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THE BIBLE'S ETHOS ON WOMEN: CONFLICTING VIEWS AND THEIR INTERPRETIVE BASES

by

Deborah Alexis Hirsch

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the requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

This thesis is an analysis in three parts of a sampling of secondary, recent literature dealing with woman's status as it is presented in the Bible. First, I have dealt with her status in the creation narratives (Genesis 1-3) and the positive and negative images of woman in the family and in the community as they emerge in recent literature.

Special attention has been paid to the methodology employed by the writers, as well as the particular biases with which they approach the biblical text.

Second, I analyzed the writers' varied methodologies and critiqued them in the context of the conclusions arrived at through their interpretations of the text.

Third, I have detailed my own perspective on the biblical verses and topics presented and criticized. I have attempted, in my interpretation, to avoid a pro or anti feminist bias.

Through my research, it became apparent that inherent in almost all of the writers' methodologies is a common flaw: Inconsistency of method either in the analysis of a particular verse, or in the function of the verse proper in its context. I have demonstrated how frequently verses are drawn out of context with the result of either misrepresenting the biblical author's intent or presenting only a partial and misleading view of the narratives as a whole.

I concluded that a convincing study of woman's status in the Bible remains to be done, based upon a methodologically sound interpretation of the value that Scripture places upon woman.

Dedicated to my father (alav hashalom) and
my mother whose teaching, care, support,
and love have instilled in me a concern for
all people and a deep commitment to Judaism.

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Introduction

The Setting

Attitudes toward women have changed in the United States during the past two decades. The women's liberation movement has prompted much discussion and some action concerning such issues as equal rights and equal pay for women, abortion, child care, and wife abuse. The equal rights issue is still being debated in the states as well as in Congress. The National Organization of Women (N.O.W.) is still battling the issue of pay discrimination. According to its statistics, a woman earns only 59 cents for every $1.00 earned by a man in a comparable job. Other statistics indicate that more than 50 per cent of the work force in America is comprised of women, many of whom are also the heads of households.

The women's movement has spread beyond the economic arena and has embraced issues in the political and religious spheres as well. Each election year, more women are pursuing office, elective, and appointive positions in local and national government. The appointment of Judge Sandra Day O'Connor to the Supreme Court is perceived as a major breakthrough in the struggle for women's rights. Within the religious realm, women are being ordained as rabbis, Episcopal priests, and ministers, and the struggle by women for equality in the Catholic Church is gaining momentum.

As impressive as these accomplishments are, however, there are

indications that sexism--disrespect for the capabilities and dignity of women--has often been fostered by religious institutions and traditions. Indeed, many blame religion for the past and present subordination of women in our society. Others have used religious teachings to defend the belief that men are indeed superior to women. And regardless of which side of the issue one may be on, there is widespread acknowledgment that traditional religious institutions have continually placed women in subordinate roles.

Much of the recent feminist writing on religion focuses on the suppression of women in Judaism and Christianity. The authors of these articles and books premise their presentations on certain assumptions about traditional religious systems. Some point to the Hebrew Scriptures as the basis for our religious system today and assert that Scripture is biased in favor of the male population. Thus, for example, Phyllis Bird and John Otwell state:

> We must begin this study with the recognition that males dominated the Old Testament statistically[1]. . . . For the Old Testament is a man's book, where women appear for the most part simply as adjuncts of men, significantly in the context of men's activities.[2]

This male bias resulted in political and religious restrictions of women that limited their function to childbearing and family oriented activities. The woman was always seen as subservient to either her father, brother, or husband. Laws were passed that kept women in a secondary status. Some of the writers maintain that these laws created and perpetuated discriminatory beliefs and actions towards

women.

> Discrimination against women was inherent in the socio-religious organization of Israel. It was a function of the system. . . the system did enforce and perpetuate the dependence of women and an image of the female as inferior to the male.[3]

This type of discrimination is generally reported in the literature in terms of laws relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce, and sexual transgressions.

Although many writers accept a bias towards men in Scripture, some believe that "new interpretations" must be found for passages that tend to reflect this bias. Although "the patriarchal stamp of Scriptures is permanent. . . . interpretation of its contents is forever changing."[4] The employment of certain critical approaches to the text has resulted in "new interpretation of old texts." These interpretations do not remove the patriarchal "character" of Scripture, rather, it sheds light on passages that "reveal countervoices within a patriarchal document."[5]

Those who insist upon new scriptural interpretations perceive an ancient cultural bias against women that no longer applies in modern society. For these writers, this bias must be identified in the biblical text as pertaining to a specific time and place. At the other pole, some of the modern literature recommends the Bible as a role model for society today, and uses it to support sexual discrimination against women. These writers view the Bible as God's prescriptive word which cannot be tampered with or re-interpreted.

Others who also accept divine authorship of Hebrew Scripture try, nevertheless, to prove that women were held in high regard during the biblical period. These authors attempt to prove that women could function within the biblical society on equal terms with men; for example, they were able to pursue similar occupations without discriminatory qualifications. While these commentators may recognize that women were primarily seen in the role of wife and mother, they assert that such roles conferred on women a higher status than men.

> The relationship between God and people was actualized primarily by the appearance of new life within the people of God. . . the new life. . . came into being because the Lord worked in the woman's womb.[6]

Since God acted directly and uniquely through woman, her status in the Old Testament was high. The woman was seen as God's co-worker.

Those who maintain the latter point of view blame the feminist movement for criticizing the Bible on the basis of twentieth century biases that may not be legitimately applied to the biblical period. For example, feminist writers argue that a higher significance was given to activities performed in public, such as priestly functions. Such a statement may say more about contemporary values than it does about the biblical world. Another modern bias is that intellectual work is intrinsically superior to physical work. The men in the Bible were involved with legal decisions while the women generally stayed home with children and performed household tasks. Yet, who is to say that this type of work was, in those times, considered less important than

the rendering of legal decisions?

Writers who perceive sexism in some of the Scriptural text have chosen different ways to confront this problem. A radical approach calls for the end of all sexist religions, including Judaism and Christianity. Proponents of this view argue that modern society has either outgrown traditional religion, or that there is no way to reconcile or remove the sexism implicit in it. Another group suggests that past interpretations of the traditional texts have been wrong and that it is the interpretations which must be corrected.

Much of the literature written on the subject of the subordinate status of women today begins with analysis of biblical texts, legal passages and narratives, which have traditionally been viewed as condoning or being responsible for the subordination of women in our society. The literature, written by women and men, Jews and Christians, focuses on specific narratives and either supports, re-interprets, or outrightly denounces seemingly sexist propositions. Much of the criticized or applauded material is found in the Hebrew Bible, specifically within the first five books of Moses. Two primary areas of interest are the creation narratives in Genesis and in the rest of the Pentateuch, and material pertaining to the woman's status in the family and in the community.

Each author, whether or not he or she implicitly states it, relies on one or more of the traditions or modern schools of biblical criticism. Some of the modern writers choose critical textual approaches which

best justify their positions. Before presenting each writer's methodology, it is important to understand the basic intention of all biblical criticism.

> Biblical Criticism refers to that approach to the study of Scripture which consciously searches for and applies the canons of reason to its investigation of the text; it comprises a large number of distinguishable but interrelated methodologies. . . .[7]

The literature that will be analyzed in this thesis includes views that reflect form criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, tradition criticism, and the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis.

Some of the writers rely on form criticism or a related approach to the text. This type of analysis looks at "the typical forms by which human existence is expressed linguistically. It recognizes the repository of the living tradition of a common people."[8] Those who employ this method are concerned with looking at the culture of biblical society and not just the verses of a narrative. Linked to this approach are other critical analyses of the Bible. Tradition criticism grew out of form criticism and includes investigating "the history of transmission of traditions within the oral traditions during periods of their transmission."[9] A correlative of form criticism is redaction criticism, which attempts to identify "the use of the formal elements in a composition and interpret them within the total literary unit as a coherent and meaningful whole."[10] Rhetorical criticism can be understood as a supplement to form criticism.

> Its task. . .is to exhibit the structural patterns employed

> in the fashioning of a literary unit, whether prose or poetry and to discern the various devices by which the predications of the composition are formulated and ordered into a unified whole.[11]

The documentary hypothesis preceded form criticism and focuses on the dating and authorship of the Pentateuch. It divides the Pentateuch into four documents: J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomic), and P (Priestly). These documents underwent redaction at different times and spanned a period of 450 years. It may be useful to group the modern writers according to the type of critical, biblical method(s) they employ. Under form criticism and tradition criticism we can include, Stanton, Scanzoni/Hardesty, Christ/Plaskow, Bullough, Lacks, Bird, Swidler, Bennet, Otwell, and Trible.

Redaction criticism is applied to the text by Bird, Scanzoni/Hardesty, and Trible. Only Trible looks to rhetorical criticism for a proper rendering of the biblical material. The documentary hypothesis proposed by Graf-Wellhausen is accepted and applied by Swidler, Stanton, Ochs, Tishler, Lacks, and Otwell.

Two authors we shall consider reject modern biblical criticism. Meiselman and Applebaum approach the biblical text literally. They accept the divine authorship of the Bible and reject the results as well as the method of biblical criticism. Both authors combine Jewish traditions described in the Talmud and other Jewish sources with customs described in the Bible that do not necessarily reflect a "Jewish" point of view. By not making a distinction in their writing between these two

traditions they tend to superimpose later Jewish values on biblical society. This approach makes it difficult to decipher specific meanings of biblical verses.

A major problem that arises frequently in the attempt to analyze the various positions within the recent body of literature is the inconsistency and overlap in the various authors' approaches. A given author may apply more than one method of biblical criticism, even though these methods may not be altogether harmonious with each other. Another author who rejects the biblical criticism approach may rely on post-biblical sources or religious traditions. He/she applies eisegesis to the text, distorting it with customs and beliefs of a later period.

Other commentators do not interpret a verse within its proper context; rather, they cite a particular verse to best prove their point. In such cases, the reader is not aware of the setting, the narrative in which the verse appears, or the meaning of a specific term as it appears in the passage. The commentator is manipulating the biblical text to substantiate his/her position. Such an approach tends to deceive and confuse the reader. Another problem arises in the proper rendering of a Hebrew term into English. Too many of the writers rely on English translations of the Bible that do not always represent accurate or meaningful renderings of the Hebrew original.

Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is threefold. First, to present the spectrum of literature written on the specific areas of Creation and woman's status in the family and in the community. (The writings on the Creation narrative focus on Genesis, chapters 1-3; 5:1-2.) The thesis presents this material through a verse analysis of important words and phrases appearing in the literature that are perceived as important to the reader's understanding of:

1. The relationship and significance of Genesis, chapters 1-3; 5:1-2.
2. The meaning of the term ha'adam in the Creation narrative.
3. The meaning and function of the terms ish and ishah.
4. The significance of the rib in Genesis 2.
5. The naming of the woman twice in the Creation narrative.
6. The nature of woman's "sin" and the punishment she receives.

Concerning the material pertaining to woman's status in the family and in the community, the thesis follows a verse analysis of the biblical text; however, more than one narrative will be presented. The literature breaks down according to those authors who perceive women having a high status in the home and in the community, and those who view them in a subordinate role. The literature specifically addresses the issues of the matriarchs, the single woman, marriage, divorce, adultery, childbearing, inheritance, prophesy, and ritual purity.

Second, the thesis will examine the conflicting views and consider

the extent to which the biblical original provides a basis for these various interpretations. The critique, it is hoped, will expose both methodological strengths and weaknesses. Special attention will be paid to the accuracy of the literature's presentation, a grammatical analysis of terms and verses, translations, dependence on non-biblical sources, and evidence of pre-existing bias--whether idiosyncratic or deriving from traditional interpretations.

Third, the thesis presents my own perspective on the biblical verses and topics presented and criticized. Special attention will be paid to the Hebrew text, the biblical author and redactor's intention, and the relevance of various forms of biblical criticism. I have attempted, in my interpretation in this section, to avoid either a pro or anti-feminist bias. I begin with the assumption that the Bible was written and redacted within an essentially patriarchal culture.

Unit 1

Chapter 1

The Image of Man and Woman in the Creation Narratives

In this chapter I will present the various interpretations in the Creation narratives as to their import for the hierarchical relationship between man and woman as it emerges in biblical text.

Genesis 1:26-27

> And God said, 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.' And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.[1]

Four basic points of view, all of which are rooted in an understanding of the term ha'adam, govern the interpretation of these verses. In one, ha'adam is taken as a generic term, yielding the sense mankind or humankind. Two, ha'adam is understood as a bi-sexual term similar to the generic interpretation of ha'adam. According to this interpretation "the genus adam is bisexual in nature."[2] Though it appears that there is no real distinction between a generic or bi-sexual ha'adam, those who subscribe to a bisexual interpretation classify themselves as distinct from those promoting a generic interpretation of ha'adam. Since man cannot exist alone by himself it is necessary for the female

aspect of ha'adam to complete him making him a bisexual being. The third point of view suggests that ha'adam is neither generic nor specific, but refers rather to an androgynous creature. According to this point of view the appearance of both the singular and plural pronouns oto and otam (him and them) in reference to ha'adam indicates that ha'adam was originally androgynous and only later in the narrative became two distinct individuals. The fourth view contends that ha'adam in the opening chapter of Genesis refers to the male person only.

The first interpretation understands ha'adam as a "dual sex form"[3] representing all of humanity. One translation renders this term as persons" and reads Genesis 1:26 as:

> Elohim said, "let us create persons in our image and likeness. . . . Elohim created persons in Elohim's image, male and female Elohim created them.[4]

In this translation, the Hebrew masculine pronouns referring to ha'adam and Elohim are changed in the English to their respective generic nouns. According to one interpretation, the plural end form[5] otam (them) at the end of verse 27 is a metaphor for generic mankind. The existence of a generic ha'adam is further supported by a close analysis of verse 27.

a b c
1. And created God Humankind in His image

c' b' a'
2. In the image of God created He him

c'' a'' b''
3. male and female created he them.[6]

Lines 1 and 2 of this verse from an inverted parallel or, to use another term, a chiasmus. The focus of these lines is on the words "in his image."

> At the center of the inversion, the phrase "in his/the image" is locked in by the creative work of God. The chiasm accents this phrase while rendering its meaning inaccessible. Yet the sense of the poem itself does not remain hidden, because its third line introduces a new phrase that parallels "in the image of God" (i.e., male and female).[7]

Through this analysis it becomes clear that both "male and female" were created in God's image. In addition the movement from the singular pronoun oto (him) to the plural form otam (them) at the end of lines 2 and 3 provides a second clue for interpreting ha'adam as generic humanity.

A second theory[8] suggests that the generic humanity mentioned in Genesis 1:27--"And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"--reaches fruition in Genesis 2:23 when the generic ha'adam become ish and ishah through the creation of sexuality:

> Then the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman (ishah), For from man (ish) was she taken."

For those writers who perceive a relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 the two sexual beings, ish and ishah become one flesh with the advent of marriage. One point of view[9] asserts that it is the creation of sexuality which joins the first and second creation narratives. The term ha'adam

remains generic until Genesis 4:25 ff--"Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth. . . ."--when adam becomes a proper name referring to the man called Adam. This pattern continues through the narrative with the exception of Genesis 5:1-2:

> This is the record of Adam's line.--When God created man (adam), He made him in the likeness of God; male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man (adam).

In these two verses the term adam reverts back to its original meaning of generic humanity. One translation of Genesis 5:1-2 is:

> This is the role of Humanity (adam's) descendants. On the day that God created Humanity (adam) He made it in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them. He blessed them and gave them the name Humanity (adam) on the day He created them.[10]

A general consensus among those who consider ha'adam generic is that the two sexes are to be understood as having been created equal; however, this equality in dignity or worth is not inconsistent with differentiation in their roles or functions.[11]

Another position[12] in the literature interprets ha'adam as an androgynous term; there is no distinction between the two sexes and it is "mankind" that has dominion over the creatures and the land. This position does not attach any significance to the terms ish and ishah which some writers identify as the sexually differentiated generic ha'adam referred to in Genesis 1.

A third position[13] asserts that ha'adam refers to the sexual creature man and that woman first appears in chapter 2. A fourth position[14]

maintains that while ha'adam is first used to imply all of humanity, the end of verse 27--"male and female He created them"--implies the creation of two creatures. This interpretation also assumes that there is an evolutionary order to creation in which man is considered superior to those things created before him. Therefore, woman, who was created after man, is his superior.[15] Some writers who affirm this position maintain that Genesis 2 provides further evidence for the same hypothesis, for the female created from the "man's rib" is again last in the order of creation. Just as man supersedes all that has come before him in the narrative, woman is superior to man.[16]

The same hypothesis may result in a different conclusion, i.e., male seen as superior to female. This position[17] argues that the term ha'adam refers to both humanity and the male creature; however, the structure of the Hebrew language is such that nouns referring to both masculine and feminine objects are rendered by the masculine form. Therefore, one must be aware of the linguistic style of the text and not assume that masculine gender form applies only to masculine objects.

Genesis 2:18

> The Lord God said, "it is not good for man to
> be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him."

Man and woman's role can be further defined through the interpretation of the above verse, particularly the term ezer kenegdo. What is the precise meaning of this term which appears only once in the Bible? Ezer kenegdo is usually explained in one of three ways.

First, the woman is an ezer kenegdo in that she serves as a complement to man; she possesses those qualities that man lacks. It is the woman's role "to soothe, aid, persuade and help the man,"[17]* whose major task is "to guide and protect."[18] Second, ezer kenegdo can be defined by examining the meaning of each word. Ezer is viewed as a relational term, one that does not imply a negative or subordinate status.[19] Neged suggests a counterpart position, one that the animals could not fulfill.[20] The word ezer appears 20 times in the Bible referring to God.[21] In the Genesis narrative, God is perceived as a supreme Ezer--helper to humanity--who aids humanity by creating the garden, providing animals, and giving man and woman the task to tend the garden. Woman is created equally and endowed with the purpose of sexually fulfilling humanity, and she assumes a role which the animals cannot: "God is the helper superior to man; the animals are helpers inferior to man; woman is the helper equal to man."[22]

Third,[23] rather than explicating ezer kenegdo from the Hebrew, one commentator relies upon the older English translation of "helpmeet." The term "helpmeet" connotes suitability or compatibility, a meaning not yielded by the word "helpmate" which has found its way into many recent English translations and suggests a secondary, rather than equivalent status.

From examining God's intentions in providing ha'adam with an ezer kenegdo the focus of the commentaries shifts to the process involved in woman's creation. One position asserts that because woman is taken

from "man's rib" she is the weaker of the two and therefore has less status. She assumes her "natural duty to be close by and ready to help"[24] her husband.

A second position considers woman's creation in Genesis 2 in relation to an ancient myth concerning the creation and development of the "first man."[25] According to the myth there are several stages to the man's life: Birth, development into manhood, initiation into the tribe, circumcision, marriage, children, and death. This interpretation suggests that woman's creation in the Genesis 2 narrative parallels the initiation episode described in the myth. It asserts that Genesis 2 narrative is presenting the same myth using different characters. Woman's creation is a metaphor for man's initiation into his tribe, followed by marriage. The initiation involves circumcision which takes place in the Genesis 2 narrative under the guise of woman's creation.

> Behind the Biblical tale of Eve's creation was concealed the story of a puberty rite followed by the union of the first pair. . .[26]

Genesis 2:21-24

> So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and while, he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. The man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken. Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

Scholarly interpretation focuses on three specific actions described

in the above verses. First, it examines what, if any, significance can be attributed to woman having been created from "man's rib." The second action, the naming of the woman in verse 23--"This one shall be called woman for from man was she taken"--is of specific concern because of the similarity between the "naming of the woman" and the naming of the animals in verses 19 and 20.

> And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. . . . And the man gave names to all the cattle. . . .

In verses 19 and 20 man names the animals and assumes a superior position over them. The literature tries to determine if the process used to "name the woman" is indeed similar to the process the man used to name the animals. If this is true it would imply that the woman, like the animals, is subordinate to the man. Third, critical writing explores the meaning and purpose of verse 24--"Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife so that they become one flesh."

According to one position, the fact that woman is "taken" from man provides the basis for her subordinate status.[27] This interpretation assumes that ha'adam in Genesis 1 refers to a specific man and not to generic humanity. Accordingly, Genesis 2 describes the creation of woman from the already created man. Those writers who accept this point of view perceive Genesis 1 and 2 as describing the creation of two human beings through separate divine action. For them, woman is

dependent upon man because she evolved from him.

Other writers, however, indicate that man has nothing to do with woman's creation in Genesis 2 and therefore cannot be accorded a superior status. Such an analysis assumes that man is totally passive during woman's creation: "The man slept through the process, the bone was taken from him as a divine action."[28]

The meaning and implication of woman's creation from man's rib is very controversial. On one side are those writers who contend that woman is inferior because she was "taken from the rib,"[29] and on the other those who maintain that since the rib represents the raw material from which the woman was formed, it is no more important than the adamah (earth) from which man was taken.[30] These writers contend that woman was equal to man at the moment of her creation and justify their position either structurally or through the application of extraneous texts.

Among those who view Genesis 1 and 2 structurally, two interpretations emerge. In the first interpretation, Genesis 2 provides the details of humanity's (ha'adam) creation in Genesis 1, and it does not favor a hierarchal relationship between man and woman.

> What Genesis 1 achieves in one sentence--by defining man as a him and, in immediate opposition as them, male and female--Genesis 2 does, in stages. First the male is molded of matter and brought to life by God's breath; then the uniqueness of this creature is highlighted by the creation of all other animals; then and only then is the human viable as a species by the extraction from the male of the indispensable female.[31]

The second interpretation, based upon non-biblical sources, suggests that the rib in Genesis 2 symbolizes equality because "the ribcage occupies the upper portion of the anatomy--therefore, woman is basically equal to man and just that much more important."[32]

Other writers choose to demonstrate woman's equal status by taking a closer look at the Hebrew text--"vayikach achat mitsal 'otav"--"and he took one of his ribs"--specifically the term vayikach. One position assumes that woman was taken from the man; however, the text says simply and explicitly that it was the rib, the raw material that was removed and then fashioned into woman. This interpretation suggests that both man and woman were divinely formed.[33] The verb 'sh--to make describes woman's creation and the verb ytsr--to form is used to describe man's creation. Both verbs--ytsr and 'sh--imply that God, perceived as artist, formed man and woman as the result of His creative process.

One interpretation suggests that the use of the verb lkch--to take--does not designate a lower status to the woman because the same word is used in reference to the man in Genesis 3:19:

> By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground--for from (lkch) it you were taken. . . .

In this passage man is not subordinate to the earth by the use of the verb lkch--to take; by analogy, then, the same verb does not make woman subordinate to man.

In addition to the verses dealing with woman's evolution from man,

one is still left with the issue of man "naming" woman. Some argue that implicit in the "naming" process is man's domination of woman.[34] The consequence of "naming" includes a lowering of the status for all women in the future. Five positions are discernible in the literature that help explicate the "naming" of woman.

One position[35] brings into parallel the naming of the animals with the "naming" of the woman. Before woman's creation God forms the animals and presents them to man who names them in Genesis 2:19:

> And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.

The Hebrew term used for naming the animals is qr' shemot. By naming the animals ha'adam assumes dominion over them. The same verb qr' is used in relation to the "naming" of the woman, and the analogy is made that man who qr' (calls) woman also has dominion over her. A second position[36] finds an important distinction in biblical text between the naming of the animals and the "naming" of the woman.[37] qr' (call) is used in context with the word shemot (names), thereby the man "called names" to the animals. Regarding woman the verb qr' (to call) does not appear in relation to the word shemot (names). Therefore, man designates or labels woman without assigning to her a proper name and thereby does not assume dominion over her.

A third point of view[38] associates the "naming" of woman with man's response--zot hapa'am (this at last)--after her creation. This position

infers from the text that man delighted in woman's creation and verbalized his joy by the phrase zot hapa'am--"this at last." There is no indication by these words that man felt superior to woman.

Yet another position[39] links zot hapa'am to man's disappointment at not finding any of the animals suitable for him. Those writers who assert this position believe the animals were brought to man both for naming and because he sought among them a suitable companion. The phrase zot hapa'am (this at last) indicates man's pleasure in the woman's likeness to him and therefore designates her ishah and himself ish. The similarity between these two terms, ish and ishah symbolizes the physical likeness they share. Finally,[40] the phrase zot hapa'am (this at last) is linked to the phrase ezer kenegdo in Genesis 2:18--"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper (ezer kenegdo) for him.'" Zot hapa'am (this at last) implies that "finally there is one created who is made from the stuff as man--the same raw material substance."

Verse 24--"Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh"--supplies yet another clue to an understanding of woman's status at the time of her creation. Three interpretations are offered in the body of criticism under discussion. The first suggests that this verse does not fit into the original order of creation. It implies a reversal of God's original plan, in that "man's domination of woman is a consequence of sin and transgression."[41] Representative of this viewpoint is Russell, who states that "Yahveh did

not intend this patriarchal domination of woman, but had wanted her as co-equal to man. Yahveh's creation account implies criticism, whereas the Priestly account shows Creation's intention."[42] According to this position, Genesis 1 introduces man and woman as equal partners, but Genesis 2:24 implies a distortion of that original equality, thereby hinting at the couple's future disobedience.

The second position[43] interprets verse 24 as a rebuttal to the belief that woman is subordinate to man. Indeed, the verse is used as an argument against the patriarchal nature of biblical society. In a patriarchal society, a woman leaves her family to join her husband; however, this position suggests the opposite: man joins his wife's family. Therefore, the woman is the dominant one in the marriage relationship and the biblical text refers to a matriarchal rather than a patriarchal community.

> Nothing is said of the headship of man, but he is commanded to make her the head of the household, the home, a rule for centuries under the Matriarchate.[44]

A third view[45] suggests that it is necessary to interpret verse 24 in relationship to generic humanity in Genesis 1. According to this position ha'adam (humanity), originally one in Genesis 1:27--"And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"--became two through the creation of sexuality as ish and ishah, and now in marriage, "they return to the original unity as ish and ishah become one flesh."[46]

Once the commentators have established the original nature of man

and woman in Genesis 1 and 2, they proceed to examine how their original relationship changes in chapter 3 of the narrative. In their analyses, these writers focus upon three important events. First, they explore the meaning of the sin through which the couple's relationship is affected. Second, they examine God's judgment on man and woman. Third, they analyze the new relationship between man and woman that emerges at the conclusion of chapter 3.

Genesis 3:6-7

> When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband and he ate.

Regarding the sin, some writers claim that the couple's primary sin was their disobedience to a divine command in Genesis 3:16:

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat, but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

A portion of these writers maintain that neither the man or the woman was more to blame for the disobedience. They assert that "the two of them became one in their disobedience."[47] Others attempt to exonerate the woman on the basis of her naivete by asserting that her only fault was listening to the serpent's words about becoming "clever" in Genesis 3:4:

> And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you

> eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will
> be like divine beings who know good and bad."

Man, on the other hand, acted with greater disobedience because of his "passionate longing to get knowledge and be clever."[48] Unlike woman, man was not seduced into eating from the tree, but he blames God for his disobedience in Genesis 3:12:

> The man said, "The woman You put at my side--she
> gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the Lord said to
> the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman
> replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate."

Critics vary in their interpretations of the couple's response to their disobedience. Some writers attempt to lessen the woman's guilt placing the blame squarely on the man's shoulders. According to them, the man "turns on the woman, attempting to diminish his own guilt by blaming the woman and God."[49] He places equal blame on God, since God gave him the woman. In the end, he reluctantly accepts the consequence of his actions. The woman, however, does not blame the man. She merely indicates that she was deceived by the serpent. Whether or not there is total agreement in the literature regarding whose disobedience was greater, the result of the couple's action is perceived as the same: "The two, now alienated from each other and from God, lose the primal harmony in the discord of mutual blame."[50] The couple is now reduced to two individuals awaiting judgment. "Split apart one flesh awaits the outcome."

Genesis 3:20

> The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

According to the literature, two consequences result from the couple's disobedience. First, eternal life is denied Adam and Eve as death is introduced into their world. Second, the relationship between man and woman is colored by distortion. As God metes out judgment to man and woman, the hierarchy of harmonious creation is betrayed; the human and animal worlds now stand in opposition to one another. Man becomes estranged from woman as a result of their disobedience. They are "alienated from God, each other, and nature. All of the participants suffered a loss of freedom and limitation of potential." Man must now work the land to survive, and woman is forced to assume a new role that is perceived by some to subordinate her to the man.

Genesis 3:16

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

Some critics[51] interpret the judgment against woman as more severe since it includes a change in her relationship to her husband. She becomes subject to him out of duty and not out of love. Other writers indicate that after their disobedience the woman and man "are no longer coordinate--but super and sub-ordinate to one another."[52] This position renders the woman weaker than the man and thereby establishes

an unequal relationship for men and women in the future.

In addition to explicating God's judgment, some writers attempt to determine if this judgment was prescriptive or descriptive in nature. Two interpretations emerge from the literature. Those critics [53] who tend to interpret the judgment as prescriptive refer to it as a curse. "A woman's devotion to her husband is more natural and is part of the biblical curse to Eve, 'And your yearning shall be toward your husband!'"[54]

Other writers[55] argue that God's judgment on woman is not formulated as a curse, but is, instead, intended to inform her of the consequences of her actions. Those who affirm this position suggest that the judgment on all three--the man, the woman and the serpent--is to be understood descriptively and not prescriptively.

> God speaks of what will be, not what should be. It is descriptive not prescriptive. He does not institute or condone role stereotypes for the sexes, but His words point to the sinful ways in which men and women could be limited by cultural constriction.[56]

Within this interpretation three explanations are offered for the proper understanding of Genesis 3:16--"Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." First, this verse is not understood as "an imperative order of creation, but rather the element of disorder that disturbs the original peace of creation."[57] In other words this verse is a distortion of the original harmony attained by the union of ish and ishah. Second, a close reading of text does not support the idea of woman subordinate to the man. Otwell suggests a parallel structure between the phrases--"desire for your husband" and "he shall

rule over you." Rather than suggesting a cause and effect relationship, this position claims that they imply the same consequence: "The husband's rule is either in need or sexual desire, but does not imply subordination."[58] Therefore, woman is not inferior, she is only sexually dependent upon her husband. A third interpretation of verse 16 must be explicated by its relationship to Genesis 2:24--"Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh." This latter verse, we shall recall, yields the union of ish and ishah through marriage. This position suggests that "despite the disobedience the woman still yearns for that initial unity. Man, however, does not return her desire and instead he will rule over her."[59] A tension has emerged and the mutuality that existed in Genesis 1 and 2 is now replaced by a hierarchical division.

Another consequence of the disobedience is the "renaming" of woman. Feminist critics charge that the "renaming" of woman places her in a subordinate role. Some of these critics[60] associate the "renaming" of woman with her future role as childbearer prescribed in verse 16. The man changes woman's name from ishah to Chavah, a cognate form of chayim (life), because she is to become the mother of all human life. Through their actions, the couple acquires sexual awareness which would result in propagation. The "renaming" of woman hints at the function and destiny of all subsequent women. Scanzoni and Hardesty indicate that by "renaming" her, "woman becomes reduced to 'mother of all living things' and her natural function

and sphere has been cut in half."[61]

Other writers[62] perceive an important difference between the naming process in Genesis 2 and 3. We recall in Genesis 2 the man calls (qr') and does not name (qr' shemot) woman; however, in Genesis 3, man names woman using the same formula with which he named the animals (qr' shemot). Therefore man now has dominion over both the animals and woman. The naming of woman in Genesis 3 implies a massive corruption in the original creation. A drastic change in the relationship between man and woman has taken place. From Genesis 3:25 ff. the sexually differentiated pair--ish and ishah--who become one flesh in marriage is no longer referred to in the narrative. They are replaced by the term ha'adam. Some writers understand the return to ha'adam as once again referring to generic humanity; however, other writers perceive it as man's emergence as the stronger and superior half of the species.[63]

As the foregoing examination of individual verses suggests, a variety of perceptions of Genesis 1-3 emerge in the critical studies under discussion. One perception stresses the importance of the Creation stories on the reader's understanding of God and the world. It emphasizes the impact of Genesis 1-3 on the shaping of the present understanding of men's and women's roles in society. Although such perceptions have been addressed in the preceding verse analysis, it is useful to summarize these varying points of view in the literature.

Two distinct opinions emerge in the literature concerning the role of creation in the biblical narrative. One position[64] claims that Genesis 1, by inference, suggests that the origins and structure of the universe occurred in the precise order described by the biblical author. A second position[65] indicates that Genesis 1 and 2 form a metaphor describing the universe's progression from chaos to order. It views the Bible as a literary work and does not accept the literal interpretation of a hierarchical ordering of creation.

In presenting the different critics' points of view on the Bible, we must identify the biases many of these writers bring to their explication of the biblical text. These biases shade the writers' interpretation and presentation of men's and women's roles both in biblical and modern society. Commentators' biases can be divided into three positions according to their particular interpretation of the role of man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2.

One bias is based on the assumption that God's plan in Genesis 1 and 2 is for man and woman to be equal partners on earth.[66] Among those who adhere to this position are some writers who maintain that the creation accounts are an attempt to explain the reason for the roles of men and women in biblical society, and not how things were originally intended. A second bias establishes the male as dominant and superior to the female.[67] One critic attributes this situation to the patriarchal environment in which the Bible was produced. According to Bennett, it

is important, when reading the Bible, to keep in mind that a patriarchal bias favors male over female, and may present the male as the stronger and more important of the two sexes.[68] A third bias grows out of the assumption that from the beginning of creation, men and women were considered equal in dignity but different in the tasks they performed.[69] According to this position, man and woman were given equal dominion over the earth but they were assigned different functions according to their natural inclinations. Man was to assume a more aggressive, leadership role, and woman was to be more passive as she served as her husband's helper.

In each of these three positions, the commentators' biased interpretations of the creation accounts are linked to their understanding of the relationship between the first three chapters in Genesis. Some writers[70] subscribe to the Documentary Hypothesis and render Genesis 1 and 2 as separate accounts, written by different authors. They attribute Genesis 1 - 2:4 to the Priestly source and Genesis 2-4:24 to the Jawhist source. There are some writers who only rely on the Documentary Hypothesis to explicate only some of the biblical text and use other critical methods of interpretation to clarify other biblical narratives.

Other writers[71] present Genesis 1 and 2 as consistent accounts. Although they do not discount the possibility of more than one author, they attach greater significance to the redactor's role in compiling the Bible into its present form. In addition, these writers may take into

consideration the cultural, political, and economic factors of biblical society in the hope that these factors can help to further explain the biblical author's intentions. One author who assigns particular importance to the author's and redactor's style is Trible, who perceives the biblical text as a ring composition, i.e., the beginning and the end of a narrative depict the same situation. In the case of Genesis 1 and 2, a ring composition would imply that a specific pattern and linkage exists in the biblical author's ordering of words and phrases; a subject is introduced in one verse and then elaborated upon in another verse. An example of this would be the use of the term "earth" in Genesis 1:1--"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In this verse no details are offered concerning earth's contents. According to this analysis details about the earth's contents are provided on the sixth day in Genesis 1:24--"And God said, let the earth bring forth every living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind." In both Genesis 1:1 and 1:24 earth is the subject of the narrative.

Yet another focus,[72] although lacking in consistency, deems only one of the creation accounts significant and accurate in its presentation of male and female. Writers who promote this interpretation perceive woman as subordinate in Genesis 2 because she was "taken from man," rely solely on Genesis 1 for their explication of man's and woman's relationship in the creation narratives. Representative of this point of view is Stanton who claims:

> My own opinion is that the second story (of creation)

> was manipulated by some Jew, in an endeavor to give heavenly authority for requiring a woman to obey the man she married. . . . Genesis 2 is an allegory of an imaginative author. . . .the first account of creation is more satisfactory for both sexes.[73]

The fourth position involves those commentators who combine the events of Genesis 1 and 2 into one account. In this interpretation, verses are quoted out of context and non-biblical source material is used to help explicate the text. When secondary sources are used, they are often cited as if they are a part of the biblical text.

In the following chapter we shall analyze both the commentators' approach to the creation narratives as well as their interpretations of the verses presented in this chapter.

Unit 1

Chapter 2

Critique: The Image of Man and Woman in the Creation Narratives

The writings discussed in the first chapter of this unit focus upon the image of male and female as it emerges in the opening chapters of Genesis. The writers, whether feminist or apologetic, apply a more consistent methodology to the textual material considered in this unit than they do, as we shall see, to that discussed in units 2 and 3. The various writers agree that the creation narratives of Genesis 1-3 provide the foundation upon which women's status in the Bible is determined. Role models for women in future generations are also derived from the creation narratives.

Each critic approaches the biblical text with one of the following two biases. On one side is the claim that the Bible is a sexist document in which woman is regarded as inherently inferior to man from the time of her creation. A second, and very different, approach asserts that the biblical text is, indeed, sympathetic towards women and supports their claim to equal status with men. Proponents of both these positions claim that their interpretation is borne out in the Genesis narrative. Ironically, both of these positions are developed from inadequate textual analysis. Although Trible also approaches the text with the bias that in Scripture women are equal to men; she is the only

writer among those under discussion who substantiates her claim with a thorough and consistent textual analysis.

It is my intent here to examine the methodologies employed by several writers to determine whether they have adopted a consistent textual analysis of the text or whether they have permitted their biases to color their interpretations. Alternative interpretations of the text will be offered to demonstrate the need for a close textual analysis of the individual passages cited by the writers as well as a careful evaluation of the relationship of these passages to the overall narrative in Genesis 1-3.

All of the writers who examine the opening creation accounts in Genesis 1-3 take note of verse 27: "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The awkward disposition of singular and plural pronouns immediately strikes the reader both in the Hebrew (oto and otam) and in the English translation (him and them). As previously indicated in chapter 1, the explication of this verse is dependent upon the writers' interpretation of ha'adam. Four points of view emerge in the literature: ha'adam as generic humanity, ha'adam as bisexual which appears to be similar in meaning to generic humanity, ha'adam as an androgynous creature, and ha'adam referring only to the male earthling. An important element in considering the various interpretations of ha'adam presented in the literature is the manner in which the writers approach the opening chapters in Genesis. The most consistent explication of the

text is offered by the approach that views the opening chapters of Genesis as interrelated and basically self-sufficient. These critics apply one of two methodologies to the biblical text: rhetorical criticism or the Documentary Hypothesis.

Rhetorical criticism, used almost exclusively by Trible and Trible alone, is the most consistent and thorough in its presentation of the creation narratives. She suggests that Genesis 1-3 form a ring composition in which the beginning and end of a narrative depict the same situation (cf. p. 32). Since she perceives a relationship between Genesis 1 and 2, ha'adam in verse 26--"let us make man (ha'adam) in our image after our likeness"--is understood as the generic term embracing all of humanity. Throughout her presentation, Trible suggests that the biblical text first describes man (ha'adam) in the generic and in Genesis 2 further distinction is made by the introduction of sexuality through ish and ishah. In explicating verse 27--"And God created man (ha'adam) in His image, in the image of God He created him (oto); male and female He created them (otam)"--Trible argues that it is not the male of the species that is in God's image; rather, the image is related to the phrase "male and female" in the verse. Therefore, when God says--"Let us make man (ha'adam) in our image"--the ha'adam must refer to humanity, male and female alike.

The Documentary Hypothesis is applied to the same biblical text to yield two different interpretations of ha'adam. The first suggests ha'adam as a generic term for humanity; however, those writers who

apply the Documentary Hypothesis to reach this conclusion recognize a relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 while attributing these chapters to different authorship. For these commentators, male and female become sexual beings in Genesis 2. The second interpretation also acknowledges different authors for Genesis 1 and 2; however, it does not suggest any similarity between the two chapters. Indeed this latter interpretation maintains that ha'adam only refers to the male member of the species.

There are other writers, such as Appleman and Stanton, who ignore one of the creation accounts in their analyses, or who mesh the events of the two narratives into one, confused presentation. In either case, the methodology applied is weak, for it allows writers to avoid grappling with the basic meaning of certain passages. Selectively choosing that material which best supports their point of view, these writers develop a specious argument that the Bible treats women favorably, even though it assigns roles to men and women that are distinctly different. An obvious problem with this approach is that the same method can be used to establish contrasting points of view. Those who perceive the Bible as supportive of women tend to look at the second creation account. In it the woman is last in the order of creation and is understood to be the "crown of creation." But an opposite point of view can be reached by making a distinction between the two creation accounts, e.g., Genesis 1 is non-discriminatory, but woman's creation in Genesis 2 is dependent upon man's prior existence.

The fact that the animals are created after man in Genesis 2 adds a further complication, since, according to the perspective of the first interpretation, the animals have a higher "evolutionary" status than man, having been created after him. If both points of view can be argued by applying the same approach, the strength of the method itself must be questioned.

Only two approaches include Genesis 5:1-2 as an important element in understanding the story, yet the interpretation of these verses vary. The first theory clearly follows the Documentary Hypothesis approach; however, the reappearance of the generic term ha'adam is only explained by the fact that the authorship of these verses is the same as other parts of the narrative in which the word has a generic meaning.

In constrast, the rhetorical textual approach offers an explanation that does not rely on the breakdown of authors in Genesis. This analytical method perceives the chapters as literary units that possess common characteristics even though the particular events are not the same. The presentation is consistent in that it indicates a progression in Genesis 1 from chaos to order and progression of Genesis 1 and 2 from the general to the specific. In Genesis 1 the creation on each day begins with an overall sweeping statement about the content of the specific creation; specifics, however, are to be filled in at a later point. On the sixth day when ha'adam is created, the broad, inclusive statement is made--"naaseh ha'adam betsalmenu (let us make ha'adam in our image)"--and further in the verse the details are supplied by the phrase--"zachar

unekevah (male and female)"--chapter 2 provides still greater detail of ha'adam's creation as ha'adam emerges as a sexual creature with the introduction of the terms ish and ishah.

In all of the above mentioned approaches, certain details that would be useful in explicating both the relationship of Genesis 1 and 2 and the proper rendering of ha'adam, have been neglected or disregarded. It is my intention here to try to supply these details. In my presentation there will be interpretations suggested that will be similar if not identical to writings already discussed.

In Genesis 1:26-27 the creation of humanity (ha'adam) appears on the sixth day as a separate act of creation.

> And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The structure of the verses in which ha'adam is created is similar to structure of the narrative involving all other creations, such as the animals or plants. The formula is that each creative act begins with a statement of intention--that is, "let 'X' occur." A general category is then mentioned which is, in turn, followed by an enumeration of its specific parts. For example, on the fourth day:

> God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times--the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate

> the day and the lesser light to dominate the night,
> and the stars.

This passage begins with a statement of intent: "God said, 'Let there be lights.'" The general category is "lights." The specifics of this category "lights" include "the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars." This same formulaic style occurs in Genesis 1:26-27 when God decides to create ha'adam (man) but no details are given concerning the nature of this earthling. In verse 27 the general category of ha'adam is broken into two parts: "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." In Genesis 1:26-27, then, ha'adam refers to generic humanity.

Several commentators have indicated that ha'adam is a "dual sex form" and that the term oto (him) and otam (them) indicate, first, generic humanity, and second, its masculine and feminine components. In their presentations, these writers do not attempt to explain the use of the masculine terms ha'adam and oto (him) in relation to the structure of the Hebrew language. Unlike English that provides for a masculine, feminine and neuter gender, Hebrew owns only the masculine and feminine genders. In addition, when referring to both masculine and feminine genders Hebrew renders them in the masculine, often singular, form. Therefore, in regards to ha'adam which includes both "male and female" the masculine singular, oto (him) is used.

In analyzing the use of ha'adam or any other term in the biblical

text it is insufficient to look only at the structure or the language of a given verse. One must try to discern what the biblical author had hoped to convey to his reader. To do so, one must assume that the biblical author had a specific intention, and that the biblical redactor's arrangement of the texts had a particular purpose. Therefore the appearance of two seemingly disparate creation narratives in Genesis is not an accident or the result of the redactor's oversight. It is the biblical reader's task to determine the meaning of these chapters in relation to one another.

Before examining in detail other verses that have been discussed in the writings, it is important to present some of the events that occur in Genesis 2 before woman's creation in order to clear up some of the confusion that will arise later in the writings. In Genesis 2 the biblical author focuses upon the creation of ha'adam mentioned in the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2:7 the biblical author provides details of ha'adam's creation: "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." The passage continues with a description of the garden in Eden, specifying its contents, particularly two trees: "the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and bad." God further commands the man concerning one of these trees in verse 16: "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it, for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die." Several questions

need to be asked. What is the significance of the trees? If God plants a tree of life are we to presume that death is lurking in the shadows? What is the nature of the "tree of knowledge of good and bad?" Why has a tree been created if it is immediately forbidden? Obviously, the biblical author is waving a red flag at his reader, who knows that the trees have significance but does not understand their particular significance. These questions will be answered later in this chapter. Verse 6 does demand our immediate attention, for it is interpreted as a command to man and it is prescriptive in form. The Hebrew uses the infinitive absolute, "in which the finite Hebrew verb is preceded by its cognate infinitive," for both phrases: "you are free to eat" and "you shall die." E. A. Speiser points out that when the infinitive absolute is used, "the resulting phrase is a flexible utterance capable of conveying various shades of meaning."[1] Therefore, one need not translate the terms achol tochal and mot tamut ("you are free to eat" and "you shall die") as divine commands. As the story reveals, man does not die immediately upon eating from the forbidden tree, but rather becomes mortal and time bound. As Speiser says "The point of the whole narrative is apparently man's ultimate punishment rather than instantaneous death."

Let us look again at Genesis 1:26-27:

> And God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image, in the image of God He

created him; male and female He created them.

The explication of the above passage and a presentation of the details in the beginning segment of Genesis 2 set the stage for analyzing the writings' presentation of woman's status as it emerges in Genesis 2. Man and woman's role is further defined in the writings by the explication of Genesis 2:18--"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.'"--particularly the term ezer kenegdo (fitting helper). Three interpretations are presented in the writings. The first suggests that woman serves as man's complement and provides those skills and characteristics that he lacks. This position does not support its interpretation with any evidence. Therefore it is difficult to criticize it except on the self evident grounds that such an approach for explication is very weak.

A second position, of which Trible is the main proponent, is based upon the meaning of each part of the term, ezer and neged. According to Trible, ezer is a relational term that does not imply a negative or subordinate status. The word neged implies a counter position. She interprets the composite of these terms, ezer and neged within the context of the narrative, asserting that the roles of God, man, and the animals are in relationship to one another. Drawing upon other texts in the Bible in which the term ezer is found, Trible shows that God is often portrayed as a supreme ezer (helper). In contrast, the animals brought to man for naming and companionship do not fulfill the role of man's equal. Therefore, woman is created to serve as the ezer (helper)

who is neged man (his counterpart).

In her analysis, Trible examines each word, ezer and neged, but does not attempt to interpret them as the unit "ezer kenegdo" which appears in the text. The prefix k' in Hebrew can imply opposition. Indeed some writings do place woman in a role opposite to man which creates a sense of confrontation between the couple. It is our belief that the prefix k' needs to be translated as "as" or corresponding to man. In this regard Bennett's rendering ezer kenegdo in terms of the old English translation of helpmeet can be beneficial. That is one who is suited or compatible with man. By this interpretation, confrontation is eliminated as one facet of man's and woman's relationship and she becomes man's complement, not subordinate.

A third position, expressed by Reik, links Genesis 2 to a non-biblical myth involving the creation and development of the first man. It specifically includes his birth, development into manhood, initiation into the tribe, circumcision, marriage, children, and death. Reik suggests that woman's creation through the rib surgery parallels the circumcision of this "mythical man." Although the connection is interesting, the relevance of a myth of Australian origin to the Genesis 2 narrative is questionable. There are, in fact, biblical narratives that appear similar to myths from other cultures, such as the Enuma Elish or Gilgamesh; however, these stories emerged among peoples with whom ancient Israel was familiar. Reik's suggested parallel lacks credibility because he neither shows how an aboriginal myth was

transmitted to biblical society, nor its usefulness in elucidating biblical tradition.

The next passage that critics tackle is the passage in which woman is created and "named."

> So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken." Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

The commentators first consider the implication of woman being "taken" from man's rib. Three basic interpretations emerge in the literature. One implies that woman is subordinate because she was "taken" from man and is, therefore, dependent upon him for her existence. A second position interprets man as a passive participant in the process and credits God with the creative act. But was woman actually "taken" from man? A closer reading of the text reveals that the rib, not the woman, was taken from the man--"He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib He had taken from the man into a woman." In other words, the rib possesses no more status than the "dust from the earth" from which man was created. In Genesis 2:7--"the Lord God formed (ytsr) man from the dust of the earth"--and in Genesis 2:22--"God fashioned (bnh) the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman"--one may argue that the

verbs used to describe the creation of both man and woman are different and one may therefore ascribe to women a secondary status. But, in fact, the verbs ytsr and bnh both refer to divine action. God either forms (ytsr) or builds (bnh) raw material into a final product. The emphasis should be on the similarity of the divine involvement in the creation of man and woman, and not on the particular process.

The next passage discussed in the writings concern man "naming" woman in verse 23: "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman, for from man was she taken." Some commentators suggest that woman is named twice in the creation narratives. The first "naming" occurs in the passage mentioned above and the second "naming" is in Genesis 3:20--"The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living." Some writers explain woman's "naming" through the explication of the term zot hapa'am (this one at last) in verse 23. Four positions emerge in the literature. The first position suggests that zot hapa'am (this one at last) is an utterance of the man's joy in first seeing the woman. It asserts that the term zot hapa'am does not imply a subordinate role for woman. A second interpretation links the term zot hapa'am to man's disappointment at not finding a proper companion among the animals. This interpretation implies that when woman is brought to the man he immediately recognizes their similarity in appearance. zot hapa'am signifies the man's immediate awareness that the woman is not like the other animals. Therefore he calls the woman ishah and

himself ish to signify their similarity. A third position relies on the Hebrew for a proper rendering of the text. It links the naming of woman to the naming of the animals because of the verb qr' (to call) associated with both events. This position suggests that just as the man has dominion over the animals he acquires the status when he "names" the woman.

A fourth position sharply disagrees with this last position. It maintains that the structure of the verse in which woman is named is not identical to the one regarding the animals. The term employed in verse 19--". . . and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name"--is qr' shemot (to call names). But in the case of woman, qr' is used without the second word shemot. Therefore man does not name the woman as he does the animals; rather he designates her as ishah and himself as ish: No authority is implied.

Actually, the "naming" of woman should pose no problem since woman is never named in Genesis 2:23--"This one shall be called woman." Some writers who have suggested that the woman and the animals are similarly named indicate that the animals are brought to the man with the intention of finding an ezer kenegdo among them. The biblical text informs the reader that God creates the animals and brings them to the man "specifically to see what man would call them." There is no indication in the text that God ever intended the animals to serve as man's ezer kenegdo. These writers make this assumption based on the latter part of verse 20--"And the man gave names to all

the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found." One might assume that the phrase--"But for Adam no fitting helper was found"--implies that among the animals Adam cannot find one that was a proper ezer kenegdo. If we assume the proper meaning of ezer kenegdo is one who is suited to the man, i.e., made from the same material, it is obvious that the animals could never fulfill this role. Therefore, when man says, zot hapa'am (this one at last) he is acknowledging that woman is from the same "cloth," so to speak, as he is and that she fulfills the role of ezer kenegdo.

The same process will occur when a reciprocal relationship is implied in the text. If one were to apply this rule of grammar to our text, then the meaning of verse 24 would be: "This is why man and woman both leave father and mother to stick to one another and become one flesh." As Brichto indicates, "Anyone with a sense of style will appreciate why the author would not resort to anything so pedantic as, 'This is why a man leaves his father and mother and a woman leaves her father and mother. . . .'"[2] So why is this verse included in the narrative? The biblical author is addressing a society in which family relationships are essential, particularly the bond between parent and child. Does this relationship dissolve when the child marries a stranger? Is not the family tie stronger? The biblical author indicates that the marriage bond is not between two strangers; rather, it symbolizes, as Trible suggests, the primordial harmony when humanity

was originally one.

Genesis 3 begins with the seduction of woman by the serpent: "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The serpent assures the woman that if she eats from the "forbidden" tree she will not die; rather, her eyes will be opened and she will be like divine beings who know good and bad.

> When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

One position in the literature claims that both man and woman are equally responsible for their misdeed. Another interpretation suggests that while the woman has been duped by the serpent, the man eats of the fruit because of his desire to gain wisdom. Both of these positions are based on the assumption that the couple breaks a divine command not to eat from the tree. We have indicated (cf. p. 42) that the original "command" is more of a warning than a command. Man and woman are given free will concerning the tree but they are warned that consequences will result if they eat from the tree. Indeed what transpires after they eat? The narrative describes the action quickly--"she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate"--but does not indicate that there is an immediate change in man's and woman's technical skills. They do not go out and build jet planes, microwave ovens, or home video games. Nor do they acquire aesthetic knowledge. There is no evidence that they receive inspiration to paint

a picture of the garden home. The text is explicit regarding the outcome of their action: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths." Man and woman acquire sexual knowledge. The sexual organs, which had been created for some unknown reason, now acquire meaning. The sexual creatures, ish and ishah, gain sexual knowledge.

What consequences befall the couple? We have already indicated that an eventual consequence for man and woman is the introduction of death into their world. A second, more immediate consequence involves both a distortion in the harmony between man and nature and a change in the couple's personal relationship.

A dominant position in the literature claims that man, woman, and the serpent are "cursed" for their behavior. If one assumes that the tree is never forbidden, how can God curse them for their actions? The verb 'rr (to curse) is only used directly in reference to the serpent: "Because you did this more cursed ('rr) shall you be than all the wild beasts. On your belly shall you crawl and dust shall you eat all the days of your life." But is "cursed" an adequate translation of 'rr? By translating the verse--"more cursed ('rr) shall you be than all the wild beasts"--one is left with the impression that in some way the "wild beasts" are also cursed. In the narrative 'rr is used in context with the preposition m' (from). Together they can be translated as banned or condemned which would supply a more fitting translation for

our verse--"Banned or condemned shall you be from all the wild beasts."[3]

The judgment (not curse) on man indicates a distortion in the original harmony between ha'adam and the earth in Genesis 1. Originally man is given dominion over the earth and now the land becomes man's antagonist:

> Cursed (condemned) be the ground because of you;
> by toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life;
> Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But
> your food shall be the grasses of the field; by the
> sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat,
> until you return to the ground--for from it were
> you taken.

The judgment on woman is perceived by some of the writers to be more severe than the judgment on the man because it involves a distortion in her relationship to man: "Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." A closer examination of the verse and its context to the entire narrative is required.

The components of God's judgment of woman are interrelated. The first part involves her future role as mother: "I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children." The two parts of this verse form a hendiadys (a figure in which a complex idea is expressed by two words connected by a copulative conjunction): woman will have pain in childbearing. In order to have children woman is dependent upon her husband, therefore her desire is for her husband. Why is propagation suddenly necessary? It has already been established that death enters into the couple's world. If this were to occur without other humans to take the place of man and woman how would the human

race be perpetuated? To compensate for the eventual loss of life to befall man and woman God builds a safeguard into his creation. Having acquired sexual knowledge, the couple now uses this knowledge to perpetuate the species. It is for this reason that woman's name is fitting. Man now names the woman (qr' shem) for the first time and her name Chavah is intricately linked to her new role.

Woman, with man's assistance, is to perpetuate the human species. As we shall see in the next chapter, the biblical author is concerned with propagation, specifically that of one specific family. If man and woman never ate from the tree how could this propagation, so crucial to the biblical author's design take place? Are the events in chapter 3 a ploy by the biblical author to indicate to his readers the early beginnings of humanity, or, did God create humankind to remain within a peaceful static garden? As the next chapter will show, only the first suggestion is plausible.

Unit 2

Chapter 1

Positive Images of Women

in the Family and in the Community

The structure of units 2 and 3 of the thesis divides the literature into two parts. Unit 2 emphasizes those portions of the Bible in which the literature perceives women holding a high status position in the family or in the community. Special attention is paid to the matriarchs, the role of the mother in biblical society, and women prophets. Unit 3 focuses on the various perspectives on those portions of the Bible in which the woman clearly occupies a subordinate role. Although the focus of each section is upon the woman's positive or negative position in the society, the literature does not always agree on the status of women in the Bible. For example, one commentator may view the inheritance laws as evidence of women's equal status in the society, while another writer may take an opposing point of view. Dissenting opinions will be included in the respective units.

Genesis 16:1-6

> Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request. So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian--after Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years--and gave her

> to her husband Abram as concubine. He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The Lord decide between you and me!" Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

Genesis 21:9-10

> Sarah saw the son, whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, playing. She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

Sarah is perceived in the literature as both assertive and aggressive in her reaction to Hagar's behavior. Scholars generally interpret Sarah as a positive role model for women, based on the scriptural presentation of her strength and authority in her household.[1] In the first passage Sarah is understood to be Hagar's owner, thereby suggesting that women could own property in ancient Israel. Sarah's anger is kindled by Hagar's display of disrespect for her. One position suggests that Hagar views her pregnancy as a way to achieve a new and higher status in Abraham's household.

> Hagar had acted as if her pregnancy had made her a free woman. Sarai asked Abram to confirm her (Hagar's) legal standing.[2]

The fact that Sarah confronts Abraham on the issue is seen in the literature as a positive feature of Sarah's character. According to one commentator who perceives Sarah in this manner, even Sarah's

name, derived from the same Hebrew root meaning ruler, implies strength in her character. Her anger in the second passage, therefore, is well justified; after all, God promises Sarah that she is to become the mother of many nations. Ishmael, Hagar's son, poses a threat to that promise. Sarah's authority to handle the situation is seen as crucial. Even though she asks Abraham for action in the first passage, Abraham places the responsibility back on Sarah because Hagar is considered her property. One interpretation of Abraham's action links Sarah's authority over Hagar to the Hammurabi Law Code. "Here a slave girl remains the property of her mistress even though she has been assigned to her owner's husband as a concubine."[3] The fact that Sarah acts assertively and that she owns property is considered indicative of a high status position for women in biblical society.

Genesis 24:57-59

> And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men.

Genesis 27:5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 42, 43

> Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau. . . . Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. . . ." "If my father touches me I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." But his mother said to him, "Your curse,

> my son, be upon me!" . . . When the words of her older son Esau had been reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran to my brother Laban."

In the above two passages, the matriarch Rebekah's actions are perceived in the literature as bold and impressive. One interpretation asserts that Rebekah displays independence and authority when she leaves with Abraham's servant without creating a "scandal."[4] Despite her family's wishes that she remain at home for ten days before beginning her journey to Abraham's home, she decides to leave immediately.

Writers have found a more positive image of Rebekah in their interpretation of the second passage. Although Rebekah deliberately deceives her husband she is credited with having acted with admirable insight. When Isaac, "lacked the necessary insight to evaluate Esau's true character, Rebekah acted in a morally courageous manner, and preserved the future of the Jewish people."[5] But Rebekah's action is not interpreted as her unique responsibility since it was the woman's role in biblical society to preserve the family no matter what the consequences. The responsibility of the family rested in part with the woman, not only in terms of rearing the children but more importantly in relationship to insuring the clan's survival.

> The female. . . bore the primary responsibility for the physical survival of the family through bearing children. The male. . . carried the responsibility of being the epitome of the family. When a male was lacking however, a female took over that role.[6]

In the case of Rebekah, Isaac was still alive; however, he was lacking in judgment and Rebekah assumed the responsibility of guaranteeing Isaac's line through Jacob.

Genesis 21:1-2

> The Lord took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken.

Genesis 25:20-21

> Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah. . . . Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

Genesis 29:31; 30:1-2, 22-23

> The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. . . . When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" . . . Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace."

Some writers[7] infer from the above quotes that each matriarch suffered from barrenness during her life. Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born, and the text clearly states that Rebekah, Rachel and Leah needed divine intervention before they could conceive.

Inasmuch as it was the woman's responsibility to insure the survival of the family, the first cases presented in this chapter present

both Sarah and Rebekah as strong women. One position[8] in the literature affirms that Sarah's and Rebekah's boldness reflected their primary role as mother, whereas, another interpretation[9] considers Sarah's action towards Hagar the result of an inner weakness because she could not bear children. Barrenness was viewed as a symbol of shame and reproach in Israel. This position interprets her actions as a retaliation against Hagar who held the barren Sarah in contempt.

> Woman's status in society depended to a large extent on her fruitfulness and the inability to bear children was a cause of disgrace. The childless Sarah for example was despised by her handmaid Hagar and poor Sarah was beside herself when Hagar gave Abraham a son.[10]

In the case of each matriarch, barrenness poses a serious dilemma. Otwell represents that portion of the literature that perceives fruitfulness and barrenness as a sign of divine intervention.

> Although the promise of progeny and name was given the whole people and was recorded as transmitted through the father, the Divine presence and activity which guaranteed the progeny was resident in the woman.[11]

This position maintains that God is directly responsible for the matriarchs' predicament, since Isaac prays to God on Rebekah's behalf, and Jacob tells Rachel that only God has the power to remove her barren condition. "The womb (rechem) is a physical object upon which the deity acts. No one has control over it. Only God closes and opens the womb in judgment, in blessing and in mystery."[12] The matriarchs' barrenness, as well as barrenness for any woman in

Israelite society, is viewed in the writings as a blemish on her status in the family and in the community. According to Otwell, motherhood "was a sacred act of great magnitude which only the woman could perform." This "sacred act" provided woman with a special status. Barrenness is a hindrance in fulfilling woman's maternal role and thereby lowers woman's status.

The origins of barrenness are best presented in the literature as they relate to God's intervention on behalf of Rachel and Leah. Two opposing viewpoints exist. One opinion[13] implies that Rachel's barrenness has been due to divine disfavor. The second position[14] suggests that God is only responsible for the opening of wombs, and not barrenness. According to the first position, God has deliberately denied children to Rachel. The second position maintains that God opens Leah's womb because he sees that she is hated; however, there is no connection between the opening of Leah's womb and the showing of disfavor for Rachel. Rather than close Rachel's womb, "God first blesses women who are hated and then woman who are loved."[15] There is no doubt that Rachel is loved; however, Leah has never been Jacob's favorite wife. Therefore, God is not punishing Rachel; rather, God has pity for Leah who not only is barren, but who also does not have her husband's love.

Within the position that God is responsible for fruitfulness one author suggests that if a man tried to prevent conception he was punished for having interfered with God's plan.

> But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. What he did was displeasing to the Lord, and he took his life also.

The literature not only credits the matriarchs with having played an important role in the perpetuation of the Israelite nation, but suggests that the Israelites would have suffered a serious setback if the Hebrew midwives had obeyed Pharaoh's command to kill all new born boys.

> The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.

In contrast to the matriarchs, the midwives do not take a stand against their husbands. Instead, they disobey Pharaoh's command which could have resulted in severe punishment, if not death. Those authors who cite this incident credit the midwives for having acted courageously. They argue that God, in the biblical narrative, rewards the midwives for their actions.

> And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly.

The above narrative is viewed favorably in the literature as an example of women taking risks, asserting themselves and being rewarded for their admirable behavior. Among those authors who hold this point of view, Trible states, "a patriarchal religion which creates and preserves such. . .traditions contains resources for overcoming

patriarchy."[16] In other words, it is incumbent on the reader of biblical literature to pay special attention to those passages that reflect a positive image of women.

In addition to the matriarchs and midwives, some writers credit another group of women for being responsible for Israel's future during biblical times. These women are not praised for their maternal role, but are viewed as prophets, a title usually associated with men. Generally speaking, the Bible makes little mention of women prophets, and those who are noted have no contact with the prophetic guilds often associated with many male prophets. The Bible specifically mentions three women who are called prophets: Miriam, Deborah and Huldah.

Exodus 15:20

> Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.

Numbers 12:1-2

> When they were in Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married. . . They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?"

In the first passage Miriam is described as both a prophet and as Aaron's sister, but there are no further details about her role as either prophet or sister. The second passage provides more insight into both Miriam's personality and her role as prophet. Miriam and Aaron speak against their brother and consider their role as prophet on equal

par with Moses.

Miriam's punishment for berating Moses is viewed by some of the writers[17] as an attempt to reduce Miriam's status in the Bible. This assumption is based on the fact that only Miriam was punished, although Aaron also spoke negatively about his brother. It is suggested that Miriam was an independent leader at the time of the Exodus whose status was reduced by the J author in order to delegate total authority to Moses.

In addition to Miriam, Deborah is a prophet and a judge during Israel's early years in Canaan.

Judges 4:4

> Now Deborah a prophetess, the wife of
> Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

Despite the prophetic reference to Deborah, a portion of the literature places greater significance on her role as judge and warrior than it does on her role as prophet. One may ask why the biblical writer or redactor does not try to diminish Deborah's importance as he does in the case of Miriam? Swidler,[18] who claims that Miriam's importance has been diminished asserts that the Song of Deborah is too old and too important a poetic work to be removed from the Bible or altered in any way. Since much of the information about Deborah is stated in the Song of Deborah, it would be difficult to alter her importance without affecting the structure and nature of the poem.

Other critics attempt to explain why so few women became prophets

in ancient Israel.

> The fact that fewer women than men ruled is most easily explained by the more dangerous and demanding role of woman within the family than by any hypothesis of the repression of woman in ancient Israel.[19]

Those who affirm the above statement maintain that a woman fulfilled her obligation to her husband and family before she pursued a position outside of the home.

> (The women's) exercise of their calling must have been at best part-time, at least during child-rearing years, and not ever have begun until later in life. Early marriage with its demands upon women of a primary vocation as wife and mother would have excluded the early culturation of the gift of prophecy.[20]

Huldah, the third woman who is called a prophet in the Bible is quite different from Miriam and Deborah in that she is only known for her gift of prophecy. Unlike Miriam and Deborah, who were recognized for their leadership roles in addition to their gift of prophecy, Huldah is only known as a prophet.

2 Kings 22:11-14

> When the king heard the contents of the scroll of the Teaching, he rent his clothes. And the king gave orders to the priest Hilkiah. . ."Go, inquire of the Lord on my behalf, and on behalf of the people, and on behalf of all Judah. . .For great indeed must be the wrath of the Lord that has been kindled against us, because our fathers did not obey the words of the scroll. . . ." So the priest Hilkiah. . .went to the prophetess Huldah--the wife of Shallum. . .and they spoke to her.

Three distinct positions on Huldah's role as prophet emerge in the literature. One position maintains that Huldah is a minor character in the Bible because she is not recognized or remembered for her own special abilities. This interpretation presented by Swidler considers Huldah's identification as Shallum's wife more significant in the biblical text than the role she plays as prophet. He indicates that little attention is given to Huldah because women prophets were not an unusual occurrence in biblical society. This interpretation contends that the examples of Miriam and Deborah show that the ability to lead, rather than prophetic power, is what makes a woman extraordinary.[21]

Unit 2

Chapter 2

Critique: Positive Images of Women

in the Family and in the Community

The writings discussed in Unit 1 analyze the images of male and female in the creation narratives in accordance with a specific critical approach to the text. But not all of the commentators who address themselves to the issues in Unit 1 concern themselves with the biblical texts analyzed in Units 2 and 3. Those writers who do try to explicate the texts presented in Units 2 and 3 do not develop as thorough a contextual analysis as they do in their presentations of the opening chapters of Genesis. Indeed, clear principles or approaches in methodological analysis and interpretation are hardly discussed. The writers tend to concern themselves with loosely related examples which do not provide convincing evidence in support of either an equal or subordinate role which the Bible has supposedly thrust upon women for all generations.

Furthermore, the writers' suggestion that the roles of women who get special attention in the Bible reflect the exceptional in Israelite society is weak in that it is purely speculative. Even if correct, the appearance does not rule out the exception as the biblical ideal. The portrayal of women may at times appear to present woman in a subordinate position; however, those portions in which woman is assigned

a positive position must be viewed as evidence that the Bible is not altogether satisfied with, or indifferent to, a sexist position.

The topics analyzed in the preceding chapter include: the matriarchs, the issue of barrenness among the matriarchs, the midwives in Egypt, and women prophets. This chapter will be devoted to a critique of the methodologies employed by recent commentators to interpret the above topics.

When specific actions of the matriarchs are examined in which a higher status is ascribed to them than to women in other biblical narratives, two positions emerge in the literature. First, the matriarchs are examples of women who enjoy equal status with their husbands, and they provide a positive role model for women of future generations. Second, the matriarchs are especially noted in the Bible because their favorable status presents the exception in biblical society. The literature neglects to specify exactly what role the matriarchs fulfill in the biblical narrative.

The first passages presented for analysis in the literature involve the interaction between Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar in Genesis 16:1-6 and Genesis 21:9-10, which can be found on pages 53 and 54. In these passages, Sarah is perceived by some as possessing considerable power over Abraham and Hagar. Hagar's contempt for Sarah's inability to conceive is presented as the crux of the issue. Some commentators assign Sarah legal power over Hagar, for Abraham clearly informs Sarah that the decision is hers and that Hagar's future rests in her

hands. These critics do not attempt to examine the status of slaves, particularly the question of to whom they are subjugated. Nor do critics attempt to gain a general perspective on slavery by investigating other portions of the Bible in which slave status is featured.

In order to explain Sarah's authority over Hagar, Otwell associates Sarah's actions with information found in the Hammurabi Code. The code states that a slave girl "remains the property of her mistress even though she has been assigned to her owner's husband as a concubine."[1] In attempting to present Sarah as a strong, assertive woman, Otwell only refers to that section of a law code that will substantiate Sarah's authority; however, he neglects to cite other texts in which Sarah's actions may not prove as assertive and authoritative as the one he cites. A similar situation found in the Nuzi Tablets provides that if a woman is married and cannot conceive it is her obligation to provide a concubine for her husband in order to build up both his and her house. According to this custom/tradition, Sarah would have been obligated to give Hagar to Abraham. Therefore one could question if Sarah's actions toward Hagar were sufficient to earn her special status.[2]

Otwell and the other commentators seem to be missing the point of the passages involving Sarah and Hagar. Each writer tends to look at the content of a specific passage to reach his or her conclusion regarding Sarah's authority in her household, yet they ignore any serious attempt to understand the biblical author's intention in these passages.

My intention here is to present the biblical background to the narratives concerning Sarah and Hagar in order to show that Sarah's importance is demonstrated not by the way in which she treats her handmaiden, but by the important role she plays in the future of biblical society.

None of the commentators suggest any connection between woman's role described in Genesis 3:20--"The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living"--, Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar, the matriarchs' problem of barrenness, Rebekah's deceptive behavior to secure Jacob's blessing, the midwives commendable action, and the Levirate law. Careful study, demonstrates, however, that the above events are intricately related.

Unit 1 of this thesis concludes with the analysis of Genesis 3:20--"The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living"--in which woman is named and her role is concerned with the propagation of humanity. The biblical author, however, is not interested in all of humanity, but a specific line that will develop a special relationship with God: Abraham's descendants become that special line.

In Genesis 11, the biblical author provides a genealogy which lists Abram as the descendant of Shem, the son of Noah. Throughout that genealogy the presentation of each descendant appears the same. For example, "After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and begot sons and daughters." The author impresses on the reader that each

descendant "begot sons and daughters." In the last section of this genealogy the pattern is broken.

> When Terah had lived seventy years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.

Why does the author make specific mention of the women? Why does he emphasize that Sarai is barren when there is no reference to the other women's fertility? The answers to these questions are provided in the following chapters of the biblical narrative. The genealogy of Shem is immediately followed by God's call to Abram in Genesis 12: 1-3:

> The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."

It seems odd that God makes such a promise to Abram since the biblical author has already noted that Sarai is barren. Who will mother this great nation promised by God to Abram?

The concept of progeny is a crucial aspect of biblical society. A clan or family faces extinction if there are no children to continue the family name. In a patriarchal society, such as that found in the Bible,

the family line is perpetuated by male children, who are considered more valuable than females. The biblical author has already provided evidence for this masculine bias. In each genealogy, although daughters are mentioned along with sons, the line descends through a son; however, in Genesis 11 the author includes the name of Abram's wife in the genealogy. Is the inclusion of Sarai's name in the genealogy merely an inconsistency in the author's style, or does the biblical author intend for the reader to recognize both Sarai and Abram as important figures? In view of the fact that Sarai is to mother the "great nation," the latter interpretation seems reasonable, but there is a dilemma because the biblical author has made explicit that "Sarai was barren, she had no child."

As Abram approaches old age he is concerned that God's promise to make him "a great nation" has not been fulfilled. He confronts God directly on this issue in Genesis 15:1-6:

> Some time later, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer!" Abram said further, "Since you have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir." The word of the Lord came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be." And because he put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit.

God informs Abram that a steward will not become Abram's heir, but

that Abram's line must descend through Abram's own flesh and blood. The scene is now set for the scene between Sarai and Hagar.

Seeing that she cannot bear children, Sarai attempts to supply both Abram and herself with progeny. She offers her maidservant, Hagar, to Abram in the hope that both she and her husband will benefit from Hagar's offspring. The commentators present Sarai as a positive role model for all women because of her authority over Hagar and her ability to own property; yet, what did Sarai do that was so special? According to the Hammurabi Code and Nuzi Tablets it was not unusual in the Ancient Near East for women to own slaves and exert authority over them.[3] Sarai's importance, then, is presented by the biblical author in terms of her ability to supply progeny. When Ishmael, Hagar's son is born--one of Abram's "own issue"--Abram's need for progeny to continue the covenant between God and Abram, is still not fulfilled: God informs Abram that he and Sarai must parent the son that will continue the covenant God makes with Abram in Genesis 17.

Genesis 17:1-22

> When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him. . . ."I will establish my covenant between Me and you and I will make you exceedingly numerous. . . .You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. . . ." And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations. . . ." Abraham threw himself on his

> face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man 100 years old, or can Sarah bear a child at 90?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live by Your favor!" God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come. As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. . . .I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

Sarah's role is now made clear; she is as important as Abraham in the realization of God's promise. When Sarah and Abraham are beyond their procreative years, God blesses them with a child. The biblical author secures Isaac's importance by continuing the narrative through Isaac's genealogical line. Sarah's uniqueness is not in her assertive treatment of Hagar, but rather in the critical role she plays in securing the future of Abraham's line destined to become God's covenant people.

Many of the assumptions made in the critical and interpretive literature concerning Rebekah's role in the narratives of her courting process and of Jacob's blessing of his sons are not supported by the text. They interpret Rebekah's actions in Genesis 24 as both independent and assertive, but her role appears less significant or forceful than the critics indicate. They claim, for example, that Rebekah enjoyed equal status with her brother Laban by sharing in household chores as the text in Genesis 24:15-16 suggests:

> He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah. . . came out with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up.

There does not appear to be any substantial textual proof that Rebekah's actions were extraordinary or that her chore was one that she ever shared with her brother. In verse 11 the biblical author informs the reader that Rebekah's task to fetch water was a common one shared by other women in the area--"He made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water." The Hebrew of this text renders the term "women come out to draw water" (hashoavot) in the feminine plural. Given the linguistic convention in Hebrew of using the masculine form of the word to specify both masculine and feminine genders, it seems reasonable to speculate that the use of the feminine plural form would indicate a task customarily performed by women. Therefore, there is no proof in the biblical text that there was equality between Rebekah and Laban in the tasks they performed.

Commentators also claim that Rebekah had the authority to invite strangers into her mother's house, citing verses 23-25:". . . Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night? '. . . And she went on, 'There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night.'" While Rebekah does, in these verses, assure Abraham's servant that there is room for him in her mother's house, the formal invitation is actually extended by her brother in verses 28:31:

> The maiden ran and told all this to her mother's household. Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring--when he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah

> say, "Thus the man spoke to me." He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring. "Come in, O blessed of the Lord," he said, "why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?"

In these verses the biblical author supplies subtle details that provide the reader with insight into Laban's personality. Laban's invitation comes only after he sees the gifts Abraham's servant has given to Rebekah. If the servant had not bestowed the jewelery upon Rebekah, would Laban have been so hospitable? We don't know, but what is clear from the text is that Rebekah provides little more than information concerning lodging possibilities to the servant; the invitation is extended by a male member of the family.

Yet another example of the critics' failure to accurately interpret the text involves Rebekah's departure from her family to go with Abraham's servant "without a scandal." To what possible "scandal" is Swidler referring? The text of verse 59 reads: "So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men." There is no indication that her departure should cause a "scandal." As previously noted in this thesis, the nature of a patriarchal society required a woman to leave her father's house when she married. Abraham sends his servant with the explicit instruction to return to him with a wife in verses 4-6--"but (you) will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac.' And the servant said to him, 'What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I take your son back to the land from which you came?' Abraham

answered him, 'On no account must you take my son back there!'" These verses indicate that the servant has no choice but to bring Rebekah back to Abraham's house. From all of these verses it would appear that Rebekah acts neither independently nor admirably in leaving with Abraham's servant; rather, she follows custom.

Some critics also mistakenly credit Rebekah with preserving the future of the Israelites when she says to Jacob: "Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." In their attempt to paint Rebekah in a positive light, these writers disregard certain important events in the biblical text. Rebekah's actions are presented as if they had been prompted by her own idiosyncratic motivations, and the reader is led to believe that Rebekah possessed better judgment than her husband Isaac. But the critics ignore an earlier passage that may suggest a reason for her deception of her husband. Genesis 25:22-23 reads:

> But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate people shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

Contrary to the assertion made in the same critical studies, it is not necessarily evident from the text that Rebekah acted in a morally courageous fashion. Perhaps she was just fulfilling God's prediction

in Genesis 25:23.

One position in the literature suggests that Rebekah's actions are not unique because it was a woman's responsibility to insure the family line.

> The female. . . bore the primary responsibility for the physical survival of the family through bearing children. The male. . . carried the responsibility of being the epitome of the family. When a male was lacking however, a female took over that role. (cf. p. 56, note 6)

While there is ample justification for such a distinction, surely there is more at stake in explaining Rebekah's actions than merely her desire to insure her family's line. What difference would it have made if Esau had received the blessing? Was not Esau the same son to Rebekah and Isaac as Jacob? The answers become clear when we consider the import of Rebekah's actions according to the biblical author.

We have previously discussed in this chapter the biblical writer's stress on the continuation of one special line that will fulfill God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, 19--"I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages. . . . Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come."

God fulfills the promise to Abraham and Sarah through Isaac's birth; however, the special line does not end with Isaac, for God's covenant is with "his offspring to come." Just as there is tension

between Isaac and Ishmael in the previous narrative, there is also disagreement between Jacob and Esau. In both cases the matriarchs, Sarah and Rebekah, play a crucial role. Sarah's actions towards Hagar secured the line for Isaac. In the text describing Jacob's blessing, Rebekah's actions, whether prompted by her bias in favor of Jacob--"but Rebekah favored Jacob"--or her obedience to God's prediction in Genesis 25:23--"the older shall serve the younger"--she is credited by the biblical author with properly securing the line through Jacob.

Even though the literature tries to present the matriarchs in a positive manner, it does not overlook a serious threat to the matriarchs' status: Each matriarch suffered from a period of barrenness in her life. The writers perceive barrenness in two ways as it emerges in the biblical text. First, it is a sign of reproach and shame in biblical society. This position suggests that Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar was prompted by Sarah's low self-esteem resulting from her barren condition. Second, as Trible asserts, barrenness is associated with the deity: "The womb is a physical object upon which the deity acts. No one has control over it. Only God closes and opens the womb in judgment, in blessing and in mystery."[4] It is not my intention here to dispute the above perceptions, since it is clear that both beliefs were operative in biblical society. In Genesis 20:17-18 for example, it is reported that God punished Abimelech by closing the wombs of the women in his household. In the cases of the matriarchs there do not

appear to be any indications that their barrenness was the result of divine punishment. Even in the case of Rachel and Leah, although Trible suggests God is displaying favor and disfavor, one can only infer from the text--"The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren." Some writers assume these women suffered due to some unknown flaw in their characters, but there is little textual evidence to support such a contention. If God is responsible for the opening and closing of wombs, what then is God's purpose in denying children to the matriarchs? What was the biblical author's intent in presenting the same "flaw" in each matriarch? It is my contention that the matriarchs' barrenness fits into a pattern that has been emerging from the biblical text throughout this presentation. Barrenness is linked to the perpetuation of that one special family line that develops a unique relationship with God. The proper family line for the Israelites was not an easy one to produce. It appears to be the biblical author's intention to show that this line does not automatically perpetuate itself, but takes time, effort and God's intervention. Unlike those critics who perceive barrenness as a flaw in the matriarchs' character, it must be pointed out that the patriarchs were equally affected by their wives' failure to conceive for progeny was promised to both Abraham and Sarah.

If barrenness were linked to a matriarchal flaw would not the biblical author provide evidence that such were the case? No one, including their husbands, blames the matriarchs for their unfortunate

situation; rather, they accept the fact that God has closed their wombs without any apparent reason. In Genesis 25:21 Isaac intercedes on his wife's behalf--"Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived." In regards to Rachel, Jacob rebukes her for blaming him for her barren condition--"Can I take the place of God who has denied you fruit of the womb?"--God eventually responds--"Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb."

The future of the line becomes secure through Rachel and Leah as the line that previously descended through a single individual, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now blossoms into a nation through the twelve tribes of Israel, who is Jacob.

In trying to demonstrate deity's involvement in procreation Otwell cites the narrative in Genesis 38:9-10: "But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother." Even if his premise is accurate--that God is involved in the procreative act--the example of Onan provides weak, inappropriate evidence. Was Onan punished for interfering with God's work, or was his crime the result of his refusal to perform the duty of the levir? In Deuteronomy 25 levirate marriage is explained.

> When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her; take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty. The first son

> that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother,
> that his name may not be blotted out in Israel.

In the Genesis passage under discussion Otwell cites that portion of the text in which Onan expresses his displeasure in providing children to continue his brother's line. He does not mention the beginning of the narrative which clearly indicates that the issue is the levir's responsibility to father children for his dead brother, and not Onan's crime of hindering God's procreative intentions[5]--"Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by has as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother."

Still another example is provided in the literature of women who represent a positive role model. In Exodus 1:20-21--"And God dealt with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them"--it is clear that God commends and rewards the midwives for their saving the Israelite new born males. What, though is the purpose of this narrative? What is the biblical author's intention? Can one assume that only two midwives were responsible for saving an entire nation? Or, were the Israelites so small in number that only two midwives were necessary? The text does not supply the reader with these details. One fact can be adduced: If the Israelites had died in Egypt, God's promise to Abraham in Genesis would not reach fruition. The continuation of the special Israelite line is again the critical issue.

Some commentators who applaud this passage concerning the

midwives, do not take issue with the reward given to them--"And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them." Throughout their discussions these commentators criticize the emphasis on woman's primary role as mother. Ironically, those who hold this position do not take issue with God rewarding the midwives with motherhood. It is my belief that no reward could have been more fitting. The ones who are responsible for securing the special Israelite line are also guaranteed the continuation of their own family line.[6]

There is another group of critics who assert that in addition to the matriarchs and midwives, a third group is responsible for aiding in the survival of the Israelite nation. Women prophets provide still another positive, female role model. Three women prophets are considered in the literature: Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. In regards to Miriam two passages are cited that refer to her as prophet.

Exodus 15:20

> Then Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.

Numbers 12:1-2

> When they were in Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married. . . They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us as well?"

These passages, although they identify Miriam as a prophet, do not

include any details of her prophecy. Is it possible that the biblical author did not take the opportunity to mention the uniqueness and importance of this aspect of Miriam's role? Or, are women prophets not considered an unusual occurrence in biblical society? If so, there would be no cause to elaborate on Miriam's prophetic abilities.

Swidler cites the second passage in an attempt to further verify Miriam's prophetic status--"has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" In his presentation, Swidler ignores that part of the narrative in which God rebukes Aaron and Miriam for their previous comment in Numbers 12:5-8:

> The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward, and He said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord."

God is angry with Miriam and Aaron. God does not deny prophetic status to Aaron and Miriam, but rather asserts that Moses is a superior prophet. Even though Swidler chooses to ignore these verses, he is still accurate in his presentation of Miriam as a prophet.

Throughout this discussion we have noted that a number of writers misinterpret the original Hebrew text because they either ignore the structure of the Hebrew language, or deem the Bible a sexist document. The Hebrew language uses the masculine form of a verb or noun when

referring to both masculine and feminine genders. In the discussion of the creation narratives in the previous unit, the reader will recall that one position asserts that ha'adam refers to the male part of the species while another interprets ha'adam as generic. The different interpretations of this term are based in part on the writers' perception of the language. For those writers who assert that the masculine gender is usually only used in regards to masculine nouns or verbs, it would be interesting to know if they base their presentation of Miriam as a prophet on the Numbers 12 passage. If so, according to their own understanding of the Hebrew language Miriam would not be considered a prophet because the language used in God's rebuke of Aaron and Miriam in verse 6 contains the masculine singular forms elav (to him) and bo (in him). "And He said, 'Hear these my words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream." Would these critics of the Hebrew language agree that Miriam was not a prophet? It seems likely that they would not.

In the Numbers passage only Miriam is punished for her criticism of Moses--"As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales"--while Aaron incurs no punishment. Swidler contends that Miriam's punishment is inserted by a late biblical author who is aware of a tradition in which Miriamis presented as an independent leader during the Exodus. Miriam is punished in the Numbers narrative in order to subjugate her to Moses' authority. But

by applying a similar line of reasoning one could reach a very different conclusion. Could not the biblical author have deleted Aaron's name from the punishment to preserve Aaron's reputation? After all, it is through Aaron that the priestly line descends. Swidler's argument, then, is rhetorical at best.

In Judges 4:4 Deborah is identified as both a prophet and judge: "Now Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time." Lacks, Bennett, and Bird all consider Deborah's role as judge more significant than her prophetic post. Lacks suggests that "while the women, (prophets) to be sure, are extraordinary enough, it is the quality of their leadership that render them so. . . ." In Judges, Deborah is certainly remembered for her military leadership and judicial capabilities, while no special attention is paid to her prophetic skills.

In 2 Kings 22:14 we find the only mention of Huldah: "So the priest Hilkiah. . . went to the prophetess Huldah--the wife of Shallum. . . and they spoke to her." Two pieces of information are given in this verse: Huldah is a prophet and she is Shallum's wife. One position in the literature suggests that Huldah's lack of recognition in the Bible and low profile, are the result of her identification as "the wife of Shallum." This criticism is inconsistent since Deborah, who receives considerable attention in the Bible is similarly identified in Judges 4:4.

What significance then is attached to women prophets? The examples cited above all seem to indicate that a woman's leadership

qualities were more highly regarded in biblical society than her prophetic skills. It is this writer's contention that indeed women were recognized more for their leadership abilities. One may assume that women prophets may not have been an uncommon feature in biblical society since the text does not treat this aspect of their lives as special.

Unit 3

Chapter 1

Negative Images of Women

in the Family and in the Community

Despite the fact that some critical studies cite passages from the Bible in which women appear to be equal to men in ability and status, there are opposing opinions that maintain that women are considered subordinate to men both at home and in the community.

Woman is perceived as subordinate first to her father and later to her husband. Some writers[1] cite examples in which a father makes decisions concerning his daughter's future that result in physical harm. The legal system in Israelite society permits the father to act on his daughter's behalf without her prior consent, as is the case in Judges 15:1:

> . . . Samson came to visit his wife, bringing a kid as a gift. He said, "let me go into the chamber to my wife." But her father would not let him go in. "I was sure," said her father, "that you had taken a dislike to her, so I gave her to your wedding companion."

There is no indication in the biblical text that Samson's wife has agreed to her father's action.

> The father or husband was the boss in the ancient Near Eastern family. While woman is legally recognized as moral in ritual circumstances, her status with the family in relationship to her father or husband is clearly that of a subordinate.[2]

Critics[3] have identified three specific cases in which a father treats his daughter(s) in a manner repugnant to modern sensibilities.

Genesis 19:4-8

> They had not lain down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old--all the people to the last man--gathered about the house. And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them." So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under shelter of my roof."

Deploring Lot's attitude towards and treatment of his daughters, one interpretation suggests that Lot is willing to subject his daughters to rape in order to prevent the two strangers from being homosexually assaulted.[4] It appears that Lot is less concerned about his daughters' welfare than he is about protecting the strangers who are his guests.

Judges 19:22-24

> While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the town, a depraved lot, had gathered about the house and were pounding on the door. They called to the aged owner of the house, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him." The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please my friends, do not commit such a wrong. . . . Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you want with them; but don't do this outrage against this man."

This passage is viewed with the same contempt as the narrative of

Lot and his daughters. One interpretation[5] blames the host for being more concerned with social etiquette than he is with protecting his daughter's life. Another position[6] asserts that homosexuality, rather than hospitality, is the critical issue, since biblical society viewed homosexuality a greater abomination than rape. To prevent this horrible act, the fathers in each account decide that the rape of their daughters is lesser offense.

Judges 11:30-31, 34, 39

> And Jephthah made the following vow to the Lord: If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering. . . . When Jephthah arrived at his home. . . there was his daughter coming out to meet him. . . She was an only child; he had no other son or daughter. . . . he did to her what he had vowed.

Critics consider Jephthah's actions even more devastating than those of Lot and the old man, since he sacrifices his daughter's life in return for being victorious in battle.

According to the literature, a woman's subordinate role did not cease when she married and moved out of her father's house. "A woman was always under male jurisdiction--she was never her own person."[7] One position[8] in the literature links such subordination to the role implied by the Hebrew word for husband, baal (master or owner), and it traces this image of the husband as master to the "curse" on woman in Genesis 3:16: "Yet your urge shall be for your husband,

and he shall rule over you." A second commentator indicates that a wife's sexuality is "the exclusive property of her husband."[9]

A third position[10] examines those biblical portions in which women are treated as property and equated with other material possessions. Two passages are cited as examples:

Deuteronomy 20:10, 12, 14

> When you approach a town to attack it, . . . if it does not surrender. . . you shall lay siege to it . . . . You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town--all its spoil--and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy which the Lord your God gives you.

Deuteronomy 21:10-14

> When you take the field against your enemies, and you find among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her and would take her to wife, you shall bring her into your house. . . She shall spend a month's time in your house. . . after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife. Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money: since you had your will of her, you must not enslave her.

These passages are cited as evidence of the Israelites' treatment of foreign women during war. Although the second passage seems to imply that woman possesses a special status, since she cannot be treated as a slave, both passages are offered as evidence of the low status of women in biblical society.

Writers who favor this position also examine the status of Israelite women in relationship to their husbands' other material possessions.

In attempting to determine if women were generally treated as chattel, or if they were assigned a more valued position in the household, scholarship analyzes the following passage from the Decalogue.

Exodus 20:17

> You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

The verse is interpreted to mean that the Israelite women held no better status in biblical society than did women who were captured in war. A wife is simply listed along with other property belonging to her husband.[11]

An opposing position asserts that because the wife is mentioned first in the list she possesses a higher status than any of the other items mentioned in the verse.[12] As "the first-named member of the household" she is not equated with her husband's property. Critics holding this latter point of view cite a similar passage in Deuteronomy in which the difference in a wife's status is more clearly defined.

Deuteronomy 5:18

> You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not crave your neighbor's house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

In this parallel passage a man's wife is listed totally separate from any of his other property. Proponents of this position contend that since she is not even classified as a part of her husband's house, an

Israelite woman is held in higher regard than a foreign woman taken in war and thus occupies a unique, and equal, position in her husband's house.

Another important area for discussion is the way feminist writers consider virginity as it emerges from the text. Safeguards were taken in biblical society to insure sexual morality: marriage took place at an early age. One position asserts that sexual desire and pleasure were at the root of a man's weakness. His urge to fulfill his sexual desire made him "almost a helpless victim in the hands of Satan."[13] The biblical emphasis on virginity is considered by some critics to be yet another example of woman's low status in biblical society. The above interpretation implies that woman in Genesis 1 and 2 is not created with the same sexual needs as man, therefore it is more fitting to expect virginity in a bride than a groom.

Another position perceives an implicit bias against woman in the case of marriage; while she was supposed to be a virgin her husband was not expected to meet any standard of purity. Although there is no biblical law requiring the virginity of a bride, critics argue[14] that it was a given within the society. Citing the following passage, they point out that a woman could suffer dire consequences if she were accused of lying about her virginity when she first married.

Deuteronomy 22:13-21

> A man marries a woman and cohabits with her. Then he takes an aversion to her and makes charges against

> her and defames her, saying, "I married this woman; but when I approached her, I found that she was not a virgin." In such a case, the girl's father and mother shall produce the evidence of the girl's virginity before the elders of the town at the gate. . . . And they shall spread out the cloth before the elders of the town. The elders of that town shall then take the man and flog him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give it to the girl's father, for the man has defamed a virgin in Israel. Moreover, she shall remain his wife; he shall never have the right to divorce her. But if the charge proves true, the girl was found not to have been a virgin, then the girl shall be brought out to the entrance of her father's house, and the men of her town shall stone her to death.

In showing how these verses demonstrate the low status of women, critics make three distinct points. One, no matter what the outcome, a woman is placed in an unenviable position.[15] If a husband's charge is proven true, his wife is killed. If the accusation is false, he incurs both a fine and physical punishment, yet the consequences for him are obviously less severe than for the woman. Two, any accusation against a woman is also made against her family.[16] It is incumbent upon her father and mother to prove her innocence by producing the blood-stained sheets that the couple used on their wedding night. The parents must provide the evidence not only to protect their daughter's marriage, but to save their own reputation as well. Three, if a woman is found innocent, she must live the rest of her life with a man who was willing to have her killed for a charge he knew wasn't true.[17] Since biblical law requires that divorce must be initiated by the man, a woman cannot dissolve her marriage.

Although a woman cannot legally initiate a divorce, one position in

the literature asserts that divorce, like marriage, is a family matter. Therefore the woman's father can act on her behalf as does Samson's father-in-law in Judges 15:1-2.

> . . . Samson came to visit his wife, bringing a kid as a gift. He said, "Let me go into the chamber to my wife." But her father would not let him go in. "I was sure," said her father, "that you had taken a dislike to her, so I gave her to your wedding companion."

It is interesting that this position views Samson's father-in-law as acting on his daughter's behalf; in an interpretation of the same verse examined previously, the woman is considered subordinate to her father's authority (cf. p. 86).

Deuteronomy 24:1

> A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house. . .

The above verse is the only reference to divorce in the Bible in which a legal process is described. As has already been stated a portion of the literature understands divorce to be the exclusive right of a husband. It asserts that in the earlier biblical period a man could divorce his wife without a bill of divorce (get). Another commentator, agreeing with this position, asserts that divorce is similar to a form of expulsion, which is inferred from the Hebrew word for divorce (grsh--to expell or drive out).

In contrast to the belief that only a man can initiate a divorce one

position[18] in the literature infers from the following passage that a woman can, indeed, divorce her husband.

Exodus 21:7-11

> Whan a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he has broken faith with her. . . . If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. If he fails her in these three ways, she shall go free, without payment.

By inference, the last verse suggests that a woman may initiate a divorce, and the literature implies that a woman can divorce a man for not fulfilling his legal obligations. Otwell,[19] acknowledging that the above passage is a description of the rights of an Israelite concubine, contends that an Israelite wife must have enjoyed at least the same privilege.

A husband's authority did not only apply to his right to obtain a divorce, it also included his right to accuse his wife of adulterous behavior. In biblical society, adultery for a woman is defined by a married woman engaging in any extra-marital relationship; however the same definition was not applicable to a man. In order for a man to be accused of adultery, the relationship has to involve either a betrothed or married woman.

Leviticus 20:10

> If a man commits adultery with a married woman,

> committing adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.

The literature does not view adultery as essentially a sexual crime, but sees it instead as an offense against a husband's honor and authority. "The adulterer robbed the husband of his essential honor, while the unfaithful wife defied his authority."[20]

If a man causes a betrothed woman to lose her virginity he must reimburse the woman's family for its loss of honor. Critics emphasize the point that a woman is not compensated for her loss of virginity; rather, the offense has been perpetrated against her family.[21]

The following passage is interpreted in the literature as the legal procedure used in biblical society if a man suspects his wife of adultery. The passage is often referred to as the "Ordeal by Bitter Water."

Numbers 5:12-22

> . . . If any man's wife has gone astray and broken faith with him in that a man has had carnal relations with her unbeknown to her husband, and she keeps secret the fact that she has defiled herself without being forced, and there is no witness against her--but a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself; or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself--the man shall bring his wife to the priest. . . . The priest shall bring her forward and have her stand before the Lord. . . . And in the priest's hands shall be the water of bitterness--that induces the spell. The priest shall adjure the woman, saying to her, "If no man has lain with you, if you have not gone astray in defilement while married to your husband, be immune to harm from this water of bitterness that induces the spell. But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and have defiled yourself, if a man other than

> your husband has had carnal relations with you"--
> here the priest shall administer the curse of adjuration
> to the woman as the priest goes on to say to the woman--
> "may the Lord make you a curse and an imprecation
> among your people, as the Lord causes your thigh to
> sag and your belly to distend; may this water that in-
> duces the spell enter your body, causing the belly to
> distend and the thigh to sag." And the woman shall
> say, "Amen, amen!" The priest shall put these curses
> down in writing and rub it off into the water of bitterness.
> He is to make the woman drink the water of bitterness
> that induces the spell, so that the spell-inducing water
> may enter into her to bring on bitterness. . .Once he
> has made her drink the water--if she has defiled herself
> by breaking faith with her husband, the spell-inducing
> water shall enter into her to bring on bitterness. . . .
> But if the woman has not defiled herself and is pure,
> she shall be unharmed and able to retain seed.

Some critics[22] object to this passage on two counts. One, this text prescribes a "shameful and frightening experience"[23] for the woman, which is brought on by her husband's mere suspicion of unfaithfulness. Two, if the woman is found innocent, after being subjected to this "ordeal," the husband incurs no punishment. Even while acknowledging that in Israelite society the punishment prescribed for a woman may have been lenient in comparison to other cultures--i.e., she would suffer a miscarriage rather than be killed if the husband's suspicions were proven true--critics view the entire process as cruel and unjustified.

One position[24] in the literature mentions a characteristic of the "ordeal" that is unique to Israelite society: God acts as the judge in determining the woman's innocence or guilt. The priest only serves as God's agent. Despite the involvement of Deity in this trial, critics

interpret this narrative as an example of woman being subordinated to her husband and it is representative of woman's low status in biblical society.

The laws in biblical society reflective of woman's status are not confined to husband-wife or father-daughter relationships. Specific patterns are discernible in the matter of a woman's participation in legal and ritual matters. There is disagreement among the writers as to whether or not a woman is permitted to participate in all aspects of religious, legal, and political life. One interpretation describes women as "legal non-persons."[25] This position asserts that a woman is granted legal status only in those cases that pertain to her person, such as sexual offenses, inheritance rights, and widow's rights. Concerning all other matters the woman is not consulted. One explanation[26] of her non-participation is that a woman's primary function is in the family and her time is occupied by the needs of her husband and children. Therefore, she does not have the time to be concerned with matters pertaining to other aspects of the society.

An opposing interpretation suggests that a woman does "discharge activities usually associated with a man."[27] Although public offices are usually held by men, this is not exclusively the case. Women participate in the military, in the religious cult, and in the political community. Three passages are cited to substantiate this point of view. The first passage concerns the death of Abimelech in Judges 9:52-54:

> Abimelech pressed forward to the tower and attacked it. He approached the door of the tower to set it on fire. But a woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and cracked his skull. He immediately cried out to his attendant, his arms-bearer, "Draw your dagger and finish me off, that they may not say of me, 'A woman killed him!'"

Critics draw two conclusions from this passage. First, the woman responsible for Abimelech's death is fighting in a battle. Second, this is the only passage in which a woman's performance of a traditionally male task is considered unusual. It is inferred that because Abimelech is embarrassed to be killed by a woman, women in general do not possess the same abilities to fight as men; however, the actions of Deborah and Jael in Judges are not considered any more or less valuable because they are women.

The second passage is in the context of God's charge to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 29:9-11.

> You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God--your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to to waterdrawer--to enter in to the covenant of the Lord your God. . . .

Some commentators infer from this passage that women are counted in the religious community.[28] The fact that women witness the making of the covenant between God and Israel implies that they are not restricted to their family obligations. God considers them worthy enough to include them explicitly; therefore, women are equally responsible for carrying out all the terms of the covenant.

One position[29] assumes that Israel during the biblical period was a theocentric based community which necessitated a strong religious cult. If this cult would not permit equal participation by all of its members, then one group would be subordinated to the other in religious matters. It asserts that the following passage in I Samuel provides evidence for women as officers in the religious cult.

I Samuel 2:22

> Now Eli was very old. When he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, he said to them, "Why do you do such things?". . .

The claim that this passage provides positive proof of women's participation in the religious cult is based on the writer's understanding of the phrase "the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." Of particular interest is the word hatsovot--"who performed tasks." This term is used frequently in the Bible to refer to some type of religious service. The writer asserts that the women "who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,"[30] though not priests, did serve in some type of religious function.

In addition to examining the woman's participation in various community functions, some writers also analyze women's legal rights during biblical times. One issue that is given considerable attention is the status of woman in terms of inheritance laws. Two conflicting positions emerge. One interpretation[31] asserts that women are eligible

to inherit from their fathers. The second position[32] maintains that a woman could not receive inheritance from her father. The following verse is cited in the literature as evidence that only sons were eligible to receive an inheritance:

Deuteronomy 21:16-17

> . . . when he wills his property to his sons he may not treat as first-born the son of the loved one in disregard of the son of the unloved one who is older. Instead, he must accept the first-born, the son of the unloved one, and allow to him a double portion of all he possesses; since he is the first fruit of his vigor, the birthright is his due.

Some writers[33] claim that the inheritance laws only applied to the deceased's land. The nature of patriarchal society necessitated that land could only be inherited by male members of the family. This custom was based on the fact that only male family members could guarantee that they would remain working participants in their family. Women who married automatically became members of their husbands' families and could not have dual loyalties. If a woman left her father's house and took the land that she acquired from her inheritance, that property would become a part of her husband's household, thus causing her father's family to be diminished in wealth and status.

Writers who disagree[34] with the above point of view cite the following passage as evidence that a woman was capable of inheriting property if her father died.

Numbers 27:1-8

> The daughters of Zelophehad. . . came forward. . . . They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said, "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah's faction. . . . but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, "The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just; you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them. Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter."

Although this verse clearly indicates that a woman can acquire her father's property some commentators indicate that this passage should be interpreted in light of the passage in Numbers 36.

Numbers 36:1-9

> The family heads in the clan of the descendants of Gilead. . . one of the Josephite clans, came forward and appealed to Moses and the chieftains, family heads of the Israelites. They said, "The Lord God commanded my lord to assign the land to the Israelites as shares by lot, and my lord was further commanded by the Lord to assign the share of our kinsman Zelophehad to his daughters. Now, if they marry persons from another tribe, their share will be cut off from our ancestral portion and be added to the portion of the tribe into which they marry; thus our allotted portion will be diminished. And even when the Israelites observe the jubilee, their share will be added to that of the tribe into which they marry, and their share will be cut off from the ancestral portion of our tribe." So Moses, at the Lord's bidding instructed the Israelites saying, "The plea of the Josephite tribe is just. This is what the Lord has commanded concerning

> the daughters of Zelophehad: They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe. No inheritance of the Israelites may pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelites must remain bound each to the ancestral portion of his tribe. Every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must marry someone from a clan of her father's tribe, in order that every Israelite may keep his ancestral share. Thus no inheritance shall pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelite tribes shall remain bound each to its portion."

According to this passage, certain restrictions are placed on Zelophehad's daughters with regard to their inheritance. They may keep the inheritance only until they marry; at that time they must give it to the members of their father's tribe unless they marry kinsmen, since that is the only arrangement which enables them to keep their inheritance and maintain the ancestral tribe. In either case, the daughters serve as placeholders for the property which must remain within their father's ancestral home. Therefore, even though it would appear from the passage in Numbers 27 that women can receive inheritance, the above passage suggests that women cannot acquire and keep the property they inherit if it risks the survival and strength of their father's clan. Those critics who cite the case of Zelophehad's daughters assert that a woman achieves a higher status in biblical society by her ability to inherit or own property.

Of all the laws and restrictions concerning women, those involving ritual purity receive considerable attention in the literature. Although there are many passages in which ritual purity is discussed, modern

critics refer to the following three passages most frequently:

Leviticus 15:19, 24

> When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her impurity seven days; whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. . . . And if a man lies with her, her impurity is communicated to him; he shall be unclean seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become unclean.

Leviticus 20:18

> If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity and uncovers nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has exposed her blood flow; both of them shall be cut off from among their people.

Leviticus 12:1-5

> . . . when a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days; she shall be unclean as at the time of her menstrual infirmity. . . She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification is completed. If she bears a female, she shall be unclean two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty-six days.

Two opposing positions emerge in the literature. The first includes writers[35] who indicate that both men and women are subject to ritual purification and that the duration of their impurity is determined by the type of impurity they contract. Adler, who represents this point of view claims that being in a state of impurity

> was not perceived as causing physical consequences, nor was it viewed as dangerous in any way. Since some of the basic human functions and behavior caused tumah every member of the society regularly underwent the cycle from tumah to toharah (impurity

> to purity). . . . Thus tumah (impurity) was an accepted component of the human condition.[36]

The second opinion includes those writers who perceive the purity laws as more restrictive for women than for men.[37] Those writers who subscribe to this position address two issues. The first concerns the reason why a menstruating woman is impure longer than a man who has a seminal emission. Our text has already informed us that a woman is unclean for seven days after menstruation. In contrast Leviticus 15:16 states:

> And if a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening.

Two reasons are offered as to why the man's period of impurity for an emission of semen is less than that of woman's during her menstrual cycle. One, the longer state of impurity for a woman is due to the general reaction to blood in the biblical society. Blood is considered a life force that has certain taboos attached to it. Two, due to the economic obligations of the man to support his family, if he were to be unclean for seven days as is the case with a woman, his livelihood could be seriously affected.

The second issue is why a woman is impure twice as long after the birth of a daughter than a son. Regarding the longer period of purification after the birth of a daughter, three positions emerge in the literature. One, the lengthened purification period for a woman is linked to the "original sin" in Genesis 3. This interpretation infers that woman

is responsible for the disorder; therefore, a girl is more sinful than a boy and is subject to a longer purification process.[38] Two, the greater desirability of a son in biblical society prompts less strict laws governing men's purification. Three, a mother has a closer, more intimate contact with the Deity when carrying a daughter because the daughter will eventually continue the family line and have contact with the Deity.[39]

Those writers who consistantly portray women in a positive light, interpret the ritual purity laws as beneficial to the woman. According to their position, the ritual purity laws remove the woman from the category of sex object because her husband must respect her and not make demands on her out of his own sexual needs.[40]

Two passages in Leviticus seem to be somewhat contradictory. Leviticus 15:24 reads "and if a man lies with her, her impurity is communicated to him; he shall be unclean for seven days." Leviticus 20:18 reads "If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity and uncovers her nakedness. . . both of them shall be cut off from among their people." In the Leviticus 15 passage, contact with a menstruating woman results in an impure status for seven days. In chapter 20 excommunication (literally cut-off) is prescribed for both the man and the woman if they have relations during her menstrual period. Swidler suggests that the discrepancy is due to a change in the law during a latter period in Israelite history. He perceives the prescription in Leviticus 20:18 to be a latter addition to the biblical text and accepts its prescription for

"excommunication" to be the usual practice in biblical society.[41]

Unit 3

Chapter 2

Critique: Negative Images of Women in the Family and in the Community

Chapter 1 of this unit focuses upon negative images of women in the Bible as perceived in the literature. Topics discussed in this unit include: woman's relation to her father and husband, marriage, adultery, divorce, inheritance, and ritual purity. A general assumption made by some writers is that a woman is always under her father's or husband's jurisdiction and therefore does not share equal status with them. Other writers assert that though a woman appears to be subordinate to men all of her life, there is evidence in the Bible that suggests she does share an equal status with men in at least some of the areas above.

The first example of subordination examined in the literature concerns the father-daughter relationship. Three narratives are commonly cited by the commentators as evidence of woman's subordination in the biblical text. After discussing each incident individually, we will show how the three narratives are related.

The first example cited involves Lot's treatment of his daughters in Genesis 19:

> They had not lain down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old--all the people to the last man--gathered about the house. And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be

> intimate with them." So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof."

In their discussion of the passages, none of the writers identify the strangers or state their purpose in the narrative. Background information to the incident is vitally important in judging Lot's actions. The strangers do not appear from a vacuum and their appearance in Sodom is not haphazard. In Genesis 18 three strangers visit Abraham in Beer Sheva. Abraham is a gracious host--"As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he said, 'My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on.'" Before the strangers depart they inform Abraham that within the year Sarah will give birth to a son who will fulfill God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:19--"Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come." Towards the end of the chapter, the strangers whose identity as angels is now obvious, leave Abraham's house--"The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off." The narrative in Genesis 18 continues as God informs Abraham that the cities of Sodom and

Gomorroh are soon to be destroyed. Chapter 19 begins:

> The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening as Lot (Abraham's nephew) was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the ground, he said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you be on your way early." . . . He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread and they ate.

Lot's behavior towards these strangers is quite similar to the hospitality Abraham displays in the previous chapter. The similarity between Lot's and Abraham's behavior is too striking to be coincidental, and it is my belief that these parallel stories are related. According to the biblical author, Lot is not as deserving as Abraham and God saves him from annihilation because of Abraham--"Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval." The men in Sodom confirm God's accusations against them by demanding Lot to turn over the "strangers" (angels) for homosexual relations. When Lot urges the men not to commit such an offense and offers his virgin daughters instead, the men refuse and try to force their way into Lot's home. He is saved by the angels--"But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, they struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance."

The literature's concern over Lot's insensitive treatment of his

daughters must be understood in the context of the entire narrative. Two suggestions can be offered concerning the author's intent for this story. One, although Lot is ignorant of the strangers true identity, the reader has foreknowledge of their identity as well as purpose in Sodom. If Lot had succumbed to the men's wishes and handed over the strangers would Lot not have been committing a more severe crime? By offering his daughters Lot was forfeiting their value as virgins; however, if he had obliged the Sodomites he would have been committing an abomination against God's messengers. Those writers who address this narrative in the literature do not mention that the "strangers" are really angels, and that no misfortune actually befalls Lot's daughters. Still a second interpretation may explain the text according to the biblical writer's intention.

What is the biblical author's reason for putting the stories of Abraham's and Lot's hospitality in consecutive order? While it appears on the surface that Lot and Abraham extend identical courtesy to the "strangers," we are told explicitly that God does not save Lot for his own merit, but rather because Abraham asks that he be spared.

The major difference between the stories of Lot and Abraham is Lot's treatment of his daughters. Perhaps it is the biblical author's intention to indicate that Lot's actions towards his daughters is improper. In looking at the passage out of its narrative context one may misinterpret the text. The other two passages cited in the literature support the interpretation that the biblical author is critical of the

fathers' treatment of their daughters.

The second example cited in the writings of a father who sacrifices his daughter's virginity and life to protect a stranger appears in Judges 19:22-24:

> While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the town, a depraved lot, had gathered about the house and were pounding on the door. They called to the aged owner of the house, "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him." The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please my friends, do not commit such a wrong. . . Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you want with them; but don't do this outrage against this man."

The similarities between the above passage and the one in Genesis concerning Lot are obvious. In each passage a stranger appears in a city whose population extends no hospitality to him except for one person. Two, the men of the town demand the strangers be given to them for homosexual rape. Three, the host offers a daughter (and/or concubine) in the stranger's stead. Four, the men in the town are punished for their behavior.

Those writers whose primary approach to the text has been the Documentary Hypothesis overlook the fact that the passages in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are credited to E authorship. They make no attempt to explain why or how such similar passages are recorded in the Bible. Commentators whose primary approach is form criticism do not explain these passages in relationship to other passages in the biblical text, or to customs that were common in the ancient Near East. In

their analyses, several facts of the story are overlooked or deliberately ignored. One, though the man offers his daughter or concubine to the men of the city, only the concubine is actually given. Two, the Benjaminites' behavior is considered abhorrent and they are killed for their actions. It should be clear to the reader that the biblical author or redactor is placing these narratives in parallel in order to stress the deplorable behavior of the Sodomites and Benjaminites; however, one must not overlook the behavior of Lot and the Levite in Judges 19. It is clear that Lot's actions were not well received by God. Although it is possible that the status of the concubine is lesser, both stories are emphatic in condemning the behavior of all involved.

A third example of a father's condemnable treatment of his daughter appears in Judges 11:

> And Jephthah made the following vow to the Lord: If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering. . . When Jephthah arrived at his home. . . there was his daughter coming out to meet him. . . She was an only child; he had no other son or daughter. . . he did to her what he had vowed.

Although this story does not quite parallel the previous two narratives, there is a narrative in Genesis that is quite similar. One might compare Jephthah's vow to sacrifice his daughter with Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, and there is strong evidence that Jephthah serves as a foil to Abraham in Genesis 22. One major factor separates these two narratives: In Genesis 22 God commands Abraham to sacrifice

Isaac and then does not allow Abraham to comply with the order. In Judges 11 God remains silent when Jephthah first makes his vow and later when he carries it out. The verb used in both Judges 11 and Genesis 22 is 'lh--to offer up a burnt offering. Although the commentators attack Jephthah for his barbaric actions towards his daughter they make no mention of the similarity between Jephthah and Abraham. Why doesn't God intervene in Judges 11 as God did in Genesis 22? It would seem that the only narrative in which God approves of a parent's disregard for his child's life or well-being is in Genesis 22 where God initiates the action and then intervenes to save the child. Just as Lot serves as Abraham's foil ir Genesis 19, Jephthah represents Abraham's counterpart in Judges 11. The fact that a father is willing to sacrifice his child does not imply that it is an acceptable practice either to the society or to God.

Woman's status is not only evaluated by her relationship to her father; the commentators believe that woman's subordinate status to man continues after her marriage. Four passages are cited as evidence for woman's subordinate status. The major assumption in the literature is that a woman has no greater status in biblical society than chattel. The first passages examined are in Deuteronomy 20 and 21. Some writers are critical of the first passage because the woman is considered a part of a warrior's spoil. In the second passage the concern centers on the accepted practice of a warrior taking a woman

captured in a battle and make her his wife. Yet in their interpretations, these writers do not consider the reason why it is only the women who are spared during a battle. Far from suggesting that a woman's status is lower than that of a man, we shall see that a woman is, in fact, more highly valued than a man during battle.

As previously shown in Units 1 and 2, a woman's primary function in biblical society is in relationship to propagation. It has also been pointed out that in a patriarchal community a woman leaves her father's household and accepts the responsibility of building up her husband's family. Since the line is perpetuated through the male any woman is of value. During battle there is no need to spare the lives of the males since they are of no value; however, a woman is capable of increasing the Israelite line and has, therefore, an important status. The second passage in Deuteronomy 21 supports this notion since the woman is given more rights than a slave:

> She shall spend a month's time in your house. . . after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife. Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money; since you had your will of her, you must not enslave her.

It is clear from this passage that a woman captured during battle does not become chattel; indeed, she has equal status to an Israelite wife, who does not have low status.

The writers continue with their assumption that women, foreign or Israelite occupy a low status in biblical society by focusing on two

passages in which Israelite wives are mentioned as part of her husband's property. Although they are found in two different books of the Pentateuch--Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5--the two passages are similar. Two opinions emerge in the literature. One interpretation indicates that a woman is given no higher status than her husband's ox. A second position claims that the woman is the "first-named member" of her husband's household and is, therefore, accorded a higher status. Although the latter position is certainly a more accurate reflection of woman's biblical status, its presentation in the writings is not thorough and one can provide further evidence in support of this interpretation. The fact that the woman is the "first-named member" of the household in Exodus 20 does not necessarily prove that she has more significant status. The structure of the verse in Deuteronomy 5 does supply the required evidence. In this verse two separate instructions are given: one, do not covet your neighbor's wife; two, do not crave anything that belongs to your neighbor. In this passage the woman is clearly separate from her husband's material possessions; therefore, the argument that woman is simply part of her husband's goods is weak.

Feminist critics who claim that the Bible is a sexist document provide further evidence in their analysis of the treatment of married women in biblical society. The writings first take issue with the emphasis placed on bridal virginity in the Bible. One position claims that marriage protects sexual morality in biblical society. It asserts that man's rampant sexual desires threaten to make him "a helpless

victim in the hands of Satan." Yet there is no evidence in the Bible that men suffer from overactive libidos. Both man and woman choose to acquire sexual knowledge in Genesis 3; therefore, a man's sex drive should be no more pronounced than a woman's. In addition, it is impossible to infer from the biblical text that Satan is responsible for a man's sex drive. There is no evidence that the serpent in Genesis 3 has any link to a satanic creature, let alone that it is Satan in disguise. This interpretation is based on extraneous Christian sources in which Satan is portrayed as an evil tempter.

A second position asserts that bridal virginity is an implicit given in the biblical society. Although writers holding this point of view do not identify a specific law requiring virginity of a bride, they claim that the passage in Deuteronomy 22 is based upon the requirement that she be a virgin:

> A man marries a woman and cohabits with her. Then he takes an aversion to her and makes charges against her and defames her, saying, "I married this woman; but when I approached her, I found that she was not a virgin.". . . But if the charge proves true, the girl was found not to have been a virgin, then the girl shall be brought out to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death.

The argument that the above passage proves that a woman must be a virgin in order to marry is fallacious because the punishment described applies only to those women who initially claimed to be a virgin. To assume that all women need to be virgins would imply that a widow is ineligible to remarry.

The issue of virginity is not purely an ethical one; it also involves economics. If a man marries a woman presumed to be a virgin, he pays the woman's father more money than if she is not a virgin. The fact that the family is involved in proving the woman's innocence is further evidence that the financial aspect of the marriage arrangement is of primary importance.

It may appear that the woman is placed in an unenviable position if she is proven innocent since her husband is forbidden to divorce her in the future; however, is this passage designed to torment the wife? In modern society, a divorced woman often has options concerning her future; however, this is not the case in biblical society. By forbidding the husband to divorce his wife, biblical society is safeguarding the legal, if not the social, status of the woman.

The one position in the literature that asserts that a woman can acquire a divorce by having her father act on her behalf is particularly weak because the case specifically cited in Judges 15 as evidence does not indicate that the woman ever asked her father to secure a divorce:

> Some time later, in the season of the wheat harvest, Samson came to visit his wife, bringing a kid as a gift. He said, "Let me go into the chamber to my wife." But her father would not let him go in. "I was sure," said her father, "that you had taken a dislike to her, so I gave her to your wedding companion."

Samson's father-in-law does not suggest that his daughter questioned Samson's commitment; but rather takes upon himself the responsibility of the decision to give her to another man. Far from providing sub-

stantial evidence that a woman could initiate a divorce in biblical society, the passage merely reaffirms patriarchal authority.

Two positions are taken in the literature regarding divorce. One firmly maintains that divorce is the exclusive right of the husband. The second position asserts that a woman can initiate a divorce and it cites a passage from Exodus 21 as proof.

> When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he has broken faith with her. . . . If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. If he fails her in these three ways, she shall go free, without payment.

Those commentators who cite this passage as evidence of a woman's right to initiate a divorce base their decision on fallacious inference from the text. The passage in Exodus 21 focuses upon the property status of a slave. The analogy is made in the literature that if a slave "shall go free" should her owner deny her food, clothing or conjugal rights, then a married woman should have at least the same right. But even if one were to accept the basic premise of this analogy, there is no explicit evidence in Exodus 21:7-11 that a woman initiates the divorce. A more accurate interpretation of this passage is that a man who denies a female slave food, clothing and conjugal rights must grant her her freedom without selling her to another person. The issue is slave status and not divorce.

Some writers interpret the consequences of adultery as still another

area in which the Bible places the woman in a subordinate role. In Leviticus 20 the penalty for both a man and a woman is death: "If a man commits adultery with a married woman, committing adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death." A general consensus among the critics who examine the issue of adultery is that the adulterous couple violates the woman's husband's authority and honor. These same critics do not make a connection between the issue of adultery and that of virginity previously cited. But one can argue that the circumstances and results of an adulterous relationship do, in fact, substantiate the primary issue of Deuteronomy 22 in which a woman's virginity at the time of her marriage is brought into question by her husband. The prescribed punishment for a man who has an adulterous relationship with a married woman differs from the consequences of a relationship with an unbetrothed woman. In the latter case the man does not transgress the authority of a husband, but he does cause a financial loss to the woman's family by decreasing her value as a bride.

Those writers who examine the narrative in Numbers 5 tend to view the "ordeal by bitter water" as a degrading experience for the woman, but their condemnation is not rooted in an unbiased or thorough examination of the text. Let us look at the narrative once more.

> . . . If any man's wife has gone astray and broken faith with him in that a man has had carnal relations with her unbeknown to her husband, and she keeps secret the fact that she has defiled herself without being forced, and there is no witness against her--

> but a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself; or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself--the man shall bring his wife to the priest. . . . The priest shall bring her forward and have her stand before the Lord . . . . And in the priest's hands shall be the water of bitterness-that induces the spell. The priest shall adjure the woman, saying to her, "If no man has lain with you, if you have not gone astray in defilement while married to your husband, be immune to harm from this water of bitterness that induces the spell. But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and have defiled yourself, if a man other than your husband has had carnal relations with you"--here the priest shall administer the curse of adjuration to the woman as the priest goes on to say to the woman--"may the Lord make you a curse and an imprecation among your people, as the Lord causes your thigh to sag and your belly to distend; may this water that induces the spell enter your body, causing the belly to distend and the thigh to sag." And the woman shall say, "Amen, amen!" The priest shall put these curses down in writing and rub it off into the water of bitterness. He is to make the woman drink the water of bitterness that induces the spell, so that the spell-inducing water may enter into her to bring on bitterness. . . Once he has made her drink the water--if she has defiled herself by breaking faith with her husband, the spell-inducing water shall enter into her to bring on bitterness. . . . But if the woman has not defiled herself and is pure, she shall be unharmed and able to retain seed.

Several questions need to be raised with regard to this narrative. Why does there appear to be so much confusion in the narrative? With what crime is the woman charged? What is the meaning of <u>may marim</u>? What is Deity's role in the passages? If one examines the text closely, adultery seems to be the charge against the woman; however, adultery is expressed in four different ways in verse 13: if she goes astray, breaks faith, a man has carnal relations with her, or she has defiled

herself without being forced. It seems clear that the accusation is rooted in a husband's mere suspicion of adulterous behavior. The awkward, unclear style of the text indicates the uncertainty of the fact of crime.

This passage is titled "ordeal by bitter water" both because of the term may hamarim, interpreted as bitter water, and the "ordeal" to which the woman is subjected. The translation of "bitter" is based on assuming the Hebrew root to be mrr. However, a translation, "oracular," based on the verb yrh makes for a better understanding of the text. According to the structure of the Hebrew language "bitter water" should be rendered as mayim marim and not may hamarim, and Brichto notes that "the use of a construct with a plural of abstraction should alert us to a more portentious content in marim."[1] Oracle would suggest that Deity is in some way involved in the trial, and indeed God serves as the judge. If Deity is called upon to give a verdict, by implication, at least, it would seem that the evidence produced by the husband is questionable, as is the ability of a priest or legal judge to reach a just decision. Logic suggests that the woman is to be considered innocent unless her husband can substantiate his charge.

What is the purpose of this ritual--not legal--procedure? It has been noted throughout this thesis that there are situations in which a woman is subordinated to her husband; however, the Numbers 5 narrative seems to indicate that a husband must prove his suspicion of adultery beyond any reasonable doubt; he must "put up or shut up."

In contrast to those commentators who condemn this procedure as prejudicial to woman's status, it is our understanding that it attempts to support the woman when her husband makes groundless accusation against her.

In addition to the restrictions placed on a woman in a father-daughter or husband-wife relationship, some of the writers investigate the role women play in both legal and religious matters in biblical society. Accordingly, woman's participation in legal and religious cult matters provides a further basis for judging either her equality or subordination in the society. It is hardly surprising that a specific pattern emerges among the commentators. Those writers whose intention it is to present biblical woman's status in a positive light tend to ascribe to her equal participation with men in the legal and religious spheres of the society. Three examples are cited as evidence of woman's equality, but these passages provide only weak, inconclusive evidence.

The first example comes from Judges 9:

> Abimelech pressed forward to the tower and attacked it.
> He approached the door of the tower to set it on fire.
> But a woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's
> head and cracked his skull.

Although critics have inferred from this passage that a woman is able to serve in the military, the biblical text indicates little more than that the woman responsible for Abimelech's death was a townsperson who threw the millstone from the top of the tower, not necessarily with

any particular target in mind, and it struck Abimelech on the head: "Within the town was a fortified tower and all the citizens of the town, men and women, took refuge there. They shut themselves in, and went up on the roof of the tower." There is no indication in this passage that the women, let alone the men, are soldiers.

A second passage cited in the literature as proof for woman's equal participation in the religious and legal community is from Deuteronomy 29:

> You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God--your tribal heads, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to waterdrawer--to enter into the covenant of the Lord your God.

This example provides little if any evidence for the commentators' claim. The fact that women are mentioned in this passage as part of the community with whom God makes a covenant does not in itself confirm that women have equal status with men on either legal or religious matters. In the passage "little ones" and "soujourners" are also mentioned, yet one would not argue that a minor or stranger share equal status with the elders in the community.

Those writers who cite the passage from I Samuel 2:22 to show that a woman is able to hold religious office in biblical society are also relying on very weak evidence:

> Now Eli was very old. When he heard what his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, he said to them, "Why do you do such things?"

One position claims that although there is no mention of a priestess in the religious cult, one can infer that a woman can have a cultic office from the phrase, "et hanashim hatsovot petach ohel moed" (the women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting). The word hatsovot is translated in the literature as "who served," which it is inferred, means a form of Temple service; however, the context of the verse indicates otherwise. The Hebrew is uncertain regarding the term hatsovot; however it is possible that the passage refers to women who are cult prostitutes and rather than part of the official Temple worship. One could infer that the women performed a different task, however, the nature of the task or the status attached to it is not clear. Therefore the passage is not an example of woman's positive or negative status in the biblical society, rather, it tells of Eli's sons' repremandable behavior. The description in the passage of Eli's sons lends at least indirect support for this interpretation--"Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the Lord."

Concerning the issue of inheritance, two positions emerge in the writings. One position asserts that only males are eligible for inheritance based upon the passage in Deuteronomy 21: "when he wills his property to his sons he may not treat as first-born the son of the loved one in disregard of the son of the unloved one who is older." Although it is true that inheritance is transferred through the male line, the passage cited above does not produce conclusive evidence since the topic does not necessarily pertain to the general rules governing

inheritance. The passage is in the context of the inheritance of the first-born and the injunction against a father displaying favoritism towards one son over another.

A second position claims the passage in Numbers 27 provides evidence that women are eligible for inheritance. The passage in Numbers 27 discusses the plea of Zelophehad's daughters to receive their father's inheritance since there was no male heir. Some writers indicate that this passage must be read in light of another passage in which Moses further clarifies Zelophehad's daughters' inheritance. Numbers 36 qualifies the women's inheritance:

> They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe. No inheritance of the Israelites may pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelites must remain bound each to the ancestral portion of his tribe.

The critical issue concerning inheritance involves the perpetuation of the clan. Since women usually marry outside of their father's family, it is important that they do not inherit property and then leave their father's household, thereby depleting the clan of its wealth.

This latter position, though it consistently examines the biblical text, does not explain how inheritance affects woman's status in biblical society. It is clear from the Numbers 36 passage that women can be place holders for inheritance until it is necessary to relinquish inheritance privileges to the males of the family. We have already seen examples of women as owners of property in Genesis (e.g., Sarah's authority over Hagar), but property ownership and inheritance rights

are not the same issue. If a woman owns a slave, at the appropriate time the slave becomes part of her husband's transferable property, not hers. But the fact that inheritance laws are rooted in the patriarchal structure of the society does not necessarily imply a subordinate role for women. The rules governing inheritance simply insure the perpetuation of a family's economic strength.

The writers studied here pay particular attention to woman's status as it is affected by the laws of ritual purity. Two positions emerge in the literature. The first maintains that both men and women are subject to ritual purification and that the length of the purification process is dependent on the type of impurity contracted. A second position claims that the laws for ritual purity are more restrictive for women than for men. Each of these positions focuses on impurity stemming from the sexual organs.

Regarding a woman's longer period of impurity after the birth of a daughter, three positions emerge in the literature. The first links this lengthened time period of two weeks instead of one (for a boy) to the "Original Sin" of man and woman in Genesis 3. We have already shown in unit 1 that the woman is not more responsible than the man for the events in Genesis 3. More importantly, the biblical text makes no reference to an "original sin" in its presentation of the garden narrative. It is clear that Scanzoni and Hardisty are drawing upon later Christian theological beliefs that are inapplicable to the biblical narrative.

A second position suggests that a woman's state of impurity is longer for a female child because biblical society is biased in favor of males. It would be just as logical, however, to argue that a longer period of purification is indicative of the higher status of a female child.

A third position thus claims that the lengthy purification period after the birth of a female is due to a closer relationship between a mother and God during pregnancy because a daughter will perpetuate the family line. This last argument is no more substantiated than the one that precedes and opposes it. In short, the regulations in regard to ritual purity or purification cannot be adduced for the question of female status one way or the other.

Those commentators who claim that the ritual purity laws benefit a woman because they remove her from the realm of sex object, appear to me to be presenting an apologetic point of view. Throughout their analysis of the Bible these writers, represented primarily by Meiselman, tend to ignore or avoid any and all negative images of women. Although their intention is to criticize recent feminist literature from a Jewish perspective, this "Jewish" point of view generally does not reflect the biblical intention. Rather, it presents the view of Talmud and other post-biblical sources.

Swidler provides inconsistent evidence for his claim that the ritual purity laws are more stringent when dealing with a woman's impurity

than a man's. He asserts that the punishment for sexual contact during a woman's impurity is inconsistent in the Bible. Leviticus 15:24 states: "And if a man lies with her, her impurity is communicated to him; he shall be unclean seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall be unclean." According to Swidler, the passage in Leviticus 20:18 prescribes a stricter punishment: "If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has exposed her blood flow; both of them shall be cut off from among their people." It is necessary to understand each of these passages in their proper context. The selection from Leviticus 15 appears in a chapter which focuses upon impurity stemming from a discharge from the body. In contrast, the Leviticus 20 verse does not appear to be related to ritual impurity since it is sandwiched in between an entire section of incest prohibitions. It is our contention that verse 18 relates to incest taboos and it follows, therefore, that the prescribed punishment is more severe.

Conclusion

This thesis has presented a fair sampling of the recent literature on Scripture's attitude on women in terms of dignity, rights, and social status. My analysis of these interpretations and methodologies discloses that one flaw is common to almost all of them: Inconsistency of method, either in the analysis of a particular verse or in the function of the verse proper in its context. I have demonstrated how frequently verses are drawn out of context with the result of either misrepresenting the biblical author's intent or presenting only a partial and misleading view of the narrative as a whole.

The majority of commentators discussed in this thesis tend to rely on one or more forms of biblical criticism as base and substantiation for their varying interpretations of the text as it is seen to bear on the status of women. The exclusive use of a single critical approach, whether Documentary Hypothesis, form criticism or rhetorical criticism, presents three problems. First, the various critical approaches fail to do justice either to the biblical author's intention in general and in fine, or to the question of editorial consistency as reflected in the final biblical product as it has reached us. A second criticism applies to each of the methods used with perhaps the exception of Trible's rhetorical criticism. The several methods are not consistently applied to all of the passages. Each commentator seems to employ a specific approach when it best supports his or her particular bias towards a

text. Finally, scholars who do not subscribe to another critic's methodology may reject that critic's interpretation, not by demonstrating its lack of validity, but simply on the basis of disagreement with the approach applied.

The present writer is neither a biblical scholar nor an expert in ancient Near Eastern studies. I have, however, tried to analyze the biblical narratives without a bias in favor of any particular critical approach. My general conclusion is that a convincing study of women's status in the Bible remains to be done. I would like to suggest five factors critical to such a study. One, the author of such a study must be aware of the pitfalls that the use of a particular critical approach presents. Two, in order to avoid pitfalls, one must examine the text in the Hebrew and not rely on English translations. In addition one must examine the narratives as they pertain to their setting in the framework of biblical society. Three, since the Bible was produced over a period of centuries, one must filter out early and latter traditions that otherwise would seem to co-exist at each stage of Israelite development. Four, one must distinguish within a narrative between descriptive story and prescriptive values. It is my belief that the description of a particular event that places woman in a subordinate role does not necessarily reflect the biblical author's normative point of view. Indeed, a narrative may be written to point out the negative elements in a particular social practice. Thus, for example, in Unit 3 the "Ordeal of Bitter Water" was seen to be composed in recognition

of woman's subordination to her husband. The author, however, although unable to alter the woman's subordinate status, could indicate the negative features of such a practice and suggest the need of a remedy. Finally, one must distinguish between biblical society's customs and those operative in our own culture at the present moment in time. The Bible describes a society rooted in a patriarchal, patrilineal culture and should not be seen as necessarily prescribing its customs and laws for any other future culture. The values in general rather than their application at a given time and place must be discerned. Our times call for a balanced and methodologically sound interpretation of the value that Scripture places upon woman, upon the dignity or lack of it which it sees as owing to her, and the implications of such value and dignity for women's roles in the economic and social context of twentieth century society.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

[1]John Otwell, And Sarah Laughed (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 13.

[2]Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament" in Religion and Sexism, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 41.

[3]Ibid., p. 50.

[4]Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 202.

[5]Ibid., p. 202.

[6]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 192.

[7]Richard N. Soulen, Handbook of Biblical Criticism (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), p. 26.

[8]Ibid., p. 62.

[9]Ibid., p. 165.

[10]Ibid., p. 143.

[11]Ibid., pp. 145-146.

Unit 1

Chapter 1

[1] The Torah (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), p. 4. In addition to this passage, all translations from the Hebrew original are taken from The Torah or from The Prophets published by JPS.

[2] Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 73.

[3] Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), p. 76.

[4] Anne McGrew Bennett, "The Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women" in Radical Religion (Volume 1, #2, Spring 1974), p. 28.

[5] Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, p. 18.

[6] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[7] Ibid., p. 16.

[8] This position is affirmed by the following commentators: Scanzoni/Hardesty, Swidler and Trible.

[9] This position is primarily affirmed by Swidler, Scanzoni/Hardesty, Otwell and Trible.

[10] Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, p. 85.

[11] This latter point of view is primarily supported by Trible and Swidler.

[12] Roslyn Lacks, Women and Judaism--Myth, History and Struggle (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1980), p. 13.

[13] Those commentators who assert that ha'adam refers to the sexual creature man include Meiselman, Russell, Lockyer, and Tishler.

[14] This point of view is affirmed by Appleman and Stanton.

[15] Solomon Appleman, The Jewish Woman in Judaism (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1979), p. 4.

[16] Ibid., p. 4.

[17]Letty M. Russell, The Liberating Word (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 40-41.

[17*]David Schepps, Remarkable Women of the Scriptures (Philadelphia: Darrance and Company, 1976), p. 4.

[18]Ibid., p. 4.

[19]Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" in The Jewish Woman, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 223.

[20]Ibid., p. 223.

[21]Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974), p. 26.

[22]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 223.

[23]Bennett, "The Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women," p. 27.

[24]Theodor Reik, The Creation of Woman (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960), p. 57.

[25]Ibid., a detailed discussion regarding this myth can be found in pp. 59-114.

[26]Ibid., p. 80.

[27]Those who affirm this position include Meiselman, Russell, Lockyer and Tishler; however, Meiselman interprets the text as non-subordinating.

[28]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 224.

[29]Stanton in her interpretation assumes that woman occupies a subordinate role; therefore, Stanton only considers the creation account in Genesis 1 as viable.

[30]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 223.

[31]Although this position is affirmed by Trible, it is best rendered by this quote which I received via communication with Herbert Chanan Brichto.

[32]Solomon Appleman, The Jewish Woman in Judaism, p. 8.

[33]Those writers who support this point of view include: Meiselman, Scanzoni/Hardesty, and Trible.

[34]Those writers who bring up for discussion woman's subordination due to "naming" do so with the purpose of refuting this point of view; however, Lacks suggests that the "naming" of woman lowers her status in all future generations, cf. Women and Judaism--Myth, History and Struggle, p. 14.

[35]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," pp. 224-225.

[36]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," pp. 224-226.

[37]Ibid., p. 226.

[38]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, p. 27.

[39]Russell, The Liberating Word, p. 48.

[40]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 224.

[41]Russell, The Liberating Word, p. 49.

[42]Ibid., p. 49.

[43]The sole proponent of this point of view is Elizabeth Cody Stanton, cf. note 44.

[44]Elizabeth Cody Stanton, The Woman's Bible (Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974), p. 22.

[45]The primary writers who affirm this position are Scanzoni/Hardesty and Trible.

[46]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 224.

[47]Ibid., p. 227.

[48]Bennett, "The Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women," p. 28.

[49]Ibid., p. 29.

[50]Nancy M. Tishler, Legacy of Eve (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 50.

[51]This position is primarily represented by Schepps.

[52]Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, p. 79.

[53]Those commentators who interpret God's judgment as prescriptive include: Meiselman, Lockyer, and Tishler.

[54]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 10.

[55]Those writers who suggest that God's judgment is descriptive include: Bird, Lacks, Swidler, Scanzoni/Hardesty and Trible.

[56]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, p. 34.

[57]Ibid., p. 35.

[58]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 18.

[59]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, pp. 35-36.

[60]Those writers who indicate that the role of woman is linked to the "renaming" of woman in Genesis 3 include: Meiselman, Lacks, and Lockyer.

[61]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, p. 36.

[62]Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," pp. 224-225.

[63]Russell rejects the concept that ha'adam is the stronger of the species even though ha'adam "renames" woman.

[64]This position is maintained by those writers who subscribe to a literal understanding of the biblical text, e.g., Meiselman and Appleman.

[65]Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, p. 12.

[66]Those commentators who perceive man and woman as equal partners in creation are: Scanzoni/Hardesty, Swidler, and Trible.

[67]The interpretation that man is dominant and superior is presumed by Swidler to be a traditional interpretation that he rejects.

[68]Bennett, "The Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women," p. 27.

[69]The major proponent of this point of view is Schepps, pp. 3-4.

[70]Those who affirm this position include: Swidler, Otwell, and Stanton. To a lesser extent, Lacks, Bird, Bennett, Ochs, Tishler, and Lockyer.

[71]Those who subscribe to this point of view include Bird, Scanzoni/Hardesty and Trible. To a lesser extent Swidler can be included.

[72]Those who discuss only one account of creation include: Stanton, Meiselman, Appleman, Russell, and Schepps.

[73]Stanton, The Woman's Bible, p. 17.

Chapter 2

[1]E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1964), p. 17.

[2]This quote as well as other information critical to my presentation was received by means of oral communication with Herbert Chanan Brichto.

[3]This quote as well as my discussion on the "banned" and "cursed" was received by means of oral communication with Herbert Chanan Brichto. A general discussion of the nature of a curse can be found in Herbert Chanan Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement" in Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. 48, 1976.

Unit 2

Chapter 1

[1]Those commentators who assert this point of view include: Bullough, Meiselman, Scanzoni/Hardesty.

[2]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 103.

[3]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[4]Vern L. Bullough, The Subordinate Sex (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1974), pp. 121-172.

[5]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 20.

[6]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 145.

[7]Those critics who affirm this position include: Bird, Lacks, Otwell, Scanzoni/Hardesty.

[8]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 168.

[9]This position is supported by Bullough, Lacks, and Otwell.

[10]Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," pp. 44-45.

[11]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 61.

[12]Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, p. 35.

[13]Trible suggests this possible position in God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality; however, she proceeds to argue a different, more plausible point of view.

[14]Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 34-35.

[15]Ibid., p. 35.

[16]Ibid., p. 202.

[17]Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, p. 85.

[18]Bennett, "The Biblical and Traditional Subordination of Women," p. 29.

[19]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 151.

[20]Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 68.

[21]Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women, pp. 85-87.

Chapter 2

[1]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, pp. 102-103.

[2]For further explanation cf. E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Inc., 1964), pp. 117-121.

[3]Ibid.

[4]cf. note Unit 2, Chapter 1 number 12.

[5]Otwell makes the assumption that the issue critical to the biblical passage is God's punishment of Onan because he refuses to comply with the general command to have children. It is our understanding that the passage neither is concerned with a general command for children, nor does it have any relationship to the issue of barrenness as Otwell suggests. The passage is in reference to Onan's refusal to comply with his obligation to fulfill the levir's responsibility for his dead brother; it is for this that Onan is punished.

For further discussion on this topic cf. Herbert Chanan Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife--A Biblical Complex" in Hebrew Union College Annual (Vol. 46, 1975), pp. 43-45.

Unit 3

Chapter 1

[1] Writers who affirm this position include: Bird, Bullough, and Otwell.

[2] Lacks, Women in Judaism, p. 111.

[3] Critics who have made mention of one or more of the narratives in which a father mistreats his daughter include: Bullough, Lacks, Otwell, and Swidler.

[4-6] There is agreement in the literature that daughters were subjected to cruel treatment by their fathers as was the case with Lot, the Levite and Jephthah. Swidler makes the case that hospitality was the essential issue. Other critics such as Otwell and Bird condemn the fathers' unreasonable behavior but don't offer adequate explanation for the motivations involved. Speiser in Genesis, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964) and Sarna in Understanding Genesis (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), offer more detailed information.

[7] Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, p. 43.

[8] Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, pp. 77-78. The same position is also suggested by Swidler in Biblical Affirmations of Women, p. 140.

[9] Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 51.

[10] Commentators who assert that women are equated with material possessions include Bird, Otwell, and Swidler.

[11] This position is asserted by Bird and Otwell.

[12] Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 76.

[13] Bullough, The Subordinate Sex, p. 42.

[14] Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 51. A similar view is presented by Bullough.

[15] Those writers who maintain the position that woman was in an unenviable position include: Swidler, Otwell, Bird, Lacks and Scanzoni/Hardesty.

[16]Otwell assumes that the charge is made against a woman's family as does Meiselman; however, Meiselman does not necessarily perceive the procedure to place woman in a subordinate role.

[17]This issue is presented by Lacks and Bird in reference to the Deuteronomy 22 passage as well as the Numbers 5 passage concerning the "Ordeal of Bitter Water."

[18]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, pp. 120-121.

[19]Ibid., pp. 120-121.

[20]Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 51.

[21]Critics who affirm this point of view include: Bird, Lacks, and Otwell.

[22]Scanzoni/Hardesty and Swidler.

[23]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, p. 48.

[24]Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[25]Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," p. 56.

[26]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 168.

[27]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 137.

[28]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[29]Ibid., p. 152.

[30]Ibid., p. 155.

[31]Ibid., pp. 144-145.

[32]Lacks, Women in Judaism, p. 89. Meiselman agrees with Lacks in Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 88.

[33]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, pp. 84-95. Similar to above note Lacks in her book agrees with Meiselman.

[34]Bird, Lacks, Meiselman and Otwell all give the example of Zelophehad's daughter as evidence that women in certain situations could hold property. They do for the most part indicate that women were placeholders till the inheritance could transfer through the male

line; however, they don't mention the Numbers 36 passage as solid evidence for their point of view.

[35]Those writers who agree that purification laws were determined by the different types of impurity include: Trible in "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," Otwell and Scanzoni/Hardesty.

[36]Rachel Adler, "Tumah and Toharah: Ends and Beginnings" in Response special edition The Jewish Woman An Anthology, ed. Liz Koltun (Summer 1973, Number 18), p. 119.

[37]This view is affirmed by: Bird, Otwell, Scanzoni/Hardesty, and Swidler.

[38]Scanzoni/Hardesty, All Were Meant To Be, pp. 130-131.

[39]Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, pp. 176-177.

[40]Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law, p. 127. This position is also affirmed by Appleman.

[41]Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Woman, pp. 148-149.

Chapter 2

[1]For further discussion of the analysis of the verb yrh as well as a more thorough explanation of the position presented by the present writer see Herbert Chanan Brichto, "The case of the Sota and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law'" in Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. 46, 1975.

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