרֹאשׁ in 2:25 and 3:1, and the pointing of אדם to make it a proper name in 2:5 and 3:17, 20. In Gen 2:21 and 3:17, 20, לאדם occurs, from which it can be concluded that the Masoretes have provided the preposition ל with a sewa. This vocalization shows that they probably considered אדם to be a proper name, Adam. But from the consonantal text of Genesis 2–3, in which אדם the human occurs nineteen times, and from the specific context of 3:17 and 21, it appears that reading לאדם as a proper name is not possible. Ellen van Wolde, A Semiotic Analysis, 174–76.

9. Helen Kraus charts the various translations of Genesis 1–4 and concludes: “What the study does show is that there is enough semantic and syntactic variation between the Hebrew and some of the translated texts to suggest that the blame for the inequality of the gender relationship through the centuries lies at least partly with the translators.” Kraus, 190.

10. See, for instance, the NIV with subheadings: “Adam and Eve” at 2:4 and “The Fall of Man” at 3:1.

Section One: Interpretation Before the Common Era

Intra-Hebrew Bible Interpretation

The interpretative process begins within the HB corpus itself, although there is no direct engagement with the Eden narrative. The narrative is not included in the credos or the syntheses of the acts of God. We may deduce that Israel never considered it an historical incident on a par with other foundational historical incidents. It is nowhere cited as an explanation of sin and evil.12

It is evident, however, that the idea of Eden occurs at various levels of the HB corpus indicating that a foundational stage of reception of the text lies within the HB itself. We see this in the references to Eden in the prophetic corpus (Ezek 28:13; 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35; Isa 51:3; Joel 2:3) where the metaphor of the Edenic garden carries the vision of a powerful, prosperous people.13 We also note the allusions within the law corpus to an Edenic state (Leviticus 26).14 Lexical and conceptual parallels include references to eating, fruit and trees, exuberant fertility and the presence of God walking among his people. Although Leviticus 26 alludes to the possible return to a creational ideal through torah observance, no reference is made to restored female/male relations.


13. This applies equally to the states and the leaders that challenged Israel (Tyre and Assyria, in the Ezekiel references) as much as to a future redeemed Israel (Isaiah and Joel).

‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’ play no role in the HB after their appearance in Genesis.15

There are however, significant places where conversations on sex/gender are taken up. While direct citations are absent, that does not mean that these themes with which the Eden narrative is concerned did not continue to be considered within the faith of Israel. By what criteria should these texts be selected for discussion? Two main ones are employed here: First, texts that show conceptual links with the themes of the Eden narrative that we are following in this work. These centre around the partnership of female and male actors working within God’s purposes in creation. A second criterion is that these conceptual themes be expressed with linguistic parallels to the Eden narrative.16 This yields only one text to be considered: The Song of Songs.17

15. Adam is listed at the start of the genealogy in 1 Chron 1:1.

16. A more general discussion of the human partnership in the HB is undertaken in chapter nine.

17. Jer 31:15–22 and Mal 2:13–16 are narrowly excluded in that they appear to be allusions rather than extended treatments. The Jeremiah passage (31:15–22) uses tropes from the creation narratives to describe the new thing that God is doing. The reference to the woman grieving over her children recalls the punishment of Eve related to her child-bearing (Gen 3:16) and the violent loss of her son, Abel (4:25). The punishment is being reversed in an act of God that will bring missing children home. In 31:22, God sums up the reversal by alluding to a new creation with the conscious use of the verb used with God as subject in the creation narrative: בָּרָא. The passage ends with this verse: נָקְבָּה תַּסְוָבָּב גָּבַר (“a woman encircles a man”) which may allude to Gen 3:16 where the fraught woman/man relationship, marked by notions of longing and rule, gives way in Jeremiah’s image to a union of great intimacy. The sexual imagery of encirclement of the man reverses the usual imagery of (male) penetration. It is an image from a woman’s perspective, conjuring ideas of nourishment and protection of a vulnerable figure. The inversion of expected female/male power relations provides a striking picture of Israel’s eschatologically renewed life with God. Deborah F. Sawyer, “Gender-Play and Sacred Text: A Scene from Jeremiah,” JSOT 24, no. 83 (1999): 99–111. Mal 2:13–16 makes an argument against the putting away of foreign wives. The prophet draws on notions that are most clearly adumbrated in the Eden narrative. Mal 2:15a reminds the reader of the separate, intentional creation of a partner for the first human. 2:14c draws on the notion of companion that recalls the intended purpose of the partner’s creation to make a case for faithfulness to the wife of his youth. The author reads covenant in the words of Gen 2:24 and implores men to be faithful to “the wife by covenant.” See Gordon Paul Hugenberger, Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi (Leiden: Brill, 1993). Mark Brett has suggested a similar view, that Malachi is taking a stand against Ezra’s “holy seed” by asserting that holiness is a matter of behavior, not ethnicity. “Gen 2:24 says that leaving the covenantal bond with parents is exactly what becoming “one flesh” (בָּאָדוֹר אוֹהָד) means. Becoming one might even challenge the natural bonds of ethnicity, yet still qualify as holiness. Mal 2:14–15 seems to deal with the same argument, taking a
As surprising as the sudden appearance of a refreshing green garden when travelling through a dry landscape, is the Song of Songs in the canon of the HB. Its bold account of first-person human experience, and intimate human experience at that, gives it prominence within the predominance of third-person writings. Its subject-matter, human love in all its aspects, raises questions about the place of sexuality in religious devotion, in scriptural reflection, and ultimately in the Godhead itself.

There are a number of ways that the Song declares itself unusual. We are ambushed by the explosion of passion, surprised by the explicitness of intimate acts. The reader feels like an interloper, overhearing things s/he ought not. While the Song shows some awareness of social strictures on sexual expression (8:1, 8), it challenges the architecture of social control of women common in legal, historical and prophetic texts, with images of a woman openly enjoying intimacy with her beloved away from the gaze of others. Furthermore, in a world where procreation was critical, it portrays sexual intimacy for its own sake without attention to the consequences for women.

The Song of Songs’ many allusions to the Garden of Eden alone would make it of interest for our study but its intense focus on a female/male position against Ezra’s “holy seed” (zera’ ḫaqqādeš) argument as well, by emphasizing oneness: ḫāmāh ḫā’ēḥād mt’hqqāqēš zera’ “īḥōhīm: “The One seeks spiritual/godly seed,” which for Malachi implies that you should not divorce a woman, even if she is foreign.” Private communication, Feb 2, 2018.
relationship within the context of garden, makes it doubly so. The moot questions of Genesis 2–4, namely the place of sexual feeling and experience in the narrative both before and after the transgression, find answer here. I propose to look at the Song of Songs from the point of view of its intersections with the Eden narrative and will draw some conclusions about its treatment of the couple relationship. I suggest that the Song is in dialogue with the Genesis story, providing an example of the way the Genesis traditions of human partnership have been generative in Israel’s written deposit. We will do well to read both ways, noticing how the Song both borrows from and comments upon the Genesis Eden narrative.

Genesis 2–3 and the Song of Songs clearly deal with many of the same themes. Both are set in idealised gardens where trees grow and animals gambol. Both are concerned with the human bond between female and male. The occurrence of a rare word תשוקה (“desire,” “turning”) only in the extended Eden narrative (3:16 and 4:7) and the Song (7:10) suggests a conscious allusion. Yet the Eden narrative has יהוה אלהים (“Yahweh Elohim”) as the lead actor, while the

18. Ken Stone queries not only that the Garden of Eden narrative is primarily ‘about’ sexuality but also its necessary association with binary female/male sexuality. Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 23–45.

Song makes no conscious reference to God.\textsuperscript{20} This may be no more than the conventions of different genres but reminds us to be cautious when ascribing intentional connections.

Placed side by side in readerly endeavor, the Song takes issue with some of the conclusions drawn from the Eden narrative. It is constituted as a dialogue between a woman and a man. Shorter conversations begin and end the book (1:5–2:7, and 8:1–14) and, in between, longer monologues occur. These monologues contain conscious verbal echoes one of the other. The female invitation: “Let my beloved come to his garden” (4:16) is repeated by the man: “I come to my garden . . .” (5:1). Images of each other as gazelles, (2:16; 8:14) of mountains of spices (4:14; 6:2; 8:14) are among the shared vocabulary of admiration and longing. Whereas, in the Eden narrative, lack of dialogue characterizes the relationship, especially at the critical moment of deciding to eat the fruit, in the Song the pair are in constant, if eroticized, communication.

Each partner indulges in a prolonged paean of praise of the other’s naked body (4:1–15; 5:10–16; 6:4–7; 7:1–5), thus reversing the shame of nakedness that caused the primal couple to hide from each other and God. The frank knowing of each other adumbrated in Gen 2:25, is brought to fulfilment in the Song.

Many scholars have commented on the absence of hierarchy and the evident mutuality of the couple in the Song. Phyllis Trible comments:

Born to mutuality and harmony, a man and a woman live in a garden where nature and history unite to celebrate the one flesh of sexuality. Naked without shame or fear . . . this couple treat each other with tenderness and respect. Neither escaping nor exploiting sex, they embrace and enjoy it. Their love is truly bone of bone and flesh of flesh, and this image of God male and female is indeed very good . . . Testifying to the goodness of creation, then, eroticism becomes worship in the context of grace.

The woman’s תשוקה (“desire,” “turning”), linked so problematically with man’s משלי (“predominate”) in Gen 3:16, is turned around in the Song. Three times a formula of mutual belonging is declared by the woman (2:16; 6:3; 7:10) and in the third, a change of reference links her belonging to his desire for her: אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו (“I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me” 7:10). Notions of rule are far away from this idyllic re-conception of female/male relations. André LaCocque declares this, perhaps prematurely, a challenge to patriarchal discourse conveying gender inequality, but as we shall see, declarations of the Song’s trumping of patriarchy ignore some other features.

There is an ever-present asymmetry between the woman and man. The man has freedom of movement in contrast to the woman who is always seeking escape from confinement as from watchmen and brothers. The man never sees himself as possessed in the same way that the woman does. He does not refer to

21. See Ellen F. Davis, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 293–95; Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 250; LaCocque, Romance She Wrote, 37; Eskenazi, With the Song, 185.


23. LaCocque, Romance She Wrote, 36–37.
himself as the beloved’s, unlike the woman who does so repeatedly (2:16; 6:3; 7:11). While acknowledging her power over him (she is “a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots,” 1:9; her tresses can “ensnare a king,” 7:5), the man is still the free agent in assigning his affections. There are elements in the Song that hint at blame of the female for her attempts at free movement. Bad things still happen to forward women in the Song: watchmen beat her (5:7) and brothers enclose her (8:8–9) without a hint of narratival condemnation.

One startling variation of a Garden of Eden theme carries mixed valency. Whereas in the Genesis narrative, the garden represents the place of God’s immediate presence (with allusions to Temple theology) and by extension, the realm of human vocation, in the Song, God is absent and the woman herself is portrayed as the garden: “גarden locked is my sister, bride, a garden locked, a spring sealed” 4:12). A cluster of metaphors show her as a blossoming and fertile garden (4:9–15). The man’s speech appeals to sight, scent and taste and depicting a variety of exotic and local plants as well as streams of fresh water. The author draws on a stock of ANE imagery depicting woman as a garden to be enjoyed.24 Although the woman seems to hold the right to invite the man into the garden, it (the garden) is still exclusively his, locked until he gains sole access.

We can confidently conclude that the Song is a challenging re-reading of the Garden of Eden narrative. Conclusions such as that Genesis is “severely chastened” (thus, LaCocque)25 by the Song or that it “constitutes an inversion of

25. LaCocque, Romance She Wrote, 37.
Genesis” (thus, Landy), overplay that relationship. What we have is a re-reading of the Eden narrative in which we are invited to reflect further on the complex reality of human sex/gender significations. It is simply too bald to leave untold the richness of human sexuality. The threadbare tale of complex, ambiguous human interaction with which we are left at the conclusion of the Eden narrative, must be complemented by this text that shows the dimensions of human sexual partnership. Annette Schellenberg shows how authors of Proverbs 1–9 and Sirach both responded to the Song, showing that they clearly understood it literally rather than allegorically. Their response shows a fear of unbridled eroticism and the need for restraints.

Both Jewish and Christian scriptures declare love as the essence of the divine/human relationship. Thwarted and distorted love between God and beloved Israel, forms the imagery of much prophetic discourse in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. The Song of Songs suggests that human love is paradigmatic

26. Landy, Paradoxes of Paradise, 209.


28. Sentinel texts include the Shema (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:4–5); and John’s epistle: ”Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8).

29. Discussion of the rhetorical purpose of the crude depiction of Israel’s adultery in the so-called "porno-Prophets" is beyond the scope of this thesis. We note here only the fact of its existence and the testimony it gives to the fractured intimacy of the divine relationship with Israel. See, for example, Jer 3:1–3, 13; Ezek 16; Hos 2:1–15 but compare the more positive perspective in Isa 54:4–8; 62:4–5.
of this relationship and thus occupies an important place in the HB. The Song is an unqualified endorsement of eroticism.

This does not exhaust the analogical depths of the Song. Scholars have highlighted the resonances of Temple imagery. The *locked garden* is an imaginative description of the Temple as presented in 1 Kings 6–7. The possibility of intimate encounter with God, that trope that undergirds Temple theology in the HB, reinforces the sense that the Song knows that human intimacy can in some way prepare us for encounter with an immanent God. The Song of Songs and the Eden narrative then are partners in an endeavour to describe aspects of sex/gender anthropology in ways that adumbrate relationships with God and humanity.

The Second Temple Period

Literature of the Second Temple period shows the development of thinking about the primeval couple in regressive ways. In this development, various themes coalesced to create a stream of thinking separating and denigrating the woman. Following the conquest of the Levant by Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, a broad cultural movement of Greek origin, known as Hellenism, came to have profound influence over the ANE. Hellenistic constructions of sex/gender are complex and unable to be reduced to a simple formula but one stream is considered androcentric and often misogynistic.

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Influence in ancient documents is notoriously difficult to trace but one clear vehicle for transmission of Greek ideas into biblical interpretation was the Septuagint (LXX), an early (third century BCE) Greek translation of a pre-Masoretic Hebrew Vorlage.\(^{33}\) This translation became the scriptures of the scattered Jewish and early Christian communities and influenced their understanding of the Genesis text that is the subject of this study.

Among the ideas introduced by Hellenism into the circumambient culture was a dualism that drove a wedge not only between body and spirit but derivatively, between understandings of Adam and Eve.\(^{34}\) The very names Adam and Eve are the product of a change in conceptualizing of the couple. Whereas the Hebrew text speaks only of man and woman until Gen 5:1, translations beginning with the Greek LXX began the practice of ascribing the proper names Adam and Eve.\(^{35}\) Along with this came the practice of translating אשה and איש/אדם as γυνή/ἀνδρός, carrying tones of wife and husband, implying a socially-enacted contract between them.

Greek thought shaped conceptions of sex/gender across the ANE.\(^{36}\) Platonic anthropology conceived the soul as the self with the body its

\(^{33}\) The earliest extant copies of the LXX pre-dated the MT by about 500 years, until the discovery of Qumran texts. Kraus, *Gender Issues*, 11

\(^{34}\) There are conceptual and terminological links between the LXX version of Genesis 1–2 and Plato’s *Timaeus*. Martin Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung*, BZAW 223 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994).


\(^{36}\) Tikva Frymer-Kensky discusses the impact of Hellenism as part of her work on the role of goddesses in the ANE. *In the Wake*, 202–212.
receptacle. In Plato’s thought, matter, with its overtones of femaleness, became something to be overcome to attain knowledge. Viewed through such a metaphysical framework, the Eden narrative’s first creature became the universal male while the woman became his supplement. Genevieve Lloyd charts the historical association of woman with all that was not Reason. "The content of femininity, as we have it, no less than its subordinate status, has been formed within an intellectual tradition. What has happened has been not a simple exclusion of women, but a constitution of femininity through that exclusion."

Through subtle translations linking Gen 1:26 with Genesis 2, the LXX allowed the creation of woman from the male to appear to parallel the formation of generic humanity in God’s image (Gen 1:26). The man is in the image of God and the woman is in the image of the male and, by implication, subordinate in the chain of being. Similarly, the translation of הָמוֹן as ἄνδρος/γυνή loses the Hebrew pun and has the effect of losing the commonality of the two. As we shall see below, the woman’s participation became isolated from the man’s and her role was reshaped as seductress and instigator. The two complementary sexes

40. The Septuagint retains ἄνθρωπος for אדם until 2:16, retaining the word used in Genesis 1. This gives the impression that the male created is the generic human. Loader, The Septuagint, 35.
42. We note that the depiction of Eve in Greek thought showed some variation. In the middle portion of the Greek Life of Adam and Eve, composed during the first three centuries CE, is a sympathetic portrait of Eve. John R. Levison, "Ideology and Experience in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve," in Sex, Gender and Christianity, ed. Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2012), 3–32.
with a joint vocational mandate that the Eden narrative had so carefully constructed, became one natural sex (male) with a subordinate derivative (female).

Other translation subtleties contributed to the isolation of the woman. In Gen 3:13, the woman complains that the serpent נָתַת мне ("tricked me") while the Greek has ἠπάτησεν which has a range of meaning from deceive to seduce. This, combined with the shame at being naked, in the context of Hellenistic thought gave rise to notions that the sin involved sexuality. This is reinforced in 3:16. In the Greek, the woman will ἀποστροφή ("return") to her husband with constant sexual desires and he will κυριεύσει ("rule over") her. Sexual attraction, at least as it applies to women, seems to have become a curse.

One early indication of negative impact can be seen in the deuterocanonical book The Wisdom of Sirach, which dates from the early second century BCE and links Eve with sin for the first time:

Do not fall for a woman’s beauty – and do not hasten to what is hers. For in the assembly shame – a wife sustaining her husband.

Slackness of hands and weakness of knees – a wife who won’t make her husband happy.

From a woman is the start of iniquity – and because of her, we waste away, all alike.44

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These Platonic anthropologies were also combined with folkloristic motifs, such as the myth of Pandora45 and the Lilith myth46 to further darken conceptions of women and skew the notion of partnership.47

**Philo (25 BCE–50 CE)**

Philo’s works register the continuing impact of the cultural environment on interpretations of the Eden narrative. Philo was the author of an early exegesis of

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45. Hesiod’s story, *Works and Days*, provides the only Greek source pertaining to woman’s creation. In this story, dating from about 700 BCE, the god Zeus becomes angry at Prometheus, whereupon Zeus hides the celestial fire. Prometheus steals the fire from Zeus and brings it to men. To punish men for having received this illicit gift, Zeus counters with the creation of anti pyros, “a beautiful evil,” who is a continuous source of harm to men. Pandora (called such because the gods gave her gifts to make her a beautiful pitfall for men) is sent to Prometheus’ brother, Epithemeus, who foolishly accepts her as a gift from Zeus. She opens the jar of evil, releasing all the evils and diseases that silently and invisibly wander over the earth. This depiction is strongly negative of women, holding a seductive woman responsible for all evils on earth. William E. Phipps, *Genesis and Gender: Biblical Myths of Sexuality and their Cultural Impact* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 40–49.

46. A closer link can be found between conceptions of Eve and the Mesopotamian Lilith myth. The earliest evidence of Lilith is found in a Sumerian list from 2400 BCE that describes “Lilu-demons” who would visit sleeping men to seduce them and produce grotesque children. She is associated with two other deities, Ishtar and Lamastu and expresses two aspects of them: a Lamastu aspect which is responsible for torturing pregnant women and kidnapping newborns, and an Ishtar aspect, a seductress who entices men. Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (Zurich: Daimon Verlag, 2007), 32. On Lamastu, see Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1992), 115–16. The myth of Lilith is extraordinarily resilient, spanning many centuries. Incantation bowls dating between 900 and 1800 CE carrying Lilith’s image were found in what were formerly Babylonia and Persia. These bowls, placed at liminal places in homes, carried incantations, appealing her, keeping her away from homes and ’divorcing’ her from any males she seduced. She appears in the Talmud and in midrashim in the rabbinic period, and, at about the same time (300–600 CE), in incantation bowls in Nippur in Babylonia where the Tigris and Euphrates meet, in an area thought to be a site of Jewish settlement. Lilith also crosses cultures. We see her on ornaments for Greek tombs in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. In some Greek literature, she is none other than the siren – a divinity who is avid for blood and hostile to the living. Jo Milgrom, “Some Second Thoughts About Adam’s First Wife,” in *Genesis 1–3 in the History of Exegesis*, ed. Gregory A. Robbins (New York, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 225–53. The Lilith myth does not appear to have had a significant impact on Christian writing about Eve, possibly because it was so heterodox. John Flood, *Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2011), 45.

the LXX translation of the Pentateuch influential among medieval scholars and he was considered an honorary Church Father. In his retelling of the creation story, a primary androgyne was created in God’s image (Genesis 1). In a second stage, a male is created first representing mind (nous), and from him, woman, symbolising sense-perception (aesthesis), as helper and ally of mind (Genesis 2). She then, was the source of the fall of man, her senses falling prey to the wiles of the serpent. After describing the creation of woman, Philo writes:

But when the woman also was created, man perceiving a closely connected figure and a kindred formation of his own, rejoiced at the sight, and approached her and embraced her. And she, in like manner, beholding a creature greatly resembling herself, rejoiced also, and addressed him in reply with due modesty. . . . And this desire caused likewise pleasure to their bodies, which is the beginning of iniquities and transgressions, and it is owing to this that men have exchanged their previously immortal and happy existence for one which is mortal and full of misfortune.

Philo’s interpretation shows two threads which would become part of NT and patristic understandings. First, he articulates the idea that the woman was created secondarily and derivatively as a supplement to the man. The woman is twice-fallen, once from the human of pure spirit and then also from the male. Second, the woman is associated with carnality and sin. Male desire for her results in a fall, and that, even before the fruit of the tree is desired and eaten.


49. For a helpful discussion of Philo’s thought on two sexes, see Lloyd, Man of Reason, 22–28.


We can see the influence of Platonic dualism – the separation of body and mind – and note how the body is increasingly linked with the woman and a site of disruption and angst.

Some Preliminary Conclusions

We pause here in our chronicle to isolate some of the developing themes in the reception history and discuss their relevance to this thesis. We note first the confusion around the question of the first human being, caused in part by the existence of two creation narratives. Is there one human, androgynous in form, later divided into two sexes? Or are there two beings, from their origin, male and female? The Hellenistic environment reflected in the writings of Philo assumed a single-sex beginning of humankind. Explaining the agential woman then became a problem requiring imaginative solutions.

The idea of the androgyne is one that existed in the wider cultural milieu. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Aristophanes tells an androgynous tale. There were three kinds of humans, a double male, a double female and an androgyne, each with double organs and four arms and legs. Because they planned to climb to the heavens and make war on the gods, Zeus decided to bisect each to diminish their power. After each was cut in two, each half yearned for the other, entwined arms around each other and desired to grow together.

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53. Plato, *The Symposium*, 189–93. William Phipps notes that, in this myth, sex is related to sectioning. The term *sex* comes from Latin verb *secare*, to cut, and Aristophanes’ speech is probably the etymological source of the metaphor. The androgynous myths picture not only an
These myths attest to curiosity about the mystery of human sexuality and attempts to explain its origin. While the Genesis Eden narrative has some resonances with these androgyne myths, it is also very different, insisting on a separate creation process for the creation of sex/gender in humans and a very positive initial impulse toward complementarity as the basis of unity. It is indeed interesting to observe the absence from other ANE creation narratives of the separate creation of woman.

The androgyne myths are the closest we come to a recognizable sense of complementarity in very early literature. They assert something that biology and psychology have since established: that masculinity and femininity are not absolute poles but are to be conceived as positions on a continuum. At the same time, we note the ready imposition of male priority onto this promising base. It is hard to resist the conclusion that sexual differentiation was seen to cause both complexity and pain. The wider patriarchal culture could not but assume male priority and therefore read the already androcentric creation stories to reassert sex/gender hierarchy.

Another theme coming to prominence at this stage in our survey is the association of the woman with sex and derivatively, with sin. As we will see, it will develop further into clear sexism in the NT and the patristic writings.

54. Seen in the separation of אדם into two sexed beings and in their move toward unity.

55. Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake, 30.

56. The word “sexism” is chosen here to draw attention to passages that set alternate directives to women solely on the basis of their sex, that make use of stereotypes, and proscribe women’s practice in the church thus conforming with the definition: “Prejudice or discrimination based on original wholeness and sexual separation but also a voluntary division. Greek myth endorses homosexual bonding as well as heterosexual. Genesis and Gender, 12–13.
especially seen in the work of Augustine. Once the body was seen to be an inferior partner to the mind, it became easy to link it with women’s more visible bodily (reproductive) functions and the associated awe and fear. Folkloristic motifs in the ambient cultures, such as the Lilith and Pandora myths, provided ballast for the further isolation and impugning of women and the resultant impoverishment of the partnership motif.

The picture of the development of misogyny is by no means monolithic as the deuterocanonical book of Jubilees, an ancient Jewish work dated to the second century BCE, shows. While Hellenism was working in one direction, a different stream of interpretation is evidenced in this work. Here the writer has consciously rewritten the Eden narrative to bring the woman to full characterization with the man.\(^{57}\) The first human is a composite of a man and a woman made up of Adam and ‘the rib, his wife’, but this human is a male with an undeveloped female aspect.\(^{58}\) This reveals the basic premise of the author’s sex/gender understandings: masculinity is the dominant principle of the natural order while femininity is a potential coexistent with the creation of humanity. Without full development of its female potential, however, the human creature, for all its male dominance, is inadequate. These themes continued in rabbinic writings, to be reviewed later in this study.\(^{59}\)

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sex; behaviour, conditions or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1141.


59. See pp.208–211.
Section Two: Early Christian Perspectives

New Testament Gospels

Genesis was an important resource for Christian writing and theology and the Eden narrative played a prominent part. In Christian reflection on the subject of sex/gender, the words and actions of Jesus are significant but the gospels preserve a less than comprehensive account of Jesus’ thinking on the Eden narrative.

The Gospel of Mark records an incident when Jesus responds to a question about divorce (10:2–12 //Matt 19:4–9). Jesus’s response takes them back to Genesis:

He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this command for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.” Mark 10:3–9

Jesus quotes here from two parts of Genesis: 1:27 “Male and female he made them,” and 2:24: “a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh.” He quotes verbatim from the LXX except for the bracketed

phrase "and be joined to his wife." The addition of this phrase, which also appears in the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Peshitta, the Vulgate and the Arabic, may represent an attempt to strengthen support for monogamy. In the time of Jesus there is evidence of polygamy practised among the Jewish community. Jesus, like the Essene community, gives strong support for monogamy and life-long marriage based on the Genesis text.

Jesus’s response is a direct challenge to the patriarchal functioning of divorce in the first century. The LXX, through its linking of Gen 2:24 to Gen 1:27 places an emphasis on unity rather than the subtle unity-in-difference achieved in the Hebrew pun (אשה from איש). While the Pharisees wanted to debate the reasons whereby a man may divorce his wife, Jesus, the ultimate interpreter of the law, by-passes Moses and takes them back to the divinely intended unity of the first couple in the Eden narrative.

New Testament Epistles

Incubated in the same Judaeo-Hellenistic cultural milieu as Philo’s works, were the various epistles that came to be canonized as part of the Christian New


62. The MT of Gen 2:24 lacks reference to the two that would strengthen it as a counsel of monogamy. The text then is ambivalent as evidence of divine preference for monogamy. Polygamy was presumed in the ANE and the Hebrew patriarchs practiced it.


64. Loader, *The Septuagint*, 79–82.

Reflection on the Genesis creation narratives are a prominent component in Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writers but the texts also show the influence of secondary interpretations of Genesis from the Second Temple period. This brief survey will not attempt to exegete those passages but will note the differing ways that Genesis has been used to develop argumentation around the significance of the coming of Christ for sex/gender conceptions and for matters of church order.

Many allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 frame Paul's argument in 1 Cor 11:2–12 where he contends for a hierarchical social and ecclesial order on the basis of his reading of the LXX texts. He highlights Eve's creation εκ του ἀνδρα “from the man” and δια του ἀνδρα “for the sake of the man.” This reading of Genesis 2 controls his reading of Genesis 1. Man is the image and glory of God while the woman is simply the glory of man. This argument may represent the influence

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66. Helen Schüngel-Straumann argues that the Genesis texts were read against a literary environment of tendentious exegesis of the Eden narrative, including the Book of Jubilees, and the Testament of Twelve Patriarchs. "On the Creation of Man and Woman," 55–64.


68. Richard Hays helpfully analyzes the different ways that intertextuality may be detected in Pauline texts. For this study, we are using the more audible examples in which writers cite and allude to Genesis 2–3. Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 1–33.

69. The LXX misinterprets the change of Hebrew verb from singular to plural in Gen 1:27 to construct an argument that women bear only a limited God-likeness. Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation of Man and Woman,” 63. The LXX translated Gen 2:20 as βοηθὸς ὁμοίος ἀὐτῶ “a helper like him.” This recalls 1:26 where God created man in God’s likeness. As a result, a reading can emerge in which man is in the image of God and the woman is in the likeness of the man. Paul seems to have this understanding in 1 Cor 11:3 and 11:6. William Loader, Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 2013), 18.
of the Gnostic notion of a chain of being, which dictates that woman and man should know their place and not abandon the symbols of their status.

This androcentrism continues in Paul’s use of Adam to create a typology of Christ in Rom 5:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45–49. Paul compares the first human, who brought sin, to the second Adam, Christ, who brought salvation. In his argument, since Christ is an individual, so, too, must be Adam. Paul sees Adam’s actions as allowing death into the world. In the process, the woman of the Eden narrative is erased from the story. In Paul’s exegesis, Adam carries all the responsibility for the introduction of sin into the world.

This seemingly tendentious use of the Eden narrative is explained by Paul’s use of the LXX text. It is also a function of Paul’s determination to understand and explain the significance of the unique Christological event using HB themes and figures. In doing so, he canonizes a particular reading of the Genesis narrative that loses sight of the partnership of woman and man. In our next example we see an interesting variation of that theme that registers the impact of the LXX and Hellenistic literature on early Christian theology.

Citations and allusions to Gen 2:24 in Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings (1 Cor 6:12–20; 11:2–6; 2 Cor 11:2–3; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:21–33) suggest ongoing reflection not only about marriage but also about uses of the marriage

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70. James Barr sees influence in Paul from the Wisdom of Solomon and IV Ezra and concludes: “. . . it is in certain later strata of the Old Testament, including books that are outside the present Hebrew canon, that the real grounds for the Pauline understanding of Adam and Eve are to be found.” *The Garden of Eden*, 18.

71. There seem to be variety of ideas in Second Temple literature about whether Adam or Eve was the originator of sin. Compare Sir. 25:24 with Wis. 2:23–24. See also Konrad Schmid, “Loss of Immortality? Hermeneutical Aspects of Genesis 2–3 and Its Early Reception,” 58–78.
metaphor for understandings of ecclesiology. Deuterocanonical and other Second Temple literature show developing reflection on Gen 2:24. These reveal an intriguing mosaic of HB themes that are rooted in the Genesis text. These include notions of passionate love, the idea of faithfulness (linked with the words usually translated ‘cleaving’), and themes of covenant and marriage. The specific NT advancement of these prominent HB themes is the transposition of Christ and church for God and Israel. We also cannot help but note that the notion of a new decisive kinship adumbrated through the creation and the resulting relationship of female and male in Genesis 2, lies behind the argument developed in 1 Cor 6:12–20 and Eph 5:15–20. The new, powerful kinship of the female/male relationship has become in Pauline theology the model for understanding the powerful kinship of the church and Christ.

It is nevertheless clear that the order and hierarchical structure of the Greco-Roman household is also a strong influence on NT epistles. The Deutero-Pauline epistle of 1 Timothy, written in the late first century or early second century CE, dictates a double submission for woman: she is to have no authority to teach in the church and no authority over a man (2:11–15). These strictures are based on a particular interpretation of the seeming consecutive creation of Adam and Eve, combined with the idea that Eve alone was deceived. We note the solidification of the motifs noted in earlier literature, of the first human as a


named male, Adam, and the isolation of Eve as the only one deceived. The writer of 1 Timothy reflects Greco-Roman expectations of the behaviour of women while referring to the LXX version of the Genesis narratives. They show little sign of the critical eschatological reflection that begins to influence Pauline thinking in Ephesians and Galatians. The author asserts that in the new economy of the Kingdom, “there is no male and female” (Gal 3:28). Exegesis of what this means in Pauline theology is beyond the scope of the present study but there are hints that Paul understood that the Christ event entailed a radical re-assessment of social sex/gender formulations for the early church.

Post-Biblical Interpretation: Church Fathers (Second to Fifth Century CE)

We see in the writings of Church Fathers, the further development of an anthropology that abstracted women and normalised men even as it shaped

74. In 1 Timothy, the author reflects literature of the day. Plutarch (46–125 CE) gives differentiated advice to the married couple: “For a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband and should not feel aggrieved if, like the flute-player, she makes a more impressive sound through a tongue not her own.” Conjugalia Praecepta, 32. See also Aageson, “Genesis,” 119–24. Of further interest to our study, is the framing of the woman's role around child-bearing (“Yet she will be saved through child-bearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” 1 Tim 2:15). The subtle shift from singular to plural subject in this verse gives the sense of a universal prescription from which no woman is exempt. We see here an early Christian adoption of essentialist sex/gender characteristics which still influence conservative church traditions today as well as an early iteration of hagiographic Madonna conceptions of true womanhood.


negative perceptions of women.\textsuperscript{77} Genesis texts were appropriated to identify ‘woman’ with ‘Eve’, drawing apostolic authority from the limitations on women enjoined in 1 Tim 2:11–15.\textsuperscript{78}

Intense controversy developed from the second century CE around the matter of marriage and celibacy and the Genesis narratives were central to these debates. While Fathers such as Clement read Genesis 1 as an affirmation of marriage and procreation, others discounted it, reading it as a story of an original human evolving to the true Christian – the celibate. Both Clement and Tertullian defended marriage yet encouraged marital partners to practise abstinence and urged the unmarried to be celibate.\textsuperscript{79}

Genesis, particularly the first three chapters, was central to wider theological debates, and not just those relating to the Christian practices of marriage and celibacy. Scholars in Alexandria and Antioch, places which formed two axes of biblical and theological concentration in the first four centuries CE,


\textsuperscript{79} Elaine Pagels sees this development as a Christian response to the pagan philosophy which justified undisciplined self-indulgence. The theme of human freedom, the freedom to gain mastery over passion, dominates patristic exegesis of Genesis 1–3, especially among Greek fathers for the first four centuries of the Christian era. The power of the rational will was asserted by Platonic and Stoic philosophers as well, but what Plato praised in the Symposium as the rarest of accomplishments, namely, controlled passion, Christians insisted was in reach of everyone. "Freedom From Necessity: Philosophic and Personal Dimensions of Christian Conversion," in Genesis 1–3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden, ed. Gregory A. Robbins (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 67–98, 68.
show intense interest in Genesis. Three examples provide a sample of the kinds of interpretations of the Eden narrative that took place.

Didymus the Blind, (310/313–398 CE) taught in Alexandria in the late fourth century and provides an example of allegorical exegesis. His interpretation, influenced by the work of Origen, serves a Christological purpose in which Adam refers to Christ, and Eve to the church. Like Philo, Didymus blames the woman for the primordial sin, but, whereas Philo’s interpretation rests on his anthropological understanding of man as mind and woman as sense-perception, Didymus focusses on Adam's free choice in following the woman. Adam followed Eve in sinning with the intention of saving her. Supporting his argument with a quote from 1 Timothy, Didymus argued that, just as Christ voluntarily took on flesh and in so doing, redeemed humanity, in the same way, Adam lowered himself to eating the fruit in order to be with Eve in her expulsion and thus better instruct her.80

Ambrose of Milan (333–397 CE) had a highly allegorical interpretation of the story based on a hierarchy between Adam (Christ) and Eve (church). Ambrose argued that Eve’s responsibility was less than that of Adam because Adam heard the divine proscription directly from God. The church’s progress toward salvation is mirrored in the story of Eve, in whose sentence is, ironically, the path to grace. 81 Eve’s sentence is interpreted by Ambrose as penitential, with procreation as part of the process of restoration. Woman is saved because she


81. De institutione virginis, 4:29, Reuling, After Eden, 79.
brings forth humankind. On the other hand, Ambrose lauds the celibate life over marriage.\(^{82}\)

John Chrysostom, a representative of the Antiochene school teaching in the second half of the fourth century CE, eschewed allegory. In John’s exposition of Genesis, woman and man were created with equal honor but were damaged by the transgression. Woman’s submission to man, God’s just response to the transgression, was a result of the sin and not a natural feature of creation. God’s grace is seen in the protection given by the man following her *turning* to him.\(^{83}\)

John’s focus remains eschatological. He is interested in the real effects of the consummated Kingdom of God. “Eve has made you subordinate to man, but if you want, I shall make you equal in dignity not just to man but even to the angels. She has deprived you of the present life: I shall also give you the future life, which is incorruptible and immortal and full of countless goods.”\(^{84}\)

We note that there were different versions and translations of the HB in use through the early Christian centuries which produced varied interpretations. Most of the church Fathers used the LXX. Apart from Jerome, very few of the Fathers knew enough Hebrew to use the consonantal text. This, in part, explains the dual trajectories of Genesis interpretation taken by Church Fathers and Jewish rabbis, whose work was based on the consonantal MT and was probably based on a different *Vorlage* than that of the LXX. Jerome’s Vulgate was a

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translation into Latin from the Hebrew made around 400 CE. His rendering of Genesis stays close to the Hebrew, preserving some of the ambiguities of the consonantal text.

**Conclusions: Early Church Fathers**

In the work of early Church Fathers, Genesis 2–3 was put to use to construct a theology of the church. The Fathers in general neglected Gen 1:27, indicating that female and male were simultaneously created.\(^85\) The allegorical interpretations of the Alexandrian school linked Adam with Christ and Eve with the church. Implicit sex/gender assumptions are embedded in these works: that the relations between men and woman are hierarchical is a given; that the woman is responsible for an ongoing tendency to sin in the human race is also presumed.

Stereotyping and universalizing characterized the Fathers’ depiction of women. The church’s efforts at self-definition against Gnosticism with its denigration of the material world, did not aid the cause of women.\(^86\) As ascetic currents came to prominence in the church, women as representative of sexuality and procreation, were further displaced.

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85. Elizabeth A. Clark and Diane F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, The Oaken Cross: The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 152. John Chrysostom accounts for this inconvenient verse by stating that it was relating in advance what was described in detail in Genesis chapter two.

There is evidence of a few women who took to ‘house asceticism’ or established communal monasteries for women.\textsuperscript{87} That we have no access to the writings of these scholars, speaks volumes about the social hierarchies of the day. Two were interlocutors of Jerome and obviously had his respect yet none of their writings was cherished enough to survive the passage of time. These few women scholars had to renounce their social location and even their womanhood to become Bible scholars, ironically confirming the dominant male perspective in biblical scholarship.

Faltonia Betitia Proba (ca. 320–370 CE) had a classical education and is the earliest known Christian poet. She wrote a \textit{cento}\textsuperscript{88} (\textit{Cento Virgilianus}) based on the work of Virgil, which is the only complete, extant writing known to be composed by a woman in the patristic period.\textsuperscript{89} In the \textit{cento}, there is a positive view of woman’s creation.\textsuperscript{90} Proba, however, follows her male colleagues in

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\textsuperscript{87} These included Macrina the Younger (330–379 CE), sister to Cappadocians, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, who established a religious community in Pontus; Marcella (327–410 CE), a wealthy Roman who helped found a community of biblical scholarship in Rome; and Paula who established a monastery for women in Jerusalem. Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, \textit{Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2012), 338–40; 44–46; 400–01.
\textsuperscript{88} “\textit{A cento} is a patchwork of lines and half-lines from the work of a poet, combined so as to be different in content and sometimes in tone from the original.” Taylor and Choi, \textit{Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters}, 412.
\textsuperscript{89} The survival of the manuscript was possibly due to the need for subtle Christian material following the decree of Emperor Julian who, in 362 CE, forbade Christians to teach in schools. Clark and Hatch, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 98–99; 151.
\textsuperscript{90} “...And now in the middle course of the shady night, The Almighty Sire laid the ribs and entrails bare.
One of these ribs he plucked apart from
The well-knit joints of youthful Adam’s side,
And suddenly arose a wondrous gift –
Imposing proof – and shone in brilliant light;
Woman, a virgin she, unparalleled
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emphasizing Eve's secondary status and her responsibility for the doom of the human race. Eve is cast as a temptress. When Eve offers the fruit to Adam, the serpent entices her: “You are his wife. It is right for you to test his will by pleading” (line 194). Eve then uses her wiles, appealing to her husband “with sudden sweetness” (line 205). It is significant, admittedly an argument from silence, that Proba nowhere comments on 3:16. Women’s subjection to men is not mentioned, nor is the toil of childbirth. She brings little female subjectivity to her interpretations of Genesis 1–3.

Rabbinic Interpretations

We earlier noted the variant interpretation of the Eden narrative in the Jewish work, the Book of Jubilees (second century BCE). Within the Judaism of the first centuries CE, some of these differing sex/gender ideologies were developing. Although rabbinic Judaism had no univocal position on sex/gender, there are some interesting tendencies evident in many midrashim that comment on Genesis 1–3. This encourages us to pause and explore these works from a different religious tradition for relevance to our theme.

In figure and in comely breasts, now ready
For a husband, ready now for wedlock.”


92. Individual rabbinic traditions are notoriously difficult to date. Because of the collective nature of the midrashim, developed and edited over time, definitive dates are hard to establish. The rabbinic period, however, is generally held to be 70–1000 CE.

93. Midrashim are collective documents reflecting the voices of many rabbis, meant to open up discussion of issues rather than providing one definitive meaning. As such, they are a different type of literature to the treatises and sermons which we have thus far encountered. Midrashim have a political tendency, reflecting the fact that many were compiled and edited in the period when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire (early fourth century). Like much of the literature we have already referenced in this chapter, they were compiled through an
Rabbinic Judaism can be seen as a reform movement not only against Hellenistic Judaism (exemplified by Philo) but also against Christian anthropologies. Rabbinic Judaism, the cultural formation of most of the Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Jews of Palestine and Babylonia, was substantially different in its discourses of the body and sexuality from Greek-speaking Jewish groups and also much of Christianity. 94

The major source of information about rabbinic interpretation of Genesis is Genesis Rabbah, an exegetical collection completed sometime before 500 CE. 95 Its significance lies in the fact that, judging from the number of citations and quotations in later commentaries, it is the leading midrash on Genesis. 96 The political context of its redaction was the period of the triumph of Christianity as part of the Roman state, which caused much reflection on the past history and the future destiny of Israel.

androcentric process, being composed by male scholars gathered in Jewish academies for preaching purposes. Learning took place in the context of dialogue with the understanding that meaning for that reading community will emerge. As such, it is a religious rather than a literary process. For further discussion of the nature and method of midrashim, see Reuling, After Eden, 171–80.

94. Daniel Boyarin persuasively argues this case. Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 1–30. Significantly, this was recognised by Fathers such as Augustine of Hippo who castigated the Jews for their emphasis on sex and reproduction. Augustine wrote: “Behold Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor 10:18). This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.” Tractatus adversus Judaeos, 7, 9, quoted in Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 1. See also Paul Morris, “Exiled From Eden: Jewish Interpretations of Genesis,” in A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden, ed. Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, JSOTSUp (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 117–66.


*Genesis Rabbah* declares its different perspective by paying more attention to Genesis 1 and 2 than Genesis 3. Whereas patristic writers found in Adam and Eve’s sin a decisive breach in history, the rabbis have a different view. According to this *midrash*, whereas the wicked drive God out, the righteous create room for God to dwell on earth. Adam is of limited importance, as only the first of the pre-Abrahamite generations. The real emphasis is on Abraham and Moses and the giving of *torah*, which was God’s plan from the beginning. This relativizes the sin of Adam (and by association, that of Eve). Consequently, the motif of expulsion from the garden is more potent than that of paradise (more attention is paid to Gen 3:22–24, for instance, than the preceding decrees) because it mirrors the disasters and hopes of the Jewish people. By fulfilling *torah*, Israel can find her way back to the tree of life and regain the promised land.

Unlike the focus of the patristic writers, the penal aspect of the divine decrees of Gen 3:14–19 is not highlighted in *Genesis Rabbah*. This reader is struck by the grounded, realistic appreciation of the difficulties of procreation:

> Your toil, refers to the pain of conception; your pregnancy, to the discomfort of carrying a child; in pain, to the sufferings of miscarriages; shall you bring forth, the agony of childbirth; children, to the suffering involved in the upbringing of children. R. Eleazar b. R Simeon said: “It is easier for a man to grow myriads of olives in Galilee than to rear one child in Eretz Israel.”

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The midrash seems reluctant to attribute pain-filled childbearing, the natural result of marriage, to human sin, aligning with preceding parts of the midrash that recount the wedding of Adam and Eve in positive terms.

Two parts of the midrash are relevant to 3:16b. Unlike that of the patristic scholars, the rabbinical text reads תשוקה ("desire") not תשובה ("turning"). The political message is that Israel, like the woman, has been weak and turns to await now the salvation of God, figured as her husband ("yet your desire shall be for your man"). On another level, we note the normality and naturalness of the woman’s desire for the man, listed alongside other experienced desires, and its lack of attribution to her sin.99

The polyvalent nature of midrashim is seen in some more clearly gendered comments on parts of Genesis, evidenced in the midrash on Gen 2:22 which develops the gender essentialist qualities that we have noticed in patristic texts. The woman is seen as Other and the subtext is that she needs to be controlled.100

In contrast, another text from Genesis Rabbah discusses the reasons for woman’s creation and adopts a less misogynistic tone: “It is not good [Genesis 2:18].’ It was taught: “Anyone who is in a wifeless state is without goodness, without help, without happiness, without blessing and without atonement.”101 As with the previous extract, this midrash also includes a list of HB examples to illustrate the positives of having a ‘household’ (meaning, ‘wife’).

100. Genesis Rabbah 18, Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, 1:162–163.
101. Excerpted from Genesis Rabbah 17:2; Theodor and Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabba, 1:151–52.
Conclusions – Rabbinic Writings

We can safely conclude that there was no monolithic construction of sex/gender. The interests of the *midrash* are more global – providing a wide lens on life in Israel under the political conditions in which it found itself in the fourth and fifth centuries. Nevertheless, many *midrashim* reveal certain assumptions about sex/gender. The rabbis have a more positive conception of the body and sexuality as part of marriage and little interest in celibacy as a spiritual practice. Desire and sexuality are de-linked from the transgression, and, along with the details of the reproductive lives of women, are considered natural phenomena. Many *midrashim* thus give evidence of more contact with the lives of women. Underneath the persistent sexism lies an appreciation of the partnership of women and men. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Jewish tradition has stayed closer to the trajectories of the HB than the early Christian interpretations which seem to have been more strongly influenced by the LXX and Hellenism. This conclusion will be further discussed in chapter nine.

Augustine (354–430 CE)

The writings of Augustine of Hippo have had strong impact on the development of Western Christianity.\(^\text{102}\) Genesis figures prominently in much of his work and

\(^\text{102}\) Willemien Otten, “The Long Shadow of Human Sin: Augustine on Adam, Eve and the Fall, in a Feminist Theological Perspective,” in *Out of Paradise: Adam and Eve and Their Interpreters*, eds. Bob Becking and Susanne Hennecke (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 29–49. Peter Brown attributes to Augustine great influence over Western Christian views of sexuality: “For the next millennium of Western Christendom, the experience of sexuality tended to be frozen in a single paradigm of enormous power. The idea that the deepest meaning of the experiences associated with sexuality is to be approached in terms of a *poena reciproca*, . . . meant in practice a widespread conviction . . . that the meaning of a diffuse and multivalent aspect of the human person had been imposed upon it, unilaterally and univalently, by God . . . . As a result, sexuality would never be trivial in the West.” “Augustine and Sexuality” (paper presented at the Forty Sixth Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies, Berkeley, Calif, 1983), 12–13.
his views on the body and sex/gender issues, which changed over the course of his lifetime, have attracted much scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{103}

The Christian culture of the time shared with the wider culture an understanding of an ordered hierarchical cosmos. The higher, spiritual beings and the lower physical beings were incompatible and could be joined only by a hierarchy of intermediate beings. God, as Father, oversaw a cosmic order in which social relationships were ordered hierarchically one to the other. A man was considered the woman’s head and woman’s behaviour could shame men unless tightly constrained with legal and social rules.\textsuperscript{104} Augustine’s writing initially assumed much of this divine order. Women did not bear the \textit{imago dei} as did a man.\textsuperscript{105} Over the course of his life, however, Augustine came to appreciate that the incarnation of Christ flattened the vertical hierarchy. God had directly joined human flesh and Augustine’s later work in Genesis showed a greater appreciation of the physical body.\textsuperscript{106}


\textsuperscript{104} The conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 CE had seen the movement from house churches to worship in public buildings. This removed women from leadership roles as social pressures influenced the church. Karen Jo Torjesen, \textit{When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination after the Rise of Christianity} (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1993), 3.


\textsuperscript{106} Brown, \textit{Augustine and Sexuality}, 9.
On becoming bishop in 395 CE, he responded to the debates between Jerome and Jovinian. The debate crystallised around the question of whether marriage was a divinely ordained state with origins in the bond between Adam and Eve, or whether it was a practical but inferior solution for sinful humans. In 400 CE, he began a treatise, *De bono conjugali* (*On the Good of Marriage*) in which he reflected on the Genesis narratives. While he certainly held to gender hierarchy, he believed that the relationship between Adam and Eve was not only for procreation. There were elements of friendship, albeit not an equal one. Adam and Eve were close friends in paradise and their friendship was intensified by their kinship, as woman had come from man:

> Every human being is part of the human race, and human nature is a social identity and has naturally the great benefit and power of friendship. For this reason God wished to produce all persons out of one, so that they would be held together in their social relationships, not only by the similarity of race, but also by the bond of kinship. The first natural bond of human society, therefore, is that of husband and wife.  

At the same time as he was working on *De bono conjugali*, he was writing *De sancta virginitate* (*On Holy Virginity*), making clear that sexual continence is necessary for the kingdom of heaven and that virginity is the portion of angels. Augustine developed a model of the church in which different modes of life—marriage, virginity, monastic life—all have their place in a church as an earthly community called to be holy. This reminds us to take note of the wider cultural

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109. “With an eye on this Christian commonwealth, the same person who as an adolescent was so in love with being in love was now able to broaden his personal experience of sexual activity and abstinence into a workable picture for the Church of his time, including all and excluding none.” Otten, “Augustine on Marriage,” 405.
context in which Augustine was writing and the broader argument that he was developing as he commented on Genesis passages.

In another work, De Genesi ad litteram (The Literal Meaning of Genesis), a commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis, written over fifteen years and completed in 415 CE, he concluded that the creation of woman was primarily for procreational purposes:

Or if it was not for help in producing children that a wife was made for the man, then what other help was she made for? If it was to till the earth together with him, there was as yet no hard toil to need such assistance; and if there had been the need, a male would have made a better help. The same can be said about companionship, should he grow tired of solitude. How much more agreeably, after all, for conviviality and conversation would two male friends live together on equal terms than man and wife?¹¹⁰

This is part of a wider understanding of sexuality that understood the feminine as symbolising concupiscence. A suspicion of desire linked to the discourse of Eve’s hubris, encouraged continence (and even celibacy) in sexual relations between married people.¹¹¹ For Augustine, concupiscence is the reminder of the first paradigmatic sin of humanity, that moment when the woman and man realised their nakedness and hid, withdrawing themselves from others and from God.¹¹²

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¹¹¹ De bono coniugali 6.6. Augustine, Marriage and Virginity, ed. Rotelle, vol.1/9, 37. Kim Power points out the confusion created by the encouragement of a man to love his wife but not her body. Veiled Desire, 229.

¹¹² Brown, Augustine and Sexuality, 10–11.
Although Augustine’s view of marriage was in some ways positive, it was strongly tethered to the paradigm of the spiritual marriage of Christ and church, from which genuine mutuality could not proceed. Mirroring social relations, masculine power became a metaphor for Christ and the church, which concomitantly provided the model for husband and wife.113

Augustine remains a figure of some ambiguity. He, like others of his time, wrote about women but without evidence of having considered their perspectives.114 He maintained to the end a hierarchical view of woman/man relationships. While John Chrysostom took gender hierarchy to be a result of sin, Augustine was convinced woman and man were never meant to be equal. The sting of the punishment of Gen 3:16 seems to reside in the way rule is exercised rather than the fact of hierarchy, which, for Augustine, was a given.115

In reviewing the work of Augustine, we find it difficult to extract the notions of women, sexuality, sin and shame from his complex theologies of church, state and humanity. We search in vain for an understanding of partnership that is not enmeshed with wider anthropological and ecclesiastical symbolism. This is consistent with the idea that sex/gender anthropologies lie at the heart of social systems and shape the discourse that describes those systems. There is no secular field of sex/gender understandings that reveal themselves without first coming to grips with the theological discourse of which they are a

114. Augustine had lived in a faithful relationship for twelve years and raised a son before adopting celibacy. Greenblatt, The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve, 85–86.
part. Augustine’s complex work on marriage and sexuality reveals this nexus better than any we have studied thus far.

Medieval Women’s Writings on Genesis

The first known attempts to correct androcentric readings and read the Bible with attention to women were made by isolated female scholars in the Middle-Ages such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Christine de Pizan (1364–1430). These were two significant early attempts at recognition of the Eden pair as complementary beings. Although neither Hildegard nor de Pizan challenged the social status quo, their work represents a fresh and largely unrecognized literary achievement in reading toward mutuality. Hildegard formulated a sophisticated anthropology of partnership based on her reading of Genesis 1–3, maintaining that God has given the power of begetting not to man or woman alone but to the human couple. She expressed a mutual obligation within a patriarchal culture: woman and man are jointly enabled to reflect God’s creativity and this is seen in practical ways.116

In 1405, Christine de Pizan wrote a florid novel, The Book of the City of Ladies, challenging the Aristotelian notion that women are regarded as made of inferior stuff. Recognising the power of the Eden narrative in perceptions of women, de Pizan countered with a reading of that narrative that argued for women’s equality. With theological sophistication, she drew attention to the risk

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of charging God with creating an imperfect being. Her work was a literary act of protest against the assumed bases of women’s inferiority.\textsuperscript{117}

Along with the Pauline epistles, the Genesis creation narratives were the focus of female Bible interpreters of the Renaissance period.\textsuperscript{118} Isolated but significant examples of their work remain and commend themselves for their robust tone.\textsuperscript{119} Limited access to education and their lack of access to academic study meant that many wrote for popular audiences rather than the academy.

Conclusion

We have roamed widely in our analysis of readings of the Eden narrative. We have travelled from intertextual appropriations within the HB, through Second Temple, NT, patristic, rabbinic and early women’s readings. We have found very different ways of apprehending the Genesis text. No school or source was engaged in constructing a comprehensive thesis about sex/gender. To the extent, however, that all believed that the Eden narrative had something important to say about the life of faith which bore strongly on questions of sex and gender, we are emboldened to draw some tentative conclusions.

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\textsuperscript{118} Gerda Lerner notes that women were repeatedly forced to reinvent the wheel of Bible interpretation because of their isolated locations. Gerda Lerner, “One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism,” in \textit{The Creation of Feminist Consciousness} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166. Carol Newsom regards the process differently: that women, regardless of their station or the period in which they wrote, encountered the texts as misogynistic and thus defended themselves. “Women as Biblical Interpreters Before the Twentieth Century,” in \textit{Women’s Bible Commentary}, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox), 11–24.

\textsuperscript{119} One example is Arcangela Tarabotti, who, in 1654, wrote \textit{Paternal Tyranny}, a feisty defense of Eve and all womanhood. Greenblatt, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve}, 134–36.
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The history of reception of the Eden narrative thus far shows divergent understandings of sex/gender anthropology. Rabbinic writings show a robust view of sexuality and reproduction in marriage with an appreciative understanding that partnership between men and women completes and continues the work of creation. Many Midrashim come closer to having an integrated view of the place of gendered humanity in God’s creation suggesting the conclusion that Jewish tradition has stayed closer to the trajectories within the HB, while early Christian receptions moved away under Hellenistic influence. This conclusion will be examined further in chapter nine.

Works of the Second Temple period reveal the influence of the Hellenistic thought-world, mainly through the LXX, with the concomitant reductive notions of partnership. This represents a major deflection of some of the key ideas that were formed and expressed within the biblical literature. Threads of deep sexism and occasionally vicious misogyny, track through writings on the Eden narrative. The cultural impact of Hellenism, which brought Platonic views to bear on Bible interpretation, was significant. Woman, with her visible reproductive functions, became associated with the material, while man remained spiritual. It was but a small step to then associate woman with the origin of sin, a step boldly taken by the writer of the Wisdom of Sirach in the second century BCE. Woman became temptress, a designation already part of the symbolic capital of the age due to the Lilith and Pandora myths. In thus separating and problematizing the woman, the partnership envisaged in the Eden narrative fades from view. The problem of Eve enters Christian thinking and never really leaves.
NT writers, influenced by the LXX and absorbed by instructing the young church in its life, were only beginning to grasp the sex/gender implications of the new Christological framework. Patristic scholars have a theological perspective which includes women only incidentally and usually, negatively. The Eden narrative, and in particular, the NT use of that story, is conscripted for use in broad theological arguments addressing the issues of their day. Following the work of Augustine of Hippo, the notion of original sin moulded mainstream Christian exegesis of Genesis 3, giving a distinctive coloration to reflections about the woman/man pair.

We also noted the growth of sophisticated anthropologies and theologies that developed around the Eden narrative, culminating in the work of Augustine. Far from being peripheral to conceptions of God, we have found that sex/gender understandings are foundational to social architecture and thus central to the theologies that seek to order it.

All traditions brought their own presuppositions and cultural specificity to their work. An androcentric perspective was a given, even among those few women able to contribute their biblical scholarship. Gender hierarchy and an implied gender essentialism, part of the cultural fabric of the communities which gave rise to these writings, were all assumed and thus readily seen in the Eden narrative. Isolated women writers in the Medieval and Renaissance periods defended themselves against such interpretations but without much influence in academic circles.

The reception history of the narrative still had some centuries to travel.
Scholasticism\textsuperscript{120} and the Reformation had their own imprints to make on the Eden narrative. The Reformation brought the reaffirmation of marriage as part of the order of creation and a de-emphasis of celibacy. Education of women was seen as important. Monasteries for either men or women were abolished, as was clerical celibacy. The patriarchal family was now stressed as the nucleus of the church, to be modeled by the married pastor and his obedient wife and children.\textsuperscript{121} Eve did not escape her mantle of culpability\textsuperscript{122} but there was recognition that she participated fully in the divine image, a marked departure from both Augustine and Scholasticism.\textsuperscript{123} Both Luther and Calvin modified the view that woman was created as man’s inferior but nevertheless were unable to see her as equal.\textsuperscript{124}

What we have charted in this review is the accession of the Eden narrative


\textsuperscript{122} From Luther’s commentary on Gen 3:1: “Satan’s cleverness is perceived also in this, that he attacks the weak part of human nature: Eve the woman, not Adam the man. Although both were created equally righteous, nevertheless, Adam had some advantage over Eve . . . .” \textit{Comm. Gen} 3.1. WA 42, 114, 1–3.


\textsuperscript{124} Luther commented: “For as the sun is more excellent than the moon . . . so the woman, although she was a most beautiful work of God, nevertheless is not equal to the male in in glory and prestige.” \textit{Comm. Gen} 1, 27, WA 42, 51, 36–52, 11. Compare Calvin \textit{Comm. Gen} 2,21, CO 23, 48–49.
to a position in Christian culture that made it the defining narrative of sex/gender anthropology. Patriarchal society had co-opted the LXX text of Genesis into its foundational discourse and found it a congenial and amenable partner in the process.

The most radical reassessment of the Eden narrative had to await feminist scholars and to the task of understanding their contribution, we now turn.
CHAPTER EIGHT: RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE EDEN NARRATIVE

PART TWO: FEMINIST AND POST-CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

The Eden narrative continued to be a critical narrative in debates around sex/gender but profound social changes were to change the terms of the discourse into ones more readily recognised today.\(^1\) Just as cultural influences produced readings that lost the partnership theme, in the same way social changes began to recover the woman of the narrative. This, however, did not entail recovery of the partnership notion.

The spread of ideas from the beginning of the eighteenth century broadly characterized as the Enlightenment, freed ideas of the body from association with a cosmic religious and philosophic framework.\(^2\) From thinking that there was only one sex with its dominance written into the architecture of the universe, came the recognition of two different sexes. “Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented. The reproductive organs went from being

\(^{1}\) Michel Foucault notes the emergence of “sexuality” and charts the discourse of sex that has developed since the seventeenth century. *The History of Sexuality.*

paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy, resonant throughout the cosmos, to being the foundation of incommensurable difference." The debate increasingly centred on the essential natures of women and men as the one-sex model gave way to appreciation of the two sexes, albeit still incommensurable by nature. Influencing this profound shift were political changes that greatly enlarged the public square thus opening the question of who should occupy it. The ideology of separate spheres developed to describe the respective social locations of women and men but it inadvertently encouraged feminism. A solidarity developed as women became aware of common restrictions. Various social movements in which women played prominent parts, such as those of temperance and abolition, gave women organising, writing, and speaking skills.

**Early Feminist Interpretations**

The Eden narrative was a critical apparatus for late eighteenth and nineteenth century ("First Wave") feminism. The status that it had gained as the source narrative of anthropologies of sex/gender held intractable weight. It was clearly

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4. Thomas Laqueur suggests that the French Revolution, the accession of a woman to the English throne were among the changes that began to shift thinking about the place of women. *Making Sex*, 194–97. Holly Morse charts the deployment of Eve since the Middle Ages in social and political works of protest. "The First Woman Question," 61–80.


a text that feminists had to reckon with in order to raise awareness of women’s issues. Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, in her book published in 1792, took issue with Milton’s view of Eve as formed for “softness and sweet attractive grace” and rejected Genesis 1–3 as the work of men designed to oppress women. Others found in Eve a symbol of female agency who brought knowledge into the world by standing up to an authoritarian God.

The most comprehensive and perhaps bravest attempt at a gynocentric reading of the Eden narrative was that of Elizabeth Cady-Stanton in The Woman’s Bible of 1898. Cady-Stanton rightly recognised the central role that the Eden narrative played in social inequalities. Using historical and text criticism and employing a hermeneutics of suspicion, Cady-Stanton and an editorial team of women wrote commentary on every text pertaining to women in the Bible. In her commentary on Gen 1:26–28, Cady-Stanton noted the simultaneous creation of the sexes in the image of God. She further postulated a feminine element in the Godhead that negates female inferiority. She dismissed Genesis 2 as mere


8. Gerda Lerner charts the vigorous engagement of women writers with the Eden narrative from the third to the twentieth century, noting that text as one of the “boulders across the paths” hindering women’s equality. “One Thousand Years,” 138–66.


11. Cady-Stanton 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.” The Woman’s Bible (New York, N.Y.: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 214.

allegory and, in her comment on the curse of Gen 3:16, opines that it was added merely to justify woman’s subordination.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite these attempts at alternate interpretations, Genesis 2–3 remained a prime source of legitimation of gender hierarchy and negative assessments of women until the late twentieth century when Second-Wave feminism began and women developed a presence in theological schools.\textsuperscript{14} Concurrent with this expansion came the destabilizing of the classic Fall explanation of the Eden narrative in favour of one that focussed on the growth model. This is not based on a hierarchy of the sexes but, instead, on the responsibility of Adam and Eve for their cultural and moral growth.\textsuperscript{15} This heralds a stream of scholarship beginning to see the complementarity implicit in the Eden narrative.\textsuperscript{16} The centuries-long stranglehold of hierarchical understandings of sex/gender began to shift, allowing new openness to notions of partnership hinted at in the work of Hildegard of Bingen and Christine de Pizan.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Cady-Stanton, \textit{The Woman’s Bible}, 23–26.

\textsuperscript{14} For a summary of key moments in Eve-related misogyny, see Greenblatt, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve}, 129–34.


\textsuperscript{16} An example is the work of Samuel Terrien who saw the author of the second creation story as one who “unabashedly admired womanhood.” The creation of woman after the man did not indicate a movement of descent from superiority to inferiority but rather pointed to man as incomplete without woman. \textit{Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 1985), 9, 11.

\textsuperscript{17} See earlier discussion pp.217–18.
Second-Wave Feminist Interpretations

Second-Wave feminism of the 1970s and '80s brought close attention to the Genesis texts from feminist scholars. Some simply dismissed it while others appropriated Eve, and the cultural baggage that came with her, to create satire. Philosopher Mary Daly brought an uncompromising critique of the Eden narrative into her philosophy of feminism in a book first published in 1973:

... the story of the Fall was an attempt to cope with the confusion experienced by human beings trying to make sense out of the tragedy and absurdity of the human condition... Its great achievement was to reinforce the problem of sexual oppression in society, so that woman's inferior place in the universe became doubly justified. Not only did she have her origin in man; she was also the cause of his downfall and all his miseries.

Although the repudiation gauntlet had been thrown down by Daly, other feminist scholars took a more rehabilitative approach. In secular academia, changes began happening in the 1970s as more literary approaches to text analysis became important. It is no surprise that many feminists began to see

18. Prominent feminists Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett both dismissed the story of Eve as a vehicle for oppression of women. Morse, “The First Woman Question,” 75.

19. The magazine *Spare Rib*, borrowing for its title a key sexist notion from the Eden narrative, launched in 1972 and was a significant vehicle for women’s ideas into the 1980’s. Morse, “The First Woman Question,” 75.


these literary approaches as new ways to read the Bible with their own perspectives.22 The most important work at that time was done by Phyllis Trible. Her 1978 book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* presented the Eden narrative using the methodology of rhetorical criticism.23 In so doing, she started to unpeel the centuries of androcentric and misogynist translation and interpretation of that story.24 It is hard to overestimate the importance of her book in its context.

Redeeming the text, she highlighted inclusive vocabulary so long lost in translation: that the אדם conventionally translated as *man* or *Adam*, is more often a general word for *humanity*. She noted that sexuality was a simultaneous creation at the point when man recognized woman as partner. She also noted the many tendentious translations of the phrase we often know only as *helpmeet* or *helper fit for him* and such like, pointing out the radical equality of the Hebrew term עזר כנראה. She showed that the differentiation of the woman from the created earthling implied neither derivation nor subordination. She also pointed out the sensitive portrayal of the woman. Far from being a limp seductress, the woman was an active, intelligent interlocutor with the snake.

A new stage of Genesis 2–3 interpretation emerged in the 1980s as people

22. Feminist Bible scholars tend to use literary and narrative criticism rather than historical criticism which has been seen as the tool of the interpretation inimical to the interests of women. Exceptions include Phyllis Bird, discussed below, and Irntraud Fischer. *Der Erzelttern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36*, BZAW 222 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994). Sarah Shectman notes the lack of communication between source critics and feminist scholars and makes a strong case for more collaboration. *Women in the Pentateuch*, 9–54.


24. Trible, listing the specifics of the traditional interpretation of male superiority and female inferiority commented: “... they fail to respect the integrity of this work as an interlocking structure of words and motifs with its own intrinsic value and meaning. In short, these ideas violate the rhetoric of the story.” *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 73.
responded to the early feminist work. There was growing recognition of what the feminist scholars had been highlighting, namely, that the locus of patriarchy was the text itself, and not only the interpretation.

Phyllis Bird saw her feminist task as exposing the androcentric and patriarchal nature of the biblical text and of the world which formed it.25 Bird worked through the Priestly (P), and what she named as the Yahwistic (J) sources, identifying differences in their gender anthropology.26 She concluded that Gen 1:26–28, a P source, was not the egalitarian clarion call that some assumed. She claimed that the sexual distinction of Genesis 1 referred only to the reproductive task, leaving unspecified the implications for social status and roles. Reviewing the P corpus as a whole, she pointed out that there was little to present P as an equal rights theologian.27 Genesis 1 can be read with the rest of P’s work where covenant and cult are androcentric.

Tradent J, in Genesis 2 and 3, on the other hand, according to Bird, was interested in the psychosocial meanings of sexuality. Companionship, the sharing of work, mutual attraction and commitment in a bond superseding all other bonds – are the ends for which אדם was created.28 Bird’s contribution was to

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25. She wrote: “Only then can we begin to deal at all adequately with the problem of how revelation can be conveyed through such flawed vehicles of grace as our Hebrew ancestors and our own prophets and teachers” in “Translating Sexist Language as a Theological and Cultural Problem,” in Missing Persons, 247.


explore the tensions in the text revealed by the two major sources. While both are androcentric, Bird’s study explored some of the textual subtlety within each source in their sex/gender presuppositions. She drew attention to the elements of mutuality implicit in the Eden narrative and launched some of the ideas being developed further in the present study.

The work of Trible and Bird may be characterized as typical of Second-Wave feminism, aiming to challenge the patriarchalism of much scholarship on Genesis. Their work made important contributions toward a developing feminist methodology that took account of shifting social paradigms such as those noted in the first section of our Reception History.

In the 1980s feminist historiography brought fresh perspectives to the Eden narrative. Carol Meyers’ work brought significant ideas from social-science

29. Ilana Pardes and Helen Schüngel-Straumann working with sources P and J, have shown the broader gender themes at work in those documents as a whole, of which Genesis 1–3 is but a small signifier. Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3,” Schüngel-Straumann, “On the Creation of Man and Woman.” See also Sarah Shectman, who argues that different sources treat women differently. Women in the Pentateuch, 170–71.

30. “The statements concerning the first man and woman must be read together with the statements of God’s interaction with the world of his creation, his promises and his demands, his sending of saviors and spokesmen (both male and female), his judgements, his forgiveness and his new creation. Israel’s best statements about woman recognize her as an equal with man, and with him jointly responsible to God and co-humanity. That Israel rarely lived up to this vision is all too apparent, but the vision should not be denied.” “Images of Women in the Old Testament,” in Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York, N.Y.: Simon Schuster, 1974), 77.

and archaeology to bear on the narrative, arguing that Genesis 2–3 is an aetiology of the conditions of highland Iron-Age Palestine and thus helps explain the 'toils' of child-birth and the reluctance of women to bear children.\textsuperscript{32} Meyers' work provided valuable context to understandings of the social conditions of Iron-Age Palestine but the link with Genesis 2–3 remains conjectural.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky's historiographical work on Mesopotamian goddesses shed valuable light on Genesis narratives.\textsuperscript{33} Among her contributions was the insight that biblical narratives, including Genesis 2–3 make no case for essential female characteristics. There is nothing distinctively 'female' about the way women are portrayed. Their goals and strategies are the same as those held by males.\textsuperscript{34} Frymer-Kensky also drew attention to the influence of Hellenism on Israelite religion. Because biblical monotheism lacked a compelling vision of sex and gender, Hellenistic ideas filled the vacuum producing anti-carnal and anti-woman ideas.\textsuperscript{35}

Meanwhile, change broadly characterized as 'postmodernism' was bringing new approaches to biblical studies.\textsuperscript{36} The resultant critique of meta-


\textsuperscript{33} Frymer-Kensky, \textit{In the Wake}.

\textsuperscript{34} Frymer-Kensky, \textit{In the Wake}, 140–4

\textsuperscript{35} Frymer-Kensky, \textit{In the Wake}, 202–12.

\textsuperscript{36} For a general introduction to postmodernism, see The Bible and Culture Collective, \textit{The Postmodern Bible} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 8–15. Postmodernism eludes simple definition but can be summarized by saying that postmodernism “foregrounds, heightens, and problematizes modernity’s enabling assumptions about reference, representation, method, and subjectivity.” \textit{The Postmodern Bible}, 13. In biblical studies, Stanley Fish’s literary-theoretical work was instrumental to this approach. \textit{Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities} (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).
categories and monolithic truths, opened the way to new apprehensions of the Eden narrative. This approach held an agnostic view of the task of recovering any historical content. In postmodern perspective, each reader brings her own experience to the text. Mieke Bal’s fine-grained semiotic reading of the Eden narrative drew attention to the staged creation of humanity through differentiation.\footnote{Mieke Bal, \textit{Lethal Love} (Bloomington Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), 104–30. Bal argues that sexuality is a return to unity following “differentiation” of the sexes. \textit{Lethal Love}, 117.} She reads Genesis 1–3 as one narrative, however, ignoring obvious differences of focus and thus the nuances of the different sources that Phyllis Bird had identified.

Athalya Brenner’s work resists simple classification but has enriched the debates around the Eden narrative even while moving toward a rejectionist approach. Her study of the Eden narrative pointed to the ambivalence of the story: Is the state of knowledge preferable to the state of innocence? Is painful maturity preferable to pleasant childhood? “These and related questions are for each reader to decide according to his or her own personal convictions.”\footnote{Brenner, \textit{The Israelite Woman}, 123–31, 28. Brenner has also contributed two important volumes providing important background to HB texts. Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes authored a book on women’s voice in texts, departing from the idea of women’s authorship. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk Hemmes, \textit{On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible}, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Brenner also authored a book on sexuality in the HB concluding that sexuality in the ancient world is subsumed under social requirements like survival, procreation, internal and external boundaries. Her work is weakened by the fact that she pays scant attention to the Song of Songs within this schema. \textit{The Intercourse of Knowledge}.}  

Structural analyses such as that by David Jobling, lent support to the views of those feminists who think that the text cannot be rehabilitated as a spiritual resource in any way.\footnote{Jobling, \textit{The Sense of Biblical Narrative}, 39.} For Jobling, Genesis 2–3 shows “the effects of the
patriarchal mindset tying itself in knots trying to account for woman and femaleness in a way which both makes sense and supports patriarchal assumptions." Rather than rejecting the Bible outright, Jobling suggests that deconstruction be used to demonstrate that the logic of oppression does not make sense, that binary oppositions can only be established if they are assumed in advance.

Further development of reader-response approaches took extreme positions, positioning meaning-making entirely with the reader. This meant that the patriarchal reading was no longer rarefied in the text but sat with the interpretative communities implicated in such readings. It is clear that biblical


42. See, for example Mary M. Fulkerson, “Contesting Feminist Canons: Discourse and the Problems of Sexist Texts,” Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 7, no. 2 (1991). She writes: "My argument does not deny the history of the use of scripture against women. It exposes as inadequate the claim that a text such as scripture is itself sexist. It does not invalidate the much more fruitful claim that a history of corporate reading shows a dominance of social productions of scripture that are oppressive for women. The relation of scripture to oppression requires recognition of its social production, not simply with regard to its original formation, but its readings in differently configured communities." Also to be recognized here is the work of non-Western scholars such as womanist scholars Musa Dube and Gale Yee; Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," in Reading the Bible as Women: Perspectives from Africa, Asia and Latin America, Semeia (Atlanta Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997); Gale A. Yee, “Gender, Class, and the Social-Scientific Study of Genesis 2–3,” Semeia 87 (1999).
interpretation needs to take account of intersectionalities of gender with race, class, sexual orientation, disability and geopolitical configurations. Androcentric and Masculinist Readings

In response to feminist studies, there has been a reflexive resurgence of androcentric readings of Genesis 2–3. Some have been sympathetic but stronger reactions have come from proponents located within the conservative evangelical church. A prominent group, known as complementarians, maintains that women and men are equal but have differing roles in the church and in society. They argue that the Eden narrative provides a basic framework for monogamous heteronormativity and the complementarity of female and male physiology. Their position is linked to a theology of the Fall. Before that Fall, sinless man gave strong leadership to the woman and she gave joyful, responsive


44. One such as been that of Jerome Gellman. The story, he claims, cannot serve as an ideal of sexual and gender egalitarianism. He is unconvinced that the original created human showed androgyny or undifferentiated sexuality. That that creature was originally male is shown by the retention of its name and its own consciousness after the formation of the woman. “Gender and Sexuality in the Garden of Eden,” 319–36.


46. For more detail on the complementarian position, see the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, founded in 1987: https://cbmw.org

support for man’s leadership. Complementarians revert to patristic tropes such as that Eve brought sin into the world when she dominated Adam. Adam, in turn forsook his headship responsibility and both thereby brought sin and death to the human race. This argument endorses the patriarchal status quo and aligns it with the supposed intended meaning of Genesis 2–3. This reading also affirms the pattern of sexual relationship as female and male and takes for granted essentialist gender notions based on heterosexism and the male-female binary.

The last twenty years have also seen the development of masculinist approaches. Critical studies of masculinity (CSM) attempt to make men visible as a marked category, identify the hegemonic norms of masculinity and identify subversions of that hegemony. One attempt to use a masculinist lens in the Eden narrative is the work of Dennis T. Olson. Reading chapters 2–4 as a narrative unit instead of the common Genesis 1–3 unit, Olson sees the birth of Seth to Eve and her naming speech in Gen 4:25b, as deliberately countering the progression of


50. Further examples of these androcentric Bible readings can be found in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

male violence in preceding verses. Olson reads Genesis 3 as the problem of the woman acting alone. "Without the mutual hearing and speaking with one another together in a gender-integrated community, the man and woman become susceptible to temptation, error, self-deception and distorted judgement."

Masculinist studies have attracted criticism of feminist and queer scholars because many seem to be based on essentialist notions of masculinity and thus reinforce androcentric and heteronormative exegesis. As such, their contribution to analysis of the Eden narrative has been limited.

Jewish Readings

We earlier noted the variant readings of rabbinic scholars in midrashim. Rabbinic Judaism has continued a tradition of reading the Eden narrative with more positive nuances than the Christian tradition. This is not to deny the significant influence of Hellenism on Jewish interpretations seen clearly in the work of Philo. The tradition has not been monolithic. Judaism follows a discursive tradition where multiple meanings may be displayed.


53. Olson, “Untying the Knot?” 80.


57. “If anything marks Jewish biblical interpretation it is the diversity of approaches employed and the multiplicity of meanings produced.” Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, ‘Introduction:
One tradition relates that the woman and man were originally one androgynous figure divided by God.\textsuperscript{58} The implication that they are only fully human when joined one to another produced a positive endorsement of marriage. Similarly, a traditional interpretation of Gen 1:27 suggested that man attained to the image of God when joined to his wife in marriage that produces children.\textsuperscript{59} This confidence that women also share the image with men in equal ways is counter to the tradition that grew in Christian writings, such those of Augustine, that cast doubt on women’s equal bearing of that image.\textsuperscript{60}

In modern rabbinic Judaism’s interpretations, the Fall figures, of course, less prominently than in Christian tradition. The story is relativized into one of several that tell of dramatic encounters between God and humans.\textsuperscript{61} Putting aside the notion of the Fall opens the possibility that Eve’s deliberation and the couples’ eating is in fact, a liberation, an interpretation favoured by some Jewish writers.\textsuperscript{62}

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\textsuperscript{58.} Genesis Rabbah, 8.1.
\textsuperscript{59.} “In the past, Adam was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam; but henceforth [with the birth of offspring] it will be \textit{in our image, after our likeness}. Neither man without woman, nor woman without man, nor both of them without the Shechinah.” Genesis Rabbah, 8.9; 22.2 See also Baskin, “Bolsters to Their Husbands,” 90.
\textsuperscript{60.} Baskin, “Bolsters to Their Husbands,” 90.
\textsuperscript{61.} “There is no mention of an original sin, perpetually present in humankind. The word ‘sin’ does not appear at all in this episode. Nowhere does the writer imply that humanity is doomed to make bad choices.” Tamara Cohn Eskenazi in The Torah: A Women’s Commentary, eds. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York, N.Y.: URJ Press, 2008), 13–14.
\textsuperscript{62.} “... if it is a liberation, however bitter and painful it may be at the moment of separation, then human beings travel bearing a full responsibility for their life and their actions, for their choices and ultimately for their death.” Jonathan Magonet, “Leaving the Garden: Did They Fall or Were They Pushed?” in A Rabbi Reads the Bible, ed. Jonathan Magonet (London: SCM, 1991), 111–22, 15. Jon D. Levenson, “Genesis: Introduction and Annotations,” in The Jewish Study Bible, eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8–101, 18.
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A sense of this liberation is seen in the Amidah, ‘the standing prayer’ recited three times a day. The first blessing concerns knowledge: “You grace human beings with knowledge, and teach mortals understanding. Grace us with the knowledge, understanding and discernment that come from you. Blessed are you, Eternal, who graces (us) with knowledge.”63 It suggests that modern Judaism has continued the tradition that decouples the Fall from blame of the woman and from the notion of sexual sin and instead, values the knowledge that that act enabled.

The rabbinic tradition was distinctly hierarchical but not based on the Hellenized view that man was identified with mind and woman with body.64 Daniel Boyarin has argued that rabbinic Judaism did not base its hierarchical view of the sexes on fear of the body but on a desire to ensure that women continued to provide the sexual and reproductive roles that men required.65 Sexuality was important not the least to provide for the continuance of creation. Secondary purposes were also valued in rabbinic thought: pleasure, intimacy and well-being.66 While not losing touch with the vocation of serving the earth, the married partnership in rabbinic Judaism also serves the valorized role of human contentment.67 Sexuality was seen as a creative force in the world. “Its proper


64. Michael Satlow argues, however, that the rabbis only slightly reconfigured the elements found in Hellenistic writings. For the rabbis, as for non-Jewish elite contemporaries, manhood was an acquired status always at risk. Michael L. Satlow, “‘Try To Be a Man’: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity,” HTR 89, no. 1 (1996): 19–40, 20.

65. Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 106.

66. Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 72–73.

deployment was as unproblematic as proper eating and violation of its proper practice was similar to the eating of food that is non-kosher . . .”68 It was, however, always linked with procreation not as its sole purpose but as its essence. Boyarin makes the telling comment that, “Just as . . . the very essence of eating is to continue the life of the body, so the very essence of sexuality is to continue the life of the collective body.”69

Midrashic texts on the Eden narrative also maintain a conceptual link with an envisaged future. The revelation of torah fulfils and supersedes that of Eden with a future redemption: “Better is the Torah to the one who observes it and walks in the paths of the way of life than the fruit of the tree of life.”70 Even today, the link with Eden is evident in Jewish marriage ceremonies.71

Gender Criticism

The emergence of gender criticism in biblical studies is a recent phenomenon and claims a remit that both includes feminist criticism and goes beyond it, being informed by queer theory, postcolonial theory and critical theory relating to race notes in his study of the Talmudic texts that they evidence respect for women's rights to physical well-being, the absence of male violence toward them, concern for satisfaction of their physical needs including sex but still with women in a subordinated position to the male. Carnal Israel, 133.

68. Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 74.

69. Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 75.


71. “And so every Jewish marriage is both a retrieval of the marriage that crowned creation in Eden and a testament to the nuptial joy that will characterize the end of time when God restores his chosen people.” Anderson, The Genesis of Perfection, 52.
and class. One of the key theoretical informants of this approach is Judith Butler, already discussed in chapter six above, whose work showed how categories of sex and gender are produced and sustained by a range of social processes. Gender criticism goes beyond studying the representations of women and men and moves into interrogating the sexual politics at work in the text. Deryn Guest, in a book applying this analysis to biblical scholarship, describes how this criticism “explores the processes whereby sexed categories are constructed and made discrete, including interstitial places where gender blending, reversals and transformations take place.”

Thus, in the Eden narrative, gender criticism goes beyond the work of feminist criticism. Deryn Guest argues that the intriguing question of how and why the presumed male narrator chooses to undermine members of his own gender, escapes notice. Gender criticism exposes the norms that create compulsory heterosexuality and sustain the idea of sex and gender in the narrative.

Gender critics also interrogate the woman’s consent in the heterosexual contract of Genesis 2–3. Carol Meyers was among the first to note that women

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74. Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*, 26
needed to produce the maximum number of children in order to maintain land- 
holdings in an environment of famine, disease and warfare. Meyers 

Women may have needed encouragement to comply, hence the divine pronouncement of Gen 3:16 which endorses desire as the inducement to undergo such extreme toil. Meyers does not question the heterosexual arrangement itself. Gender critic Ken Stone, however, notes that women have good reason for refusing to submit to such a contract, hence the need for the text to inscribe rule of the man and desire in the woman.

Conclusion

Interpretation of the Eden narrative has profoundly changed since the advent of second-wave feminism in the 1970s. Passion has emerged as a critical tool of interpretation. A range of incisive and provocative readings has appeared through the work of those whose life experience has taught them the power of this narrative as a cultural weapon. In other words, it has taken the upraised voices of those with ‘skin in the game’ to begin to recover readings that rehabilitate the text as a resource for twenty-first century women.

Not all are convinced that rehabilitation is possible or that there is value in this exercise. Regardless of one’s position on this, it is clear that the most valuable work has been that of deconstructing the dual notions of an ideologically neutral

75. Meyers, Discovering Eve, 116.

text and similarly neutral reader. As the history of reception of the Eden narrative has shown, both text and reader inevitably convey ideologies from their own times and social locations.

Feminist and womanist scholars have also shown how sexist processes of translation, exegesis, commentary and application of the text have rendered the woman a problem. Eve has been variously traduced as gullible, weak, and seductive. It has taken the best efforts of many scholars to restore a level of respectability to Eve and to encourage the reader to notice her strength and agency.  

Our analysis of the reception history has also shown that the framework of the discourse has been limited. In many Christian locations, the theological Fall agenda sits in place, implacably narrowing discourse into a comprehensive sin-framed anthropology.  


78. Esther Fuchs, writing in 2008, lamented the lack of theoretical and critical analysis about the work that has been done in feminist biblical studies, the objectives of this work and the relationships between and among various approaches to the field. What is missing, she argues, is an inquiry into the definition of woman and feminism. She argues that they are taken for granted and usually their elaboration rests on the liberal conception of human rights articulated by proponents of the European Enlightenment. “Biblical Feminisms: Knowledge, Theory and Politics in the Study of Women in the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008): 215. In a more recent work Fuchs decries the “neoliberal turn” in feminist biblical studies that fails to interrogate the power structures behind their work. *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016). Sarah Shectman deplots the lack of mutual engagement of historical criticism and feminist scholarship and notes the ways that they could enrich each other. *Women in the Pentateuch*, 9–54.

reduced to the simple question of the extent and nature of the woman's guilt. Blame of Eve may no longer be a prominent feature of these analyses, but the deeper questions of the play of sex/gender are moot points. We have also tracked a second stream of interpretation through many *midrashim* and other Jewish writings. These offer a greater sense of the partnership of female and male in the divine economy concerned with shaping the life of Israel but retain an androcentric perspective that marginalizes women.

Feminism has proved an unsatisfactory tool for apprehending gendered partnership, especially when that partnership was encased in layers of patriarchal text. Declaring the narrative misogynist and of little worth for the feminist project has been the disappointing response of some. While it has been a critically important stage in Genesis analysis, feminist scholarship has failed to engage the basic question of the meaning of the creation of woman and man in the story, the dynamics between them, and their place in the wider Genesis creation story. While absorbed with recovering the woman, albeit a critically important task, it has neglected the intersectional dynamics of relationship and vocation. This study has been an attempt to move the discussion of the Eden narrative onto a broader canvas, focussing on the nature and significance of the creation of diverse human sexes with a synergetic mandate to serve the earth.

Our reading of the biblical material in chapters one to six has now, in chapters seven and eight, been consciously situated within the history of exegesis. In the next chapter, the significance of this discussion is examined in

80. See, for instance, Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 45–48.
relation to the larger context of the Hebrew Bible.
We earlier noted the strong influence of Hellenistic culture on interpretation of the Eden narrative conveyed in part through the LXX translation of the Pentateuch. We also noted the different angles of interpretation visible in midrashim, especially Genesis Rabbah.¹ We postulated that rabbinic interpretations stayed closer to the trajectory of the HB, showing a robust view of sexuality and reproduction in marriage and an appreciative understanding that partnership between men and women completes and continues the work of creation. This section aims to investigate the hypothesis that the HB retains some notion of partnership within its varied texts.

A full-orbed study of the notion of partnership in the HB is not the aim of this chapter. Our goal is to probe the mode of patriarchy evidenced in the world of the text for signs of the Eden partnership, characterized by the following features: a unity of vocation broadly described as serving the earth; a sexual diversity of appreciated difference that depends not on essential, innate difference but on mutual recognition and appreciation; a difference that involves more than that required for procreation; a vocation that involves joint interaction with the commands of God, freighted with enormous potential for weal or woe. In short, the Eden partnership adumbrates a tight kinship bond that suggests it may

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¹. See pp.208–12.
operate within and sometimes against, the more public loci of power in that patriarchal society. What evidence can we find for such a unit within the HB?

Interrogating Patriarchy

It is common to read the statement that the HB is a ‘patriarchal’ text that expresses the cultural reality of patriarchy of the societies that gave rise to it. If we understand the term patriarchy minimally to describe the dominance of the father-figure in the family and in wider social contexts, then this is broadly true: there is much in the HB to suggest that this was the case. The dominance of male authors, male actors and male projects in the narratives of the HB is obvious. Its legal codes evidence patrilineality and strong control over female agency especially in relation to sexuality. There is a strong emphasis on continuance of the male line.

The blunt description of the HB as patriarchal, however, does not tell us enough of what we need to know. The texts are themselves both witnesses to and instruments of patriarchy, presenting a view of a masculine world that may belie the social reality behind them. An intriguing possibility is that male power may

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be honored more in theory than in practice, with women colluding in the architecture that maintained a symbolic gender stratification.\(^3\)

How then, may we see through the lattice\(^4\) that hides women from view to investigate how this patriarchy works and whether there is anything that resembles a partnership? Varied texts and approaches are required. HB narratives, and particularly Genesis ancestral narratives, may be read through a partnership lens with interesting results. Some comparisons with other narrative and legal materials will also be illuminating, as will a review of archaeological and sociohistorical research. Because gendered power is often revealed in the management of sexuality, we will investigate the HB understandings of sexuality and marriage as seen in law-codes and narratives.

**Gendered Structures of Power**

HB narratives reveal attitudes that contest patriarchy. From Genesis through to the narratives of the periods of the judges and the monarchy, we notice stories that suggest gendered activity unexplained by common views of patriarchy. In chapter two we noted the genealogical skeleton of Genesis marked by the refrain אֲלֹה תָּוְדַעְת (“these are the begettings”) which tie the creation narratives to the

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3. Cynthia Chapman notes that anthropologists have concluded that the patrilineal model always represents an expressed ideal rather than a lived, practiced reality. She suggests that Israel was a professed “male-favoring” society while it recognized the idealized nature of that claim. *The House of the Mother*, 7–8. Carol Meyers discusses the functional lack of hierarchy in Iron-Age Israel. *Discovering Eve*, 42–45.

4. Lattices often separated the women’s sections from men’s sections of homes in the Middle-Eastern and Asian societies which had a *purdah* system of gender segregation.
subsequent Genesis narratives. The *begettings* are recounted in ways that involve the gendered partnership in interesting ways.

The so-called ‘patriarchal narratives’ of Genesis are better described as ancestral or ‘elder-narratives.’ 5 Far from being accessories to the stories, women exercise crucial roles that evidence authorial interest in the female lines as much as that of the male. 6 The interest in the male patriline (marked by the term תולדות), is concentrated in the P source but its genealogies are noticeably interrupted by maternal lateral lines (Gen 4:17–22; 11:27–30; 25:12–18; 36:1–5). 7 The women thus marked, play roles that are far from passive. The interventions of women such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Tamar ensure that scions of the family have a particular mother as well as father. The women found offshoot branches of the patriline often resulting in differentiation of peoples (Adah: pastoralists; Zillah: metal-workers; Rebekah: Edom; Lot’s daughters: Moab and Ammon). 8


6. Thomas Hieke, among others, shows that women have a considerable role in the promise line, despite it running nominally through men. Women take the initiative in moments of crisis. The choice of the right wife determines the subsequent destiny of the man. “Genealogy as a Means of Historical Representation in the Torah and the Role of Women in the Genealogical System,” in *Torah*, eds. Irmtraud Fischer and Mercedes Navarro Puerto (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 151–92.


8. “In sum, then, the matriarchs play an outsize [sic] role in the establishment of national identity and the differentiation of Israel from its neighbors.” Sarah Shectman, “Israel’s Matriarchs: Political Pawns or Powerbrokers?” in *The Politics of the Ancestors*, ed. Mark G. Brett and Jakob Wöhrle (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 151–65, 63.
Genesis shows diverse ‘marriage’ arrangements: polygamy in Gen 11:10–25:11, monogamy in Gen 25:12–35:29 and polygyny in Gen 36:1–50:26. In each case, women are proactive in arrangements that would finally produce the right male heir. These cases further show that a son becomes an heir not just by having the right father but also by having the right mother – a descendant from Terah.9 In these ways, these narratives preserve and protect particular affinal relationships as the vehicle of the divine promise at this stage in Israel’s history.10 In the HB, the private is political.11

Cynthia Chapman’s recent study makes several observations pertinent to this study. She shows that, although the patrilineal descent lines expressed an ideal, they were dependent on women and maternally related kin for their perpetuation.12 The ביטוים ‘house of the mother,’ stood as a distinct unit within the larger house of the father (Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Song 3:4; 8:2). Chapman draws attention to the use by women of the vocabulary of “building up” (בנה) a house for themselves (Gen 16:2; 30:3).13 Rather than simply an emotional need, the desire to build a house expressed a desire for economic security and social


10. The partnerships are not just the work of the women. God’s manipulation ensures that they enact the divine plan. (Opening the wombs of Leah and Rachel, Gen 29:31, 30:22; leading Abraham’s servant to Rebekah, Gen 24:27; preserving the lives of Jacob’s clan through Joseph’s post in Egypt, Gen 45:7–8).


13. Chapman points out that the words ב and בת (“son” and “daughter”) may be derivatives of “build.” Cognate verbs in Ugaritic and Akkadian bny and banû respectively mean “to build” and “to engender.” Siegfried Wagner, “בנה” *TDOT* vol. 2, 166–81. Chapman, *The House of the Mother,* 150.
prestige for the woman. They represent an exercise in self-awareness and in
forging space for their own needs.

At times, the needs of wives and husbands within the partnership
overlapped, and at other times they were distinct (1 Sam 1:8; Gen 30:1–3). One
example is the varied interpretations of the birth of the first child. Hebrew uses
distinct vocabulary for the firstborn of the mother ("The one who opens the
womb," פתח רחם) and father, ("the first fruit of my vigor," ראשית אוני, Gen 49:3)14
to differentiate their varied experience. " Mothers celebrated womb-opening sons
with praise and laughter, marked them with auspicious names, and ritually
redeemed them at the temple."15

Behind the carefully delineated arrangements for the begetting of children
lies indications of wider purpose. The covenantal promises were transferred
through the designated heir whose parentage had to be the marriage of father
and the right (Terah-descended) mother. This promise entailed a name, land and
property, and the more inchoate "blessing" (Gen 13:15; 15:5; 17:7; 21:13; 22:17;
26:3–4; 28:4; 32:12; 35:12; 48:15–16). Mothers were not merely biological
vehicles for the formation of the next generation but contributed ethnic, physical
and character traits to the children.16

Chapman’s study of Genesis texts shows that the maternal house had
political import. In the case of Jacob, for instance, the house of the father of his

mother proved to be crucial staging point as he gathered resources and support before moving back to claim the paternal blessing. Uterine brothers from within the máyב exercised authority over the chastity of their sister (so also Song 1:6; 8:8–9). In the case of Dinah, her uterine brothers, Simeon and Levi, avenge her treatment by Shechem and remove her from his house (Gen 35:25–26) demonstrating that the mother-child units within the patriarchal house could act unilaterally.

In the later history of Israel, the maternal sub-units shaped the geographic and political landscape. Unchosen sons formed nations that dwelt alongside those of their brothers. Rachel-born tribes formed the northern kingdom of Israel, known as Ephraim, and Leah-born tribes known as the House of David, formed the southern kingdom of Judah. Exilic and postexilic prophetic writings envisaged restoration of these houses. One such example is that of Jeremiah 31 where the house of the mourning Rachel ("weeping for her children" 31:15) is restored ("your children will come back to their own country" 31:17). The prophecy concludes with the astounding "new thing" that a woman "encompasses a man" (31:22) hinting at renewed national strength involving some kind of gender reversal.

Shared power is also evidenced in non-Genesis narratives of women such as the stories of the Shunammite (2 Kgs 4:8–37), Abigail (1 Sam 25), and the woman of Proverbs 31. All commanded significant resources and exercised the


right to direct others with full authority.\textsuperscript{19} The nature of the partnerships of which they were a part suggests that they experienced both rancour (1 Sam 25:25) and harmony (Prov 31:28–29).

The book of Ruth provides an interesting example of the operation of the \textit{בית אם} at a time of great stress. It centres on the desire of Naomi to create \textit{a house} for her daughter-in-law (3:1) and the achievement of the goal is marked by the birth of a son, Obed, and his symbolic feeding by his grandmother.\textsuperscript{20} Ruth, the Moabitess, is acclaimed as joining matriarchs Rachel and Leah in \textit{building up} the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11–12) even as she founded \textit{a mother’s house} within the powerful Judean line of Jesse.\textsuperscript{21}

Other HB narratives indicate the place of the \textit{בית אם} in times of political instability. Like Jacob, Absalom also retreated to his mother’s relatives (2 Sam 13:37) for protection and to gather support for a tilt at the monarchy (2 Sam 14–18) that ultimately ended in ignominious death and disgrace. David’s monarchy was disfigured by the machinations of maternal half-brothers (Amnon, son of Ahinoam; Absalom, son of Maacah).\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Meyers, \textit{Rediscovering Eve}, 189–91.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Cynthia Chapman notes breast-feeding as creating an allied group of children who trace their relationship back to their mother’s nurture. It also symbolized the child’s co-option into Judean ethnicity. \textit{The House of the Mother}, 149.
\end{itemize}
Division of Labor

Thus far, we have looked at partnership as construed within the social world of the text without attention to the sociohistorical world that might have given rise to the texts as we have them. Gender-sensitive archaeology read with biblical texts provides compelling evidence of the power exercised by Israelite women in the household setting. Carol Meyers’ ethno-historical work situating Israelite women within Iron-Age (1200–586 BCE) Palestine, projects light on the question of patriarchy. Drawing on archaeological evidence of the characteristics of food production in the dry uplands of Palestine where Israelite tribes settled, Meyers asserts that women’s critical contributions to household maintenance gave them decision-making power that complemented male forms. She suggests that the notion of heterarchy, a dispersed power-sharing model, better describes the probable configuration of power in ancient Israelite society.

Meyers relates the relative value of men and women in any society to the degree to which women contribute to the productive labor of the community. In the three major spheres of activity, protection (the province of men), production (food and shelter, jointly shared) and procreation (the province of women), it is the balance in the sphere of production which is critical to women’s status. Throughout the period covered by the HB texts, agrarian Israelite women had a

23. Meyers, “Was Ancient Israel?”
major involvement in agriculture and, hence, high value. They are also keepers of the soil, as in many agrarian cultures.

Households were a social world held together by religion, law and custom. Women and men shared the important task of education of the next generation. This went beyond covering the necessities of farming and food production to include all the traditions of religion and morality. Both mother and father had authority to do this (Prov 10:1; 15:20; 20:20; 23:22–25). Women served in the roles of prophet, sage, midwife but not priests. The ubiquity and domestic distribution of clay female figurines testifies to the role of women in domestic religious practice. Although largely absent from formal cultic leadership, women were active in female puberty rites (Judg 11:39–40) and post-childbirth purification rites (Lev 12:1–8) and other private religious observances.

In the two domains we have thus far discussed, the distribution of power and the division of labor, there is significant variation across space and time but there is significant evidence that beneath a textual discourse of male predominance was a functioning economy of arbitrated power and labor sharing. The vocational partnership of gendered difference adumbrated in Genesis 2–4 may indeed reflect a pattern of lived experience in Israelite societies.


Sexuality as Partnership in the HB

The conclusions above challenge the view that the partnership of women was primarily for procreative purposes. Was the ‘help’ provided by Eve and the many Eves that followed her merely that of child-bearing, as suggested by David Clines? What can a study of the organization of sexuality and desire in the HB tell us about the likelihood of that claim?

Procreation, of course is a strong imperative for much of Israel’s history, recorded in ancestor promises (Gen 15:5; 17:2; Ruth 4:11–12), in diasporic survival (Exod 1:7; Deut 1:10), monarchic prosperity (1 Kgs 4:20) and prophetic promise (Zech 10:8). As part of the fabric of blessing in the nation, it signaled prosperity and divine favor (Job 1:1–3). Women were needed for this important task but as we have seen above, there are other facets to partnership.

As understood today, sexuality refers to that aspect of human autonomy that pertains to sexual expression. It covers a range of sexual feelings, desires, preferences and activities. In modern parlance it is also an attribute or possession with which persons choose to express themselves. As we have seen, the narratives of the HB belong to an age before sexuality, as moderns understand it.

In settings where individual expression is subsumed within the needs of the


32. According to Merriam-Webster, the term refers to: “the quality or state of being sexual; the condition of having sex; sexual activity; expression of sexual receptivity or interest.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1141. The term first appeared in the nineteenth century, in the jargon of biology and zoology but first appeared with the above meaning in a book published in 1889 concerned with women’s illnesses. Giddens, Transformation of Intimacy, 23.
collective, sexual experience as individual choice barely exists. Where there are cultural requirements to reproduce and little opportunity to control conception and manage birth and infant survival, the space for sexual expressivism is very narrow.\(^3\)

Conceptions of sexuality are also greatly influenced by demographic exigencies. We know little of how sexuality was conceived in a premodern era when the physiology of conception and childbirth were little understood and child survival rates were low. The very survival of communities depended on the ability of couples to produce and raise offspring.\(^4\)

Nevertheless, there is some evidence of both male and female sexuality that goes beyond the need for procreation. Athalya Brenner’s careful study of the language of sex and love in the HB, concludes that in all sections, males are the agents and subjects of love and loving more often and more positively than females.\(^5\) Males are active sexual agents whereas females are depicted as pre-sexual beings. Males may lust and covet, they may rape before and after claiming love for the victim, as with Shechem and Amnon (Gen 34:1–3; 2 Sam 13:1–13). Female desire, on the other hand, is suspect and needs regulating by a male

\(^3\) There are practical considerations as well. Stanley Grenz draws attention to the lack of privacy in living conditions across the ANE. *Sexual Ethics: A Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1990), 9.

\(^4\) Peter Brown’s poetic comments in his work on early Christian society could equally well be applied to the HB: “Instead of a modern debate about whether or not sex was good, we are listening to a debate . . . as to what meanings the body might come to bear, to different groups at different times, in different regions, and in different social milieus. Among the Greco-Roman notables . . . the bodies of men and women were mobilized against death. They were asked to produce in orderly fashion, orderly children to man the walls of those bright little cities whose entrance roads were lined with tombs.” *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xliii.

agent. Semantically, love, lust, desire, and intercourse are constructed differently for males and females.

Challenging the general theme of suspicion of enacted sexuality, is the Song of Songs. While the Song shows some awareness of social strictures on sexual expression (8:1, 8), it challenges the architecture of social control of women common in legal, historical and prophetic texts, with images of a woman openly enjoying intimacy with her beloved away from the gaze of others. The intimacy takes place in a mother’s inner chamber, a place associated with sexual activity. Furthermore, in a world of reproductively-focussed sexuality, it portrays sexual intimacy for its own sake from the perspective of a woman. A positive view of eroticism is canonized in this book.

The Song bears witness to a partnership not only of pleasure but of purpose: “My beloved spoke thus to me; ‘Arise my friend, my beautiful one and go forth!’” (Song 2:10) The man encourages the young woman to greater exploration of the wider environment. Fuller experience awaits her in the wider world described as a productive and beautiful landscape.

It is particularly in conceptions of same-sex sexuality that we see more


37. The Song was discussed more fully earlier, pp.182–88.


40. This is the translation and the interpretation of Tamara Eskenazi: "With the Song of Song in Our Hearts," 180.
clearly the assumptions on which were based the ordering of human sexual behavior in ancient cultures. Through review of the areas that are proscribed we can infer sanctioned behaviors and gain some insight into the way sexuality was managed. We have a particular interest in this enquiry and that is to ask how the HB estimates same-sex partnerships compared to those we now label as heterosexual, with which we have been concerned to this point. To this we now turn.

Same-Sex Sexuality

While modern thinking often assumes patterns of same-sex sexuality as part of fixed human orientation, this was not true of ancient cultures of classical antiquity. Classical Greek life (fifth to fourth centuries BCE) was characterized by the separation of female and male spheres. Men’s sphere was the polis, and women’s, the household. Sexual activity was assumed but worked within moral boundaries. Self-control (ἐγκράτεια) and moderation (σωφροσύνη) were ideals and adultery was a serious transgression. Although marriage was highly regarded, Greek thought held that women could not provide deep friendship. The institution of pederasty, wherein a male mentored a young boy into full manhood through the arts, philosophy and physical exercise, provided an acceptable sexual relationship for freeborn men. Similarly, classical Roman society (sixth century


BCE to end of first century CE) allowed same-sex relationships between master and slave.

Less is known of attitudes to same-sex relations in ANE societies. ANE sources referring unambiguously to same-sex behaviors are sparse compared to those of Greek and Roman cultures and thus no strong conclusions can be drawn but there are indications that status as well as coercion were the basis of constructing-permissible homoerotic behaviors.

These examples suggest that sexual behaviour was moderated by a range of social constructions, in which the gender of participating parties was but one factor. Of more significance were the roles played by each: active (penetrative) or passive (receptive). In both Greek and Roman conceptions, shame adhered to the male passive partner in homoerotic interactions. This role was denigrated as ‘feminine’ and was not to be countenanced by freeborn males. This meant that a

44. Nissen, Homoeroticism, 19–36. See also Anthony Heacock, Jonathan Loved David: Manly Love in the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Sex (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 81–88; Phyllis Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation,” 173–76; Saul M. Olyan, “‘And With a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” Journal of the History of Sexuality 5, no. 2 (1994): 191–94. The Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh (third to second century BCE) reveals something of Mesopotamian views of gender. The story tells of Enkidu, a wild and uncultured man, living with animals and unsuited to be a counterpart to Gilgamesh. A harlot is sent to Enkidu and after a week of sexual activity, he is no longer recognizable to the animals. He is now clothed and has wisdom and knowledge like a god. Like Adam and Eve, he gains a god-like self-awareness and enters the world as a culture-shaper. The role of the woman in the story, the harlot, is limited in time and scope, and clearly, in status. John Bailey compares the position of the woman in Genesis 2–3 with the lowly role of the harlot in the Gilgamesh epic: It is Gilgamesh who is the true partner to Enkidu. The story demonstrates that female and male were considered intrinsically different from one another and that the truest bonding could only be expected between two people of the same sex. "Epic of Gilgamesh," trans. E. A. Speiser, (ANET, 75). John A. Bailey, “Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2–3,” JBL 89, no. 2 (1970): 137–50. Kathleen McCaffrey’s work suggests the existence of third and fourth gender categories: “Reconsidering Gender Ambiguity in Mesopotamia: Is a Beard Just a Beard?” (paper presented at the XLVII Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, 2002), 379–92.

range of behaviors with persons of inferior status (slaves, prostitutes, foreigners, youths) was permissible. A passive sex role played by a freeborn male, on the other hand, was not.\textsuperscript{46}

Little was written about female homoeroticism in the extant literature of ancient societies.\textsuperscript{47} This paucity of reference is a factor of the predominance of male-authored literature. It also may be due to the liminal nature of these relationships that were based on two adult participants. Accustomed to seeing sexual activity in terms of active and passive players, these female relationships raised the aberrant thought that one must be mimicking male penetrative behaviour.\textsuperscript{48}

References to same-sex relations are few in the HB.\textsuperscript{49} They are focused on males, exclusively negative in tone and usually associated with other proscribed behavior. Two HB narratives, Gen 19:1–25 and Judg 19:1–30, might show an aversion to homoerotic activity. A number of other construals are possible. One is the implied affront to male honor such that a spouse or virgin daughter would be willingly offered to prevent it.\textsuperscript{50} We may also infer that fear of being the passive

\textsuperscript{46} Heacock, \textit{Jonathan Loved David}, 77–81.


\textsuperscript{49} The following are HB texts sometimes read as referring to same-sex relations: Gen 9:20–27; Genesis 19; Lev 18:22 and 20:13; Deut 23:17–18; Judg 19:20–24; 1 Sam 18:1–4, 19:1, 20:30; 2 Sam 1:26.

partner in such relations lies behind the narrative. Both of these narratives concern wider transgressions than that of sexual force, encompassing hostility to foreigners, or absence of hospitality, themes that are often neglected in treatments of the stories. Consensual relationships are not in view in these narratives.

Only Lev 18:22 and 20:13 directly address the subject of homoeroticism. Common interpretations of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 assume a blanket condemnation of homosexual behavior. Exegetical studies, however, suggest that only a specific kind of sexual behavior (anal intercourse) with a particular subject (married man) was proscribed. The particular reasons for the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20 are debated but it is clear that they are based on a different architecture of sexuality than that of surrounding cultures. In contrast to the construction of sexuality of classical cultures, the laws in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 make no reference to age, status or even consent, and instead, focus on the


52. Examples can be seen in translations of Lev 18:22 such as: "Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin" (TLB); "No man is to have sexual relations with another man; God hates that" (GNT); "You will not have intercourse with a man as you would with a woman; it is an abomination" (NJB).

gender and marital status of the participating parties. Jan Joosten highlights the use of the Hebrew dual form of the noun מְשָׁבֵי אַשָּׁה and translates 18:22: “You will not lie with a male on the [double] bed of a woman.” He concludes: “... the effect of Lev 18:22, on the new reading, is to strengthen the value of the heterosexual couple as a paradigm of human relationships in general: the rights of a woman to her man’s sexuality are given precedence over occasional sexual encounters between men.”

The HB gives ambiguous testimony to its estimation of same-sex partnerships. Few are described in any detail and these resist analysis with modern ideas of sexuality. The David-Jonathan relationship has often been described in ways that assume modern categories of fixed sexual orientation and have extracted the pair from the bigger narrative of which their story is a part. The strong focus of the narrative on the meaning of their friendship for the shifting power-plays of Saul and David and their houses, means that the relationship is always ambiguous. Other attestations allusive of same-sex relationships are few and ambiguous (Gen 9:20–27; Ruth 1:14–18), suggesting that they were of little interest to tradents.

The HB maintains a strong stance of protection of the married pair.

Adultery, meaning intercourse between a woman and a man other than her


husband, was a serious offence deserving the death penalty. Homoerotic activity between married males constituted a similar violation and thus, correspondingly entailed the death penalty (Lev 20:13). We note too, the absence of expressed concern about non-procreative sex. Although it is a reasonable assumption that both adultery and homoerotic activity endangered the production of recognized offspring, there is no mention of this in the laws themselves. The location of the Levitical laws pertinent to homoeroticism within the section pertaining to incest further strengthens the idea that the injunctions were about stability and safety of the extended family and particularly, of the married pair. This, of course, cannot be entirely separated from concern about legitimate procreation.

Conclusion

Our conclusions are necessarily cautious given the limitations of our evidence. Within the androcentric text of the HB we have however discerned the outlines of partnerships that speak of a functioning economy of arbitrated power and shared labor. The vocational partnership of appreciated difference, adumbrated in Genesis 2–4, and visible most strongly in the Genesis ancestral narratives, may have been the reality of life in Israelite societies. HB narratives however, suggest that the married pair was embedded within wider social groupings and did not have the same independent functioning as does a modern pair. The couple put

under the spotlight in the Eden narrative, operating without reference to extended family or clan, has no parallel in the wider HB texts.

The organization of sexuality suggests the value of the married couple to the society of Israel in ways that go beyond the production of offspring. Although marriages involved many different arrangements with women (polycoity, polygyny and monogamy\(^\text{58}\)), there are suggestions of development in the idea of marriage through the period of HB writings toward the ideal of monogamous faithful relationships based on the idea of covenant. Mal 2:13–16 expresses what can be seen as an ideal of a faithful marriage with the goal of producing offspring.\(^\text{59}\) In prophetic writings, the image of a woman’s house rebuilt becomes the image of restoration in the Day of the Lord (Jer 31:4–5)\(^\text{60}\) and a restored marriage provides the metaphor of divine relations with Israel “in that day” (Hos 2:16–23).

The theme of monogamous female/male relationships is a recurrent one in the HB, even if kings regularly flout the norm by virtue of wealth and power. Although we have argued that the Eden narrative does not institute ‘marriage’ as such, it does highlight an original pairing of a woman and man in relationship to יהוה אלוהים and the created earth. The ancestral narratives present a strong case for the female/male kinship that launched the people of God in the promised

\(^{58}\) A family unit can include both a wife and a concubine and still be labelled a monogamous marriage. Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, 15–17.

\(^{59}\) Gordon Hugenberger argues that Gen 2:24 implies the existence of a marriage “covenant” which provides the link with Mal 2:14’s insistence on marital fidelity. While Genesis provides useful support to Malachi’s plea, the arguments to support such a link between the texts are not convincing. *Marriage as Covenant*, 48–83.

\(^{60}\) Sawyer, “Gender-Play and Sacred Text,” 99–111.
land. Throughout the HB, the notion of ‘one-flesh’ kinship emerges in many layers of the text. One example is the HB law-codes which present a view of female/male partnership as the foundation of the extended family. The thrust of Deuteronomic family law is to promote the order, integrity and stability of the family even while they uphold patrilineal and hierarchical systems.⁶¹ Although marriage in the HB is shown from the male perspective, it remains the paradigmatic human community.⁶²

Although there is no direct citation of the Eden narrative in the HB and no attention to the story of a sinful Fall, Eden still has its reflection in its pages. In the HB, unlike in Hellenistic writings, there is no sense of humanity as spirit trapped in fleshly body and seeking to escape it. On the contrary, the perspective of humans as God-breathed clay who must account for themselves by their actions underlies all layers of Israel’s scripture, torah, writings and prophets. Equipped with הָדוּשׁ תַּוְּדִיה וּרְע מַע “the knowledge of good and bad,” humans respond to God’s nature and God’s limits as their history unfolds. The notion of a created, sexually-differentiated humanity, is at once shackle and opportunity, fraught with risk of

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⁶¹ Bird, “Images of Women in the Old Testament,” 51. In relation to Deuteronomic law, see the study by Carolyn Pressler, The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Laws (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993). Pressler notes the example, that in the case of the errant child (Deut 21:18–21), the mother has equal legal standing with the father, suggesting that in intra-family matters, a partnership was assumed. Naomi Steinberg also notes that Deuteronomy 19–25 intends to preserve the nuclear family unit by limiting the power of men and creating rights for women: “The Deuteronomic Law Code and the Politics of State Centralization,” in The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis, ed. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 161–70.

hierarchy and abuse yet allowing the community to generate and nurture its own grounded life.

Eden’s sexuality is neither the fear of concupiscence seen in medieval Christian thought nor the inconsequential assignment of desire of modern Western sexual practice but rather, a freighted gift. Although far from gender-equitable in any recognizable sense, and embedded in the patriarchal formations of most of human history, the HB preserves a testimony to the divinely willed, intertwined partnership of gendered humanity and the earth.

63. This notion is suggested by Boyarin’s description of the unique nature of rabbinic sexuality. *Carnal Israel*, 75.
CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

This is a world that must be constructed or reconstructed. A genesis of love between the sexes has yet to come about, in either the smallest or the largest sense, or in the most intimate or political guise. It is a world to be created or recreated so that man and woman may once more or finally live together, meet and sometimes inhabit the same place.

—Luce Irigaray, “Sexual Difference.”

The title of this thesis, “One Becomes Two,” crystallizes the theme of this study. Resisting the male-dominant gender anthropology of its times, the Eden narrative is propelled by the interactions of the human pair, not a male hero. Later reception history showed reductive interpretations which focused on one sex, the male. Two became one. We have concluded that a recovered reading of Genesis 2–4 highlighting the partnership theme can contribute to ongoing reflection by destabilizing both male-dominant readings and also the rigidity of female/male essential bipolarity.

This conclusion will draw threads together under four headings: The expression and nature of the gender anthropology in the Eden narrative; the complex journey of the partnership theme in the reception history of the narrative; the place of that theme in historical and current sex/gender frameworks; and some thoughts on possibilities for further applications within communities of faith.

The Expression and Nature of Gender Anthropology in Genesis 2–4

At the beginning of this thesis, we noted the framing question raised by the Genesis 2–4 text, namely, how the אדמה ("arable soil") is to be served (2:5). The question orients the formation of humanity to the wider creation project. The answer came in the form of an extended story of the creation of a differentiated humanity with the unique capacity to interact with God. The narrative may have been as well-served by having the single hero carry the plot, as in many other ANE mythic tales. Instead, in our narrative, the plot progression is delayed by an extended account of the creation of a couple. The human, whose creation was essential to bringing the elements to a functional completion, must first be differentiated into two with a meticulous account of biological engineering.

There are many ways in which the tradent signals to the reader the significance of this differentiation. The interwoven names אדם from אדמה, אשה from איש foreshadow the plaited plot lines. The inextricable relationship of human and earth is as salient as that between woman and man. Pronouns and otiose phrases consciously highlight the two together (2:25; 3:7). At critical junctures in the story, the איש/אישה word-pair is used.

The creation of the two is not a division as depletion (unlike the plot of The Symposium\(^2\)) but a multiplication as augmentation. A separate creation act has formed another creature from the same stuff of the first. The subsequent urge to partnership is not dependent on morphological correspondences, essential differences or hierarchical arrangements, but is discovered in collaborative

recognition of self and other (2:23). The predicament of lone-ness is not resolved by the friendship of other creatures nor by their contribution to the work effort. Nor is it resolved by the solidarity of the extended family (the parents who may be forsaken) but through the intimate otherness of partnership. This provides the core relational strength to serve the earth.

We found that the partnership expressed by the zusammen cannot fully be comprehended without attention to the narrative itself. The woman’s help is expressed in her independent thinking and behavior which creates the conditions for obeying or disobeying the divine limits that are integral to the creation project. The narrative is set in a mythical garden which sits within a wider agrarian landscape. This theological geography provides a place where divine and human worlds meet. Their interaction becomes focused on a single question: what will humans do with a divine proscription within an otherwise abundant, beatific, created world?

The narrative depicts the complications arising from the disobedience with some ambiguity. Some results are negative and others are positive. The disobedience leads to fear and distancing from God. The couple are expelled from the garden, that place of easy existence, into the recognisable agrarian life of Iron-Age Levant. On the other hand, the woman’s help was to lead the couple into a level of knowledge previously only the province of God, signified by an acute awareness of nakedness. The new knowledge of good and bad is ambiguously evaluated. The result of this divine knowledge leads not to immediate death (2:17) but to expulsion from the garden (3:22–24) and, significantly, also to a new phase of human history (Genesis 4) with the extension of kinship into the
next generation and the beginning of culture (4:17–22). While it has a shadow side, the ‘fallen’ human partnership has thus also produced the conditions that set the framework for Israel’s account of its national history. Israel also has to choose between good and bad.

It is in the human partnership that the effects of a bid for autonomous choosing are first felt: in the knowledge of nakedness. This trope is the proxy for the negative side of this new knowing. The partnership is now a vulnerable one, open to fears and guilts that will damage their life’s work. Because the vocation of the partnership is so intertwined with the wider creational network, their interdependent life is affected by the transgression. Non-human creatures, earth and their own partnership are all experienced as changed. The tasks of child-bearing, food-winning and human communion are all henceforth perceived as toilsome and compromised. Genesis 4 marks the development of each of these effects into the next generation. The תולדות (“begettings”) are all marked by disfigurement as well as the possibilities of new knowing.

In the present study, I have argued against the reading that Gen 3:16 institutes an essential hierarchy. The noticeable difference between the two envisaged in 3:16 is not the innate essentialism of dual natures set into a hierarchy but merely the restricted options entailed by different roles in reproduction. Here the world around the text surfaces to shape our reading of sex/gender roles. This world, broadly characterized as ‘patriarchal,’ offered limited roles for women. The exigencies of child-bearing, and the assumed predominance of the male in all areas of life, shaped the description of the divine pronouncements, experienced not as punishments but as perceived reality.
The divine pronouncements were, to this extent, aetiological, and they suggested the origin of life’s negative exigencies lay in the human quest for autonomy. The data of human life as it was experienced gave rise to anguished questions of cause. As such, the Eden narrative is an early theodicy, exonerating God from blame for difficult human lives. On one level the clear message is the need to obey the divine limits. On another level, humanity lives under the arc of grace, protected, clothed and provisioned by God.

One of the tasks we set ourselves was to probe the nature of the partnership between the woman and man against notions of marriage and covenant. The task proved not to be straightforward. Marriage is most often assumed in the story (seen, for example, in frequent translations of husband and wife for איש and אשה) but we also read hints of covenant (2:23–24), unauthorised marriage (2:24) and wider kinship (4:17–24). The tradent has given scant but significant attention to the delineation of this relationship. Marriage is the easiest to assume but there are some features that make us cautious of assuming that a marriage relationship, as understood in the HB context, is being inaugurated. This allows the reader space to imagine the woman and man as examples of wider human cooperation, apart from marriage, expressing their different perceptions of the divine command. This plurality is God’s willed intention to complete the creation project of serving the earth.

The question then arises of whether the narrative inscribes an ideal of duality. Are humans only to be found in dual female and male modes with the implication that others of whatever form are outside the created order? Is the twosome thus paradigmatic? We suggest that the narrative is a simplified,
condensed story and no more accounts for human complexity than Genesis 1 does for cosmological, geographical or biological complexity. The Eden narrative is a moot witness for heterosexual marriage as the exclusive paradigm of human partnership. It creates the conditions for marriage, namely, mutual recognition, intimacy and endeavour but to assert that it exclusively mandates heterosexual marriage is to go beyond the warrant of the text.

The text, furthermore, has no markers of simple dual complementarity despite the wishes of those who want to find it. Dominant patriarchal readings suggest that men are defined through the complementary binary relationship with women and an implicit hierarchy is thus assumed. We have found, however, an ambiguity in the narrative. The humans do not die, the woman's reasons for eating are not puerile and not condemned. She establishes the conditions of discursive interaction with God's commands that characterize some Hebrew scripture. She is no neat complement to the man. We resist here the strength of the sin/Fall framework that has developed throughout the Christian reception history and settled negatively on the woman and, instead, recover here two humans, of independent mien, who through their eating, come to share some of God's knowledge. The conditions are set for the reader to understand Israel's subsequent history. These conditions could not have been established through a synthetic, homogenous pair. As the slight tilt in the earth's axis has provided the conditions for earth's seasons, so the woman's agential difference has created the conditions of human interaction with divine command.

We have discovered, also, throughout the HB an interest in a quality of the marriage partnership that moves beyond the social institution of marriage. The
Genesis ancestral narratives are carried upon the accounts of the achievement of the right affinal relationship. The בית אם ("house of the mother") nested within the patriarchal establishment, operated with a level of independence to achieve the right mother and father for each subsequent generation. This maternal sub-unit played a significant role in Israel’s history. As we have discerned in the Eden narrative, history would be marked by particular partnerships, not by independent heroes.

A thread of passion underpins the machinations that lead to these marriages (Gen 24:67b; 29:18–20; Song of Songs). This is adumbrated in the intriguing note in Gen 2:24, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife” where HB social norms have primed us to expect, “Therefore a woman leaves her father’s house and clings to her husband.” Our attention is drawn to the wildcard of passion as a factor in subsequent events in Israel’s life. While partnership and procreation are definitively linked in the HB, there is a ‘surplus of meaning’ which places partnership also within the realm of pleasure.

The Pentateuchal law codes protect the order, integrity and stability of marriage. While deeply entwined with the preservation of male honour, and the necessity of procreation, the codes reveal that within the household, marriage was protected from incest and adultery with the severest of punishments. Within the family, women were agents with legal power as well as men (Deut 21:18–21; 22:13–15). Mal 2:10–16 speaks to an historical situation of men abandoning foreign wives, presenting a strong reminder of gendered creation as the basis for faithfulness.
The Journey of the Partnership Theme in Reception History

Our study of the reception history of the Eden narrative showed the journey of the narrative in selected theological writings. From the Second Temple period, writings about the narrative show regressive tendencies. Strongly influenced by the LXX translation and Hellenistic single-sex anthropology, the question of partnership was buried under the strong essentialist framework, particularly in Christian tradition. We charted the isolation of the woman in readings of the Eden narrative and the development of ideas of female predisposition to sin.

In the NT, the Eden narrative is referenced in few places. Jesus uses it to counter Pharisaic divorce debate with a strong insistence on an original divine intention for unbreakable union between woman and man. Pauline and Deutero-Pauline uses show the influence of both the Greco-Roman environment through use of the LXX, and the disruptive Christ event. The coming of Christ caused a radical reappraisal of scripture and the Eden narrative was part of this rethinking.3

We noted the growth of theologies around the Eden narrative, especially seen in the allegorical hermeneutics of church fathers. Many lost touch with the major themes of the non-P trident and introduced ideas that seem alien to that text. The negative perception of the woman proved persistent, however, and gender hierarchy was assumed.

Rabbinic studies of Genesis, however, placed less emphasis on the Fall and placed the narrative into the framework of the need for observance of torah.

Midrashic exegesis introduced a range of different perspectives that offer intriguing insight into social attitudes. While still influenced by Hellenism and clearly sexist to modern eyes, those interpretations did not adopt the dual view of humanity with men as mind and woman as sense-perception. They maintained therefore a franker appreciation of bodily difference and joint human vocation.

Christine of Pizan and Hildegard of Bingen, represent early female engagement with the Eden narrative and both challenged traditional interpretations. Their liminal place in theological circles, however, meant that their work had little influence on received views. Later female writers continued a tradition of engaging this core text yet their marginal and isolated social positions meant that their critical work did not shake traditional interpretations.

Feminist scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century proved to be the major disruptor of traditional readings. As women entered academic biblical studies, their voices called for greater interrogation of author and reader ideologies. The Eden narrative could no longer be read without cognizance of its effects on generations of women.

Partnership remains for some a suspicious notion. ‘Complementarian’ readings have smuggled hierarchy back into Genesis 2–3 interpretations under the guise of ‘mutuality’ or ‘complementarity.’

This thesis has sought to recover a notion of partnership that does not rely simply on dual complementarity under male headship but a unity of vocation accomplished through agential gender difference.

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4. Refer to earlier discussion pp.234–36.
The Partnership in Historical and Current Sex/Gender Frameworks

Our review of conceptions of gender in the ancient and modern world has shown how susceptible are gender significations to the wider philosophical architecture of the era. In the eras that produced Hellenistic and patristic literature, the one-sex notion held sway. In other words, males were the universal, natural human being, and women were aberrant persons. Hierarchy between male and female was thus written into the architecture of the universe and not susceptible to change.

Biblical notions more encompassing of partnership, tentative and fragmented though they were, faced stern opposition as Jerusalem encountered Athens and Rome in philosophical thought-worlds. We found, nevertheless, that the HB preserves some sense of the agential female both in the Eden and other Genesis narratives. The non-P tradition has created some space for gendered partnership in Hebrew narratives. The Song of Songs canonizes an appreciation of the passionate partnership of mutual appreciation.

A considerable distance separates twenty-first century reading communities from those of biblical authors. Our own sex/gender architecture is as comprehensive as that of ancient communities and just as likely to distort our reading of the Eden narrative. We ask questions about sex/gender ‘equality’ foreign to the text. We look for sexual expression in a world of opaque proscribed behaviours. We explore heterosexual normativity and attitudes to homoeroticism without realising that those are recent and modern categories.

Meanwhile, the Eden narrative confronts our questions with some of its own. At the center of this narrative is a God whose first act invited gendered
Partnership remains for some a suspicious notion. ‘Complementarian’ readings have smuggled hierarchy back into Genesis 2–3 interpretations under the guise of ‘mutuality’ or ‘complementarity.’ This thesis has sought to recover a notion of partnership that does not rely simply on dual complementarity under male headship but a unity of vocation accomplished through agential gender difference.

Reflections on Current Sex/Gender Questions

While recognising this cultural and historical gap, we proceed here to suggest some ways that Genesis 2–4 might contribute perspectives to the sex/gender debates that are part of contemporary secular and ecclesial life. This endeavour comes from a sense that it is incumbent on us to contribute to community discussions. These are not merely ancient classical legends but narratives that continue to be invoked (explicitly and implicitly) where social policy is being debated and created.

It is true, however, that simple ethical conclusions cannot be drawn in straight lines from biblical narratives such as the Eden narrative. A more discursive practice is warranted. The narrative, by its very sparseness and ambiguity, creates space for ethical reflection. It invites the reader to participate in the assigning of value and the drawing of conclusions. Jacqueline Lapsley frames this helpfully: “The question is not, then, can the Bible be understood as making any positive contribution to ethical and theological reflection, even on gender issues, but how do we read in such a way that we are open to those

5. Refer to earlier discussion pp.234–36.
contributions?” [emphasis original]. One way to do that is to enter the story empathically, encountering the otherness of the text. The following thoughts are offered as potentially helpful contributions to such a process.

Moral Agency

We are encouraged by an implicitly positive valuation of human independence in the Eden narrative. The parameters of the narrative create the opportunity for both human obedience and disobedience. Complications ensue from the transgression but not ones that end the lives of the characters. The reader is invited to reflect on the choices s/he might have made in such circumstances and ponder the choices of daily life. The question of human response to divine command within the created world is thus the critical ethical horizon in the narrative.

The Normal

Another level of moral reflection arises from the way the narrative has been read to present certain elements as the norm. Key among these powerful tropes is the female/male heterosexual binary that has proved a stumbling block to many. The story is clearly centered on a woman and man but we also note much to suggest that this is not a divinely-inscribed universal datum of human normality.

Human societies tend to be structured around fundamental principles that incline to the binary: kinfolk/alien; rich/poor; dark skin/light skin; male/female.

In these binaries one side is privileged: kinsfolk, rich, light skin, male. The effect of this is to create an orderly, dependable world in which humankind finds its place. Female and male are one of these creational binaries that simplifies in order to tell a story.

As we have noted, ancient sex/gender codes are male-focussed codes centred around the inscription of male power. The female has a part to play which, while not equal in any sense that we understand it today, gave her status as associated with the male. This pattern, while mooted in the Eden narrative, is still assumed in the story and does not necessarily deny the existence of other non-élite-male persons. The HB knows multiple significations of gender and the existence of a heterosexual pair in Genesis 2–4 does not preclude acceptance of other types of human partnership or intimacy.

The Sovereign Male

This study has found much to contest the idea that, according to Genesis 2–4, the male ought to be sovereign, whether by created intention or by postlapsarian default. While undoubtedly betraying its patriarchal origins, the text conveys some surprising inversions. The story makes a case against male autonomy through the detailed account of the creation and work of the עזר כנגדו. To the

8. Juliana Claassens has noted the use of simplifying binaries throughout the HB (for example, light and dark in Isa 5:20, 30: 9:2) and in the creation story of Genesis 1: “And the Moon Spoke Up: Genesis 1 and Feminist Theology,” Review & Expositor 103, no. 2 (2006): 328–29. Megan DeFranza argues that Adam and Eve should be seen as the fountainheads of even greater differences instead of the paradigmatic forms of difference: Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015), 177.

contrary, the text suggests that the way that the earth will be served will be through human community that begins with sex/gender diversity.

At the same time, the narrative sounds a sombre note of complexity in the human partnership. The relationship will be thwarted by these different perspectives of the chief players: women may repeatedly turn to men; men may rule over women. The perspectives are created by the different life experiences of woman and man: woman by her contact with reproduction and men by their interests entailed in that procreation.

**Gender Equality**

The narrative sits in some tension with modern notions of gender equality. Rather than a bare equality, the Eden narrative describes the wonder of difference in unity. It tells no simple story of the man recognising, defining, and appropriating the woman, nor does the woman simply make up his lack or complete his wholeness. Each is defined in terms of their respective becoming or, better, their becoming *in God*, being ordered to God as well as to each other. God exists in the narrative as the axis of the creation’s ordering, not the woman and man and certainly not the man alone. We start with our gaze on the couple and find our attention drawn to the One who stands nearby walking about in the garden, asking questions, setting limits. It is our sad self-absorption that fixes our attention on the question of woman-man equality only dimly apprehending the main characters of God and earth.

The story does not use the language of rights and is certainly no clarion-call for gender equality but it does insistently suggest that the way forward is
through human cooperation, potentially seen in marriage and in other fruitful forms of human partnership.

**Gendered Poverty**

The story suggests some ideas that may be valuable in analyses of gendered global poverty. It resists ascriptions of innate weakness in women and locates inequities in the realities of reproductive life (3:16). Whether in ancient Israel, the ANE or in the global South today, gender asymmetries are revealed in reproductive outcomes for women. The Eden story shines a light on the meanings given to the different bodies of women and men and thus highlights the gendered substructure that destabilizes partnerships and leads to different life-outcomes.

**Finally**

Genesis defines itself as a vast genealogy, looking back and looking forward, “as an ancestral archive of memory, as an engine for cultural self-fashioning.”10 Through the masterful work of its authors, the story of the woman and man in the Eden narrative provides the key to opening that archive and participating in the cultural fashioning of the people of God in the twenty-first century.


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