

2 KINGS

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 12

2 Kings

Song-Mi Suzie Park

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Barbara E. Reid, OP

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A Michael Glazier Book

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation series
BJS	Brown Jewish Studies
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Bible Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Bible Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CV	<i>Communio Viatorum</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Series
EBib	<i>Études bibliques</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>

<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NIB</i>	New Interpreter's Bible
<i>NIDB</i>	New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
<i>NIBCOT</i>	New International Bible Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>OBT</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	Old Testament Studies
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PBM</i>	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
<i>POS</i>	Pretoria Oriental Series
<i>Psychoanal Rev</i>	<i>Psychoanalytic Review</i>
<i>RelEd</i>	<i>Religious Education</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SBLMS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>SBLBS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
<i>SBT</i>	Studies in Biblical Theology

SCM	Student Christian Movement
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SO	Symbolae Osloenses
<i>SwMT</i>	<i>Swedish Missiological Themes</i>
SymS	Symposium Series
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZABR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

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Foreword

“Tell It on the Mountain”—or, “And You Shall Tell Your Daughter [as Well]”

Athalya Brenner-Idan

Universiteit van Amsterdam/Tel Aviv University

What can Wisdom Commentary do to help, and for whom?

The commentary genre has always been privileged in biblical studies. Traditionally acclaimed commentary series, such as the International Critical Commentary, Old Testament and New Testament Library, Hermeneia, Anchor Bible, Eerdmans, and Word—to name but several—enjoy nearly automatic prestige, and the number of women authors who participate in those is relatively small by comparison to their growing number in the scholarly guild. There certainly are some volumes written by women in them, especially in recent decades. At this time, however, this does not reflect the situation on the ground. Further, size matters. In that sense, the sheer size of the Wisdom Commentary is essential. This also represents a considerable investment and the possibility of reaching a wider audience than those already “converted.”

Expecting women scholars to deal especially or only with what are considered strictly “female” matters seems unwarranted. According to Audre Lorde, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”¹ But this maxim is not relevant to our case. The point of this commentary is not to destroy but to attain greater participation in the interpretive dialogue about biblical texts. Women scholars may bring additional questions to the readerly agenda as well as fresh angles to existing issues. To assume that their questions are designed only to topple a certain male hegemony is not convincing.

At first I did ask myself: is this commentary series an addition to calm raw nerves, an embellishment to make upholding the old hierarchy palatable? Or is it indeed about becoming the Master? On second and third thoughts, however, I understood that becoming the Master is not what this is about. Knowledge is power. Since Foucault at the very least, this cannot be in dispute. Writing commentaries for biblical texts by feminist women and men for women and for men, of confessional as well as non-confessional convictions, will sabotage (hopefully) the established hierarchy but will not topple it. This is about an attempt to integrate more fully, to introduce another viewpoint, to become. What excites me about the Wisdom Commentary is that it is not offered as just an alternative supplanting or substituting for the dominant discourse.

These commentaries on biblical books will retain nonauthoritative, pluralistic viewpoints. And yes, once again, the weight of a dedicated series, to distinguish from collections of stand-alone volumes, will prove weightier.

That such an approach is especially important in the case of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is beyond doubt. Women of Judaism, Christianity, and also Islam have struggled to make it their own for centuries, even more than they have fought for the New Testament and the Qur’an. Every Hebrew Bible/Old Testament volume in this project is evidence that the day has arrived: it is now possible to read *all* the Jewish canonical books as a collection, for a collection they are, with guidance conceived of with the needs of women readers (not only men) as an integral inspiration and part thereof.

In my Jewish tradition, the main motivation for reciting the Haggadah, the ritual text recited yearly on Passover, the festival of liberation from

1. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 110–14. First delivered in the Second Sex Conference in New York, 1979.

bondage, is given as “And you shall tell your son” (from Exod 13:8). The knowledge and experience of past generations is thus transferred to the next, for constructing the present and the future. The ancient maxim is, literally, limited to a male audience. This series remolds the maxim into a new inclusive shape, which is of the utmost consequence: “And you shall tell your son” is extended to “And you shall tell your daughter [as well as your son].” Or, if you want, “Tell it on the mountain,” for all to hear.

This is what it’s all about.

Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

"She Is a Breath of the Power of God" (Wis 7:25)

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor

Wisdom Commentary is the first series to offer detailed feminist interpretation of every book of the Bible. The fruit of collaborative work by an ecumenical and interreligious team of scholars, the volumes provide serious, scholarly engagement with the whole biblical text, not only those texts that explicitly mention women. The series is intended for clergy, teachers, ministers, and all serious students of the Bible. Designed to be both accessible and informed by the various approaches of biblical scholarship, it pays particular attention to the world in front of the text, that is, how the text is heard and appropriated. At the same time, this series aims to be faithful to the ancient text and its earliest audiences; thus the volumes also explicate the worlds behind the text and within it. While issues of gender are primary in this project, the volumes also address the intersecting issues of power, authority, ethnicity, race, class, and religious belief and practice. The fifty-eight volumes include the books regarded as canonical by Jews (i.e., the Tanakh); Protestants (the "Hebrew Bible" and the New Testament); and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern

Orthodox Communion (i.e., Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, including the Letter of Jeremiah, the additions to Esther, and Susanna and Bel and the Dragon in Daniel).

A Symphony of Diverse Voices

Included in the Wisdom Commentary series are voices from scholars of many different religious traditions, of diverse ages, differing sexual identities, and varying cultural, racial, ethnic, and social contexts. Some have been pioneers in feminist biblical interpretation; others are newer contributors from a younger generation. A further distinctive feature of this series is that each volume incorporates voices other than that of the lead author(s). These voices appear alongside the commentary of the lead author(s), in the grayscale inserts. At times, a contributor may offer an alternative interpretation or a critique of the position taken by the lead author(s). At other times, she or he may offer a complementary interpretation from a different cultural context or subject position. Occasionally, portions of previously published material bring in other views. The diverse voices are not intended to be contestants in a debate or a cacophony of discordant notes. The multiple voices reflect that there is no single definitive feminist interpretation of a text. In addition, they show the importance of subject position in the process of interpretation. In this regard, the Wisdom Commentary series takes inspiration from the Talmud and from *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss; New York: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhood, 2008), in which many voices, even conflicting ones, are included and not harmonized.

Contributors include biblical scholars, theologians, and readers of Scripture from outside the scholarly and religious guilds. At times, their comments pertain to a particular text. In some instances they address a theme or topic that arises from the text.

Another feature that highlights the collaborative nature of feminist biblical interpretation is that a number of the volumes have two lead authors who have worked in tandem from the inception of the project and whose voices interweave throughout the commentary.

Woman Wisdom

The title, Wisdom Commentary, reflects both the importance to feminists of the figure of Woman Wisdom in the Scriptures and the distinct

wisdom that feminist women and men bring to the interpretive process. In the Scriptures, Woman Wisdom appears as “a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (Wis 7:25), who was present and active in fashioning all that exists (Prov 8:22-31; Wis 8:6). She is a spirit who pervades and penetrates all things (Wis 7:22-23), and she provides guidance and nourishment at her all-inclusive table (Prov 9:1-5). In both postexilic biblical and nonbiblical Jewish sources, Woman Wisdom is often equated with Torah, e.g., Sirach 24:23-34; Baruch 3:9-4:4; 38:2; 46:4-5; 2 Baruch 48:33, 36; 4 Ezra 5:9-10; 13:55; 14:40; 1 Enoch 42.

The New Testament frequently portrays Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. He invites his followers, “take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Matt 11:29), just as Ben Sira advises, “put your neck under her [Wisdom’s] yoke and let your souls receive instruction” (Sir 51:26). Just as Wisdom experiences rejection (Prov 1:23-25; Sir 15:7-8; Wis 10:3; Bar 3:12), so too does Jesus (Mark 8:31; John 1:10-11). Only some accept his invitation to his all-inclusive banquet (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; compare Prov 1:20-21; 9:3-5). Yet, “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt 11:19, speaking of Jesus and John the Baptist; in the Lucan parallel at 7:35 they are called “wisdom’s children”). There are numerous parallels between what is said of Wisdom and of the *Logos* in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-18). These are only a few of many examples. This female embodiment of divine presence and power is an apt image to guide the work of this series.

Feminism

There are many different understandings of the term “feminism.” The various meanings, aims, and methods have developed exponentially in recent decades. Feminism is a perspective and a movement that springs from a recognition of inequities toward women, and it advocates for changes in whatever structures prevent full human flourishing. Three waves of feminism in the United States are commonly recognized. The first, arising in the mid-nineteenth century and lasting into the early twentieth, was sparked by women’s efforts to be involved in the public sphere and to win the right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave focused on civil rights and equality for women. With the third wave, from the 1980s forward, came global feminism and the emphasis on the contextual nature of interpretation. Now a fourth wave may be emerging, with a stronger emphasis on the intersectionality of women’s concerns with those of other marginalized groups and the increased use

of the internet as a platform for discussion and activism.¹ As feminism has matured, it has recognized that inequities based on gender are interwoven with power imbalances based on race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, physical ability, and a host of other social markers.

Feminist Women and Men

Men who choose to identify with and partner with feminist women in the work of deconstructing systems of domination and building structures of equality are rightly regarded as feminists. Some men readily identify with experiences of women who are discriminated against on the basis of sex/gender, having themselves had comparable experiences; others who may not have faced direct discrimination or stereotyping recognize that inequity and problematic characterization still occur, and they seek correction. This series is pleased to include feminist men both as lead authors and as contributing voices.

Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Women interpreting the Bible from the lenses of their own experience is nothing new. Throughout the ages women have recounted the biblical stories, teaching them to their children and others, all the while interpreting them afresh for their time and circumstances.² Following is a very brief sketch of select foremothers who laid the groundwork for contemporary feminist biblical interpretation.

One of the earliest known Christian women who challenged patriarchal interpretations of Scripture was a consecrated virgin named Helie, who lived in the second century CE. When she refused to marry, her

1. See Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism" (October 25, 2015), at <http://www.pacificu.edu/about-us/news-events/four-waves-feminism>; and Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?," <https://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave>.

2. For fuller treatments of this history, see chap. 7, "One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism," in Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 138–66; Susanne Scholz, "From the 'Woman's Bible' to the 'Women's Bible,' The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible," in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, IFT 13 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 12–32; Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

parents brought her before a judge, who quoted to her Paul's admonition, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor 7:9). In response, Helie first acknowledges that this is what Scripture says, but then she retorts, "but not for everyone, that is, not for holy virgins."³ She is one of the first to question the notion that a text has one meaning that is applicable in all situations.

A Jewish woman who also lived in the second century CE, Beruriah, is said to have had "profound knowledge of biblical exegesis and outstanding intelligence."⁴ One story preserved in the Talmud (b. Berakot 10a) tells of how she challenged her husband, Rabbi Meir, when he prayed for the destruction of a sinner. Proffering an alternate interpretation, she argued that Psalm 104:35 advocated praying for the destruction of sin, not the sinner.

In medieval times the first written commentaries on Scripture from a critical feminist point of view emerge. While others may have been produced and passed on orally, they are for the most part lost to us now. Among the earliest preserved feminist writings are those of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), German writer, mystic, and abbess of a Benedictine monastery. She reinterpreted the Genesis narratives in a way that presented women and men as complementary and interdependent. She frequently wrote about feminine aspects of the Divine.⁵ Along with other women mystics of the time, such as Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1416), she spoke authoritatively from her personal experiences of God's revelation in prayer.

In this era, women were also among the scribes who copied biblical manuscripts. Notable among them is Paula Dei Mansi of Verona, from a distinguished family of Jewish scribes. In 1288, she translated from Hebrew into Italian a collection of Bible commentaries written by her father and added her own explanations.⁶

Another pioneer, Christine de Pizan (1365–ca. 1430), was a French court writer and prolific poet. She used allegory and common sense

3. Madrid, Escorial MS, a II 9, f. 90 v., as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 140.

4. See Judith R. Baskin, "Women and Post-Biblical Commentary," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, Federation of Temple Sisterhood, 2008), xlix–lv, at lii.

5. Hildegard of Bingen, *De Operatione Dei*, 1.4.100; PL 197:885bc, as cited in Lerner, *Feminist Consciousness*, 142–43. See also Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

6. Emily Taitz, Sondra Henry, Cheryl Tallan, eds., *JPS Guide to Jewish Women 600 B.C.E.–1900 C.E.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003), 110–11.

to subvert misogynist readings of Scripture and celebrated the accomplishments of female biblical figures to argue for women's active roles in building society.⁷

By the seventeenth century, there were women who asserted that the biblical text needs to be understood and interpreted in its historical context. For example, Rachel Speght (1597–ca. 1630), a Calvinist English poet, elaborates on the historical situation in first-century Corinth that prompted Paul to say, "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor 7:1). Her aim was to show that the biblical texts should not be applied in a literal fashion to all times and circumstances. Similarly, Margaret Fell (1614–1702), one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, addressed the Pauline prohibitions against women speaking in church by insisting that they do not have universal validity. Rather, they need to be understood in their historical context, as addressed to a local church in particular time-bound circumstances.⁸

Along with analyzing the historical context of the biblical writings, women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to attend to misogynistic interpretations based on faulty translations. One of the first to do so was British feminist Mary Astell (1666–1731).⁹ In the United States, the Grimké sisters, Sarah (1792–1873) and Angelina (1805–1879), Quaker women from a slaveholding family in South Carolina, learned biblical Greek and Hebrew so that they could interpret the Bible for themselves. They were prompted to do so after men sought to silence them from speaking out against slavery and for women's rights by claiming that the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34) prevented women from speaking in public.¹⁰ Another prominent abolitionist, Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883), a former slave, quoted the Bible liberally in her speeches¹¹ and in so doing challenged cultural assumptions and biblical interpretations that undergird gender inequities.

7. See further Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 127–32.

8. Her major work, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures*, published in London in 1667, gave a systematic feminist reading of all biblical texts pertaining to women.

9. Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970, reprint of the 1730 edition; earliest edition of this work is 1700), 103–4.

10. See further Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838).

11. See, for example, her most famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman?," delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, OH; <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>.

Another monumental work that emerged in nineteenth-century England was that of Jewish theologian Grace Aguilar (1816–1847), *The Women of Israel*,¹² published in 1845. Aguilar's approach was to make connections between the biblical women and contemporary Jewish women's concerns. She aimed to counter the widespread notion that women were degraded in Jewish law and that only in Christianity were women's dignity and value upheld. Her intent was to help Jewish women find strength and encouragement by seeing the evidence of God's compassionate love in the history of every woman in the Bible. While not a full commentary on the Bible, Aguilar's work stands out for its comprehensive treatment of every female biblical character, including even the most obscure references.¹³

The first person to produce a full-blown feminist commentary on the Bible was Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902). A leading proponent in the United States for women's right to vote, she found that whenever women tried to make inroads into politics, education, or the work world, the Bible was quoted against them. Along with a team of like-minded women, she produced her own commentary on every text of the Bible that concerned women. Her pioneering two-volume project, *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1895 and 1898, urges women to recognize that texts that degrade women come from the men who wrote the texts, not from God, and to use their common sense to rethink what has been presented to them as sacred.

Nearly a century later, *The Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), appeared. This one-volume commentary features North American feminist scholarship on each book of the Protestant canon. Like Cady Stanton's commentary, it does not contain comments on every section of the biblical text but only on those passages deemed relevant to women. It was revised and expanded in 1998 to include the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books, and the contributors to this new volume reflect the global face of contemporary feminist scholarship. The revisions made in the third edition, which appeared in 2012, represent the profound advances in feminist biblical scholarship and include newer voices. In both the second and third editions, *The* has been dropped from the title.

12. The full title is *The Women of Israel or Characters and Sketches from the Holy Scriptures and Jewish History Illustrative of the Past History, Present Duty, and Future Destiny of the Hebrew Females, as Based on the Word of God*.

13. See further Eskenazi and Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, xxxviii; Taylor and Choi, *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, 31–37.

Also appearing at the centennial of Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* were two volumes edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews. The first, *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), charts a comprehensive approach to feminist interpretation from ecumenical, interreligious, and multicultural perspectives. The second volume, published in 1994, provides critical feminist commentary on each book of the New Testament as well as on three books of Jewish Pseudepigrapha and eleven other early Christian writings.

In Europe, similar endeavors have been undertaken, such as the one-volume *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, edited by Luise Schottruff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), featuring German feminist biblical interpretation of each book of the Bible, along with apocryphal books, and several extrabiblical writings. This work, now in its third edition, has recently been translated into English.¹⁴ A multivolume project, *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer, Adriana Valerio, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Christiana de Groot, is currently in production. This project presents a history of the reception of the Bible as embedded in Western cultural history and focuses particularly on gender-relevant biblical themes, biblical female characters, and women recipients of the Bible. The volumes are published in English, Spanish, Italian, and German.¹⁵

Another groundbreaking work is the collection *The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2015), which comprises twenty volumes of commentaries on the Old Testament. The parallel series, *Feminist Companion*

14. *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Another notable collection is the three volumes edited by Susanne Scholz, *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, *Recent Research in Biblical Studies* 7, 8, 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013, 2014, 2016).

15. The first volume, on the Torah, appeared in Spanish in 2009, in German and Italian in 2010, and in English in 2011 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature). Five more volumes are now available: *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014); *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Nuria Caldich-Benages (2014); *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni; English translation ed. Amy-Jill Levine (2015); *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015); and *Early Jewish Writings*, ed. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker (2017). For further information, see <http://www.bibleandwomen.org>.

to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, edited by Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff and Maria Mayo Robbins (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001–2009), contains thirteen volumes with one more planned. These two series are not full commentaries on the biblical books but comprise collected essays on discrete biblical texts.

Works by individual feminist biblical scholars in all parts of the world abound, and they are now too numerous to list in this introduction. Feminist biblical interpretation has reached a level of maturity that now makes possible a commentary series on every book of the Bible. In recent decades, women have had greater access to formal theological education, have been able to learn critical analytical tools, have put their own interpretations into writing, and have developed new methods of biblical interpretation. Until recent decades the work of feminist biblical interpreters was largely unknown, both to other women and to their brothers in the synagogue, church, and academy. Feminists now have taken their place in the professional world of biblical scholars, where they build on the work of their foremothers and connect with one another across the globe in ways not previously possible. In a few short decades, feminist biblical criticism has become an integral part of the academy.

Methodologies

Feminist biblical scholars use a variety of methods and often employ a number of them together.¹⁶ In the *Wisdom Commentary* series, the authors will explain their understanding of feminism and the feminist reading strategies used in their commentary. Each volume treats the biblical text in blocks of material, not an analysis verse by verse. The entire text is considered, not only those passages that feature female characters or that speak specifically about women. When women are not apparent in the narrative, feminist lenses are used to analyze the dynamics in the text between male characters, the models of power, binary ways of thinking, and the dynamics of imperialism. Attention is given to how the whole text functions and how it was and is heard, both in its original context and today. Issues of particular concern to women—e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water—come to the fore.

16. See the seventeen essays in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, eds., *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), which show the complementarity of various approaches.

One of the approaches used by early feminists and still popular today is to lift up the overlooked and forgotten stories of women in the Bible. Studies of women in each of the Testaments have been done, and there are also studies on women in particular biblical books.¹⁷ Feminists recognize that the examples of biblical characters can be both empowering and problematic. The point of the feminist enterprise is not to serve as an apologetic for women; it is rather, in part, to recover women's history and literary roles in all their complexity and to learn from that recovery.

Retrieving the submerged history of biblical women is a crucial step for constructing the story of the past so as to lead to liberative possibilities for the present and future. There are, however, some pitfalls to this approach. Sometimes depictions of biblical women have been naïve and romantic. Some commentators exalt the virtues of both biblical and contemporary women and paint women as superior to men. Such reverse discrimination inhibits movement toward equality for all. In addition, some feminists challenge the idea that one can "pluck positive images out of an admittedly androcentric text, separating literary characterizations from the androcentric interests they were created to serve."¹⁸ Still other feminists find these images to have enormous value.

One other danger with seeking the submerged history of women is the tendency for Christian feminists to paint Jesus and even Paul as liberators of women in a way that demonizes Judaism.¹⁹ Wisdom Commentary aims to enhance understanding of Jesus as well as Paul as Jews of their day and to forge solidarity among Jewish and Christian feminists.

17. See, e.g., Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Irene Nowell, *Women in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997); Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*, *Companions to the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

18. Cheryl Exum, "Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, FCB 6, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 75–97, at 76.

19. See Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 1:117–29; Amy-Jill Levine, "The New Testament and Anti-Judaism," in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 87–117.

Feminist scholars who use historical-critical methods analyze the world behind the text; they seek to understand the historical context from which the text emerged and the circumstances of the communities to whom it was addressed. In bringing feminist lenses to this approach, the aim is not to impose modern expectations on ancient cultures but to unmask the ways that ideologically problematic mind-sets that produced the ancient texts are still promulgated through the text. Feminist biblical scholars aim not only to deconstruct but also to reclaim and reconstruct biblical history as women's history, in which women were central and active agents in creating religious heritage.²⁰ A further step is to construct meaning for contemporary women and men in a liberative movement toward transformation of social, political, economic, and religious structures.²¹ In recent years, some feminists have embraced new historicism, which accents the creative role of the interpreter in any construction of history and exposes the power struggles to which the text witnesses.²²

Literary critics analyze the world of the text: its form, language patterns, and rhetorical function.²³ They do not attempt to separate layers of tradition and redaction but focus on the text holistically, as it is in

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

21. See, e.g., Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), whose aim is to engage in biblical interpretation not only for intellectual enlightenment but, even more important, for personal and communal transformation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001]) envisions the work of feminist biblical interpretation as a dance of Wisdom that consists of seven steps that interweave in spiral movements toward liberation, the final one being transformative action for change.

22. See Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism*, GBS, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

23. Phyllis Trible was among the first to employ this method with texts from Genesis and Ruth in her groundbreaking book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Another pioneer in feminist literary criticism is Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). For surveys of recent developments in literary methods, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

its present form. They examine how meaning is created in the interaction between the text and its reader in multiple contexts. Within the arena of literary approaches are reader-oriented approaches, narrative, rhetorical, structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructive, ideological, autobiographical, and performance criticism.²⁴ Narrative critics study the interrelation among author, text, and audience through investigation of settings, both spatial and temporal; characters; plot; and narrative techniques (e.g., irony, parody, intertextual allusions). Reader-response critics attend to the impact that the text has on the reader or hearer. They recognize that when a text is detrimental toward women there is the choice either to affirm the text or to read against the grain toward a liberative end. Rhetorical criticism analyzes the style of argumentation and attends to how the author is attempting to shape the thinking or actions of the hearer. Structuralist critics analyze the complex patterns of binary oppositions in the text to derive its meaning.²⁵ Post-structuralist approaches challenge the notion that there are fixed meanings to any biblical text or that there is one universal truth. They engage in close readings of the text and often engage in intertextual analysis.²⁶ Within this approach is deconstructionist criticism, which views the text as a site of conflict, with competing narratives. The interpreter aims to expose the fault lines and overturn and reconfigure binaries by elevating the underling of a pair and foregrounding it.²⁷ Feminists also use other post-modern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and

24. See, e.g., J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993); Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

25. See, e.g., David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 7 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978).

26. See, e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

27. David Penchansky, "Deconstruction," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196–205. See, for example, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BibInt 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

values concealed in the text as well as that of the interpreter.²⁸ The latter involves deliberate self-disclosure while reading the text as a critical exegete.²⁹ Performance criticism attends to how the text was passed on orally, usually in communal settings, and to the verbal and nonverbal interactions between the performer and the audience.³⁰

From the beginning, feminists have understood that interpreting the Bible is an act of power. In recent decades, feminist biblical scholars have developed hermeneutical theories of the ethics and politics of biblical interpretation to challenge the claims to value neutrality of most academic biblical scholarship. Feminist biblical scholars have also turned their attention to how some biblical writings were shaped by the power of empire and how this still shapes readers' self-understandings today. They have developed hermeneutical approaches that reveal, critique, and evaluate the interactions depicted in the text against the context of empire, and they consider implications for contemporary contexts.³¹ Feminists also analyze the dynamics of colonization and the mentalities of colonized peoples in the exercise of biblical interpretation. As Kwok Pui-lan explains, "A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonizers and the colonized, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control."³² Methods and models from sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate

28. See Tina Pippin, ed., *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts: Semeia* 59 (1992); Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 2007).

29. See, e.g., Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Interpretation: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); P. J. W. Schutte, "When They, We, and the Passive Become I—Introducing Autobiographical Biblical Criticism," *HTS Theologische Studien / Theological Studies* 61 (2005): 401–16.

30. See, e.g., Holly Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, eds., *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

31. E.g., Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Warren Carter, *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004).

32. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 9. See also, Musa W. Dube, ed., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); Cristl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp,

women's everyday lives, their experiences of marriage, childrearing, labor, money, illness, etc.³³

As feminists have examined the construction of gender from varying cultural perspectives, they have become ever more cognizant that the way gender roles are defined within differing cultures varies radically. As Mary Ann Tolbert observes, "Attempts to isolate some universal role that cross-culturally defines 'woman' have run into contradictory evidence at every turn."³⁴ Some women have coined new terms to highlight the particularities of their socio-cultural context. Many African American feminists, for example, call themselves *womanists* to draw attention to the double oppression of racism and sexism they experience.³⁵ Similarly, many US Hispanic feminists speak of themselves as *mujeristas* (*mujer* is Spanish for "woman").³⁶ Others prefer to be called "Latina feminists."³⁷ Both groups emphasize that the context for their theologizing is *mestizaje* and *mulatez* (racial and cultural mixture), done *en conjunto* (in community), with *lo cotidiano* (everyday lived experience) of Hispanic women as starting points for theological reflection and the encounter with the divine. Intercultural analysis has become an indispensable tool for working toward justice for women at the global level.³⁸

Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

33. See, for example, Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Susan Niditch, *"My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man": Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

34. Mary Ann Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:255–71, at 265.

35. Alice Walker coined the term (*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967, 1983]). See also Katie G. Cannon, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 30–40; Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988); Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

36. Ada María Isasi-Díaz (*Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996]) is credited with coining the term.

37. E.g., María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

38. See, e.g., María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado-Nunes, eds., *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, Studies in Latino/a Catholicism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

Some feminists are among those who have developed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) interpretation. This approach focuses on issues of sexual identity and uses various reading strategies. Some point out the ways in which categories that emerged in recent centuries are applied anachronistically to biblical texts to make modern-day judgments. Others show how the Bible is silent on contemporary issues about sexual identity. Still others examine same-sex relationships in the Bible by figures such as Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan. In recent years, queer theory has emerged; it emphasizes the blurriness of boundaries not just of sexual identity but also of gender roles. Queer critics often focus on texts in which figures transgress what is traditionally considered proper gender behavior.³⁹

Feminists also recognize that the struggle for women's equality and dignity is intimately connected with the struggle for respect for Earth and for the whole of the cosmos. Ecofeminists interpret Scripture in ways that highlight the link between human domination of nature and male subjugation of women. They show how anthropocentric ways of interpreting the Bible have overlooked or dismissed Earth and Earth community. They invite readers to identify not only with human characters in the biblical narrative but also with other Earth creatures and domains of nature, especially those that are the object of injustice. Some use creative imagination to retrieve the interests of Earth implicit in the narrative and enable Earth to speak.⁴⁰

Biblical Authority

By the late nineteenth century, some feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began to question openly whether the Bible could continue to be regarded as authoritative for women. They viewed the Bible itself as

39. See, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *JFSR* 6 (1990): 65–86; Deirdre J. Good, "Reading Strategies for Biblical Passages on Same-Sex Relations," *Theology and Sexuality* 7 (1997): 70–82; Deryn Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Feminist Hermeneutics* (London: SCM, 2011); Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

40. E.g., Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, *SymS* 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America*, *Women from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

the source of women's oppression, and some rejected its sacred origin and saving claims. Some decided that the Bible and the religious traditions that enshrine it are too thoroughly saturated with androcentrism and patriarchy to be redeemable.⁴¹

In the Wisdom Commentary series, questions such as these may be raised, but the aim of this series is not to lead readers to reject the authority of the biblical text. Rather, the aim is to promote better understanding of the contexts from which the text arose and of the rhetorical effects it has on women and men in contemporary contexts. Such understanding can lead to a deepening of faith, with the Bible serving as an aid to bring flourishing of life.

Language for God

Because of the ways in which the term "God" has been used to symbolize the divine in predominantly male, patriarchal, and monarchical modes, feminists have designed new ways of speaking of the divine. Some have called attention to the inadequacy of the term *God* by trying to visually destabilize our ways of thinking and speaking of the divine. Rosemary Radford Ruether proposed *God/ess*, as an unpronounceable term pointing to the unnameable understanding of the divine that transcends patriarchal limitations.⁴² Some have followed traditional Jewish practice, writing *G-d*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted *G*d*.⁴³ Others draw on the biblical tradition to mine female and non-gender-specific metaphors and symbols.⁴⁴ In Wisdom Commentary, there is not one standard way of expressing the divine; each author will use her or his preferred ways. The one exception is that when the tetragrammaton, YHWH, the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, is used, it will be without vowels, respecting the Jewish custom of avoiding pronouncing the divine name out of reverence.

41. E.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: A Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

42. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

43. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet; Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 191 n. 3.

44. E.g., Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See further Elizabeth A. Johnson, "God," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 128–30.

Nomenclature for the Two Testaments

In recent decades, some biblical scholars have begun to call the two Testaments of the Bible by names other than the traditional nomenclature: Old and New Testament. Some regard "Old" as derogatory, implying that it is no longer relevant or that it has been superseded. Consequently, terms like Hebrew Bible, First Testament, and Jewish Scriptures and, correspondingly, Christian Scriptures or Second Testament have come into use. There are a number of difficulties with these designations. The term "Hebrew Bible" does not take into account that parts of the Old Testament are written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.⁴⁵ Moreover, for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants.⁴⁶ The term "Jewish Scriptures" is inadequate because these books are also sacred to Christians. Conversely, "Christian Scriptures" is not an accurate designation for the New Testament, since the Old Testament is also part of the Christian Scriptures. Using "First and Second Testament" also has difficulties, in that it can imply a hierarchy and a value judgment.⁴⁷ Jews generally use the term Tanakh, an acronym for Torah (Pentateuch), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).

In Wisdom Commentary, if authors choose to use a designation other than Tanakh, Old Testament, and New Testament, they will explain how they mean the term.

Translation

Modern feminist scholars recognize the complexities connected with biblical translation, as they have delved into questions about philosophy of language, how meanings are produced, and how they are culturally situated. Today it is evident that simply translating into gender-neutral formulations cannot address all the challenges presented by androcentric texts. Efforts at feminist translation must also deal with issues around authority and canonicity.⁴⁸

45. Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11; Ezra 4:7–6:18; 7:12–26; Dan 2:4–7:28.

46. Representing the *via media* between Catholic and reformed, Anglicans generally consider the Apocrypha to be profitable, if not canonical, and utilize select Wisdom texts liturgically.

47. See Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew*, 193–99.

48. Elizabeth Castelli, "Les Belles Infidèles/Fidelity or Feminism? The Meanings of Feminist Biblical Translation," in *Searching the Scriptures*, 1:189–204, here 190.

Because of these complexities, the editors of the Wisdom Commentary series have chosen to use an existing translation, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is provided for easy reference at the top of each page of commentary. The NRSV was produced by a team of ecumenical and interreligious scholars, is a fairly literal translation, and uses inclusive language for human beings. Brief discussions about problematic translations appear in the inserts labeled "Translation Matters." When more detailed discussions are available, these will be indicated in footnotes. In the commentary, wherever Hebrew or Greek words are used, English translation is provided. In cases where a wordplay is involved, transliteration is provided to enable understanding.

Art and Poetry

Artistic expression in poetry, music, sculpture, painting, and various other modes is very important to feminist interpretation. Where possible, art and poetry are included in the print volumes of the series. In a number of instances, these are original works created for this project. Regrettably, copyright and production costs prohibit the inclusion of color photographs and other artistic work. It is our hope that the web version will allow a greater collection of such resources.

Glossary

Because there are a number of excellent readily available resources that provide definitions and concise explanations of terms used in feminist theological and biblical studies, this series will not include a glossary. We refer you to works such as *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, edited by Letty M. Russell with J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), and volume 1 of *Searching the Scriptures*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with the assistance of Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Individual authors in the Wisdom Commentary series will define the way they are using terms that may be unfamiliar.

A Concluding Word

In just a few short decades, feminist biblical studies has grown exponentially, both in the methods that have been developed and in the number of scholars who have embraced it. We realize that this series is limited and will soon need to be revised and updated. It is our hope that Wisdom Commentary, by making the best of current feminist biblical

scholarship available in an accessible format to ministers, preachers, teachers, scholars, and students, will aid all readers in their advancement toward God's vision of dignity, equality, and justice for all.



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Author's Introduction

Women Among Kings

Second Kings, the last book in a group of writings known as the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua through 2 Kings), does not initially appear to be particularly suited to feminist biblical criticism. Considering that the book details the history of the ruling monarchs of Israel and Judah, nearly all of whom are male, and the complex relationships these rulers had with their people, their political neighbors, and, most important, their male god, YHWH, the androcentrism of this text is undeniable. Women and members of other marginalized groups, as is so often the case in ancient literature, rarely are front and center. When they do make an appearance in the narrative, they are, for the most part, noted in passing¹ or as part of the supporting cast. As Renita Weems puts it: "Women like Deborah, Jael, the wise woman of Tekoa, Tamar, Bathsheba, Rizpeh, and Huldah come across as subordinate characters, supporting actresses, bit players in a larger plot that revolves around the unpredictable passions of men."²

The few female characters whose stories are narrated in detail are sometimes more unlucky than those who are merely ignored. Used as

1. Phyllis Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 34.

2. Renita J. Weems, "Huldah, the Prophet: Reading a (Deuteronomistic) Woman's Identity," in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 332.

ciphers for the biblical writers' fears or as tools for their "androcentric ideological agendas,"³ these women are rarely allowed a voice of their own. And the stories told about them would hardly be the ones they would choose to tell about themselves. To put it succinctly, 2 Kings, as the title so aptly denotes, is not a "history" of a people as such, and certainly not that of women, but of kings—male monarchs—whose stories were recorded, edited, and imbued with theological meaning by groups of elite male scribes.

As is so often the case, however, the undeniable androcentrism—especially the kind of theologically tinted androcentric focus so clearly present in 2 Kings—cannot help but convey illuminating (albeit biased) views and visions of women and other people whom the biblical writer regarded as the Other.⁴ The purpose of this commentary is to expose and uncover these underlying visions, some of which are unfavorable and some of which are sympathetic, so as to elucidate and, at points, to deconstruct and interrogate them. Following Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, this commentary explores "the liberating or oppressive values and visions inscribed in the text by identifying the androcentric patriarchal character and dynamics of the text."⁵ In so doing, this work attempts to mitigate to some small degree the absent and missing voices of women and other marginalized figures even if a full remedy for their absence remains out of reach.

This particular focus will not likely generate the meanings that the ancient male biblical writer/editors intended to convey from their writings. Indeed, the meaning intended by the original authors or editors, whatever it might be, is likely impossible to ascertain.⁶ Instead, the pur-

3. Shelly Matthews, "Feminist Biblical Historiography," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bible and Women* 9.1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 246.

4. There are numerous studies on the subject of the Other. To name just a few: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230–50; idem., "What a Difference a Difference Makes," in *Relating Religion*, 251–302; Richard Wentz, *The Contemplation of Otherness: The Critical Vision of Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984); Lawrence M. Wills, *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

5. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 57.

6. Mention must be made here of the groundbreaking essay by Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–48.

pose of this commentary is to uncover and bring out through a variety of means and methods the ways in which women and other people on the margins were portrayed, characterized, and narrated. In short, it is to shine a light on some of the androcentric messages, views, and visions that emerge from the narratives in 2 Kings so as to explore their meaning and significance. In so doing, this work seeks to recover “from historical silences the trace of the lives and faint echoes” of the voices of women who “suffered and resisted patriarchal oppression.”⁷

Approaches to Feminist Biblical Interpretation

The research in this volume exemplifies a broad understanding of feminist biblical interpretation. A multitude of methods and approaches is used to uncover views of women and other marginalized people and to explore and recover, when possible, the stories, feelings, and experiences of these figures. Jacqueline Lapsley and Patricia Tull best sum up the kind of feminist exegesis employed in this volume:

We engage in a complex, often dialogical process of acquainting ourselves with the “other” whose authorship underlies the text, seeking in sympathy to understand before responding. As we construct our reading of an ancient text, our work may be compared to home remodeling: having examined the materials available, we highlight what has been hidden from view, reclaim everything we can, repurpose or recycle what we must, and carefully refuse what we can no longer consider appropriate to the project of life-affirming inquiry—recognizing full well that other readers in other places or times may beg to differ.⁸

In line with this useful description and applying the various avenues of feminist interpretation as outlined by Alice Ogden Bellis,⁹ this commentary examines 2 Kings through a feminist lens. In some instances, such as with the analyses of 2 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 17, historical, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence are employed to elucidate the lives, roles, and experiences of women during times of ancient warfare. At other points, such as with the pericopes about the deaths of the infamous queens Jezebel and Athaliah in 2 Kings 9 and 2 Kings 11, the work reassesses and deconstructs traditional interpretations of these reviled

7. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 101.

8. Jacqueline E. Lapsley and Patricia K. Tull, eds., *After Exegesis: Feminist Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 2.

9. Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 229.

figures. These chapters, as well as others in this commentary, explore the ways in which biblical interpretations supported (and still support) the continued delegitimation of women, especially those who dared to assert and obtain a measure of political and religious authority. Relatedly, this research also searches the spaces between the words or the silences in the biblical text in order to uncover partially erased and hidden, and thereby overlooked, biblical traditions about women. Through this exposure and deconstruction, this commentary attempts to offer a counter-narrative to the one presented in the biblical text.

More generally, the depiction and presence of feminine images of the divine as well as the existence of folk religion as practiced by ancient women in Israel (e.g., 2 Kgs 13) are evaluated in this work. Also reviewed and discussed are literary and translational concerns, including an assessment of the translations of certain words and phrases as well as an exploration of recurrent themes and motifs related to the feminine. Finally, certain portions of this research attempt to look beyond the text, speculating and trying to create anew the lives of these marginalized figures who exist *sous rature*.

Masculinity of YHWH

While the approaches are many and while 2 Kings is a complicated text with many different motifs and foci, this work will highlight and trace a particular theme concerning gender that runs throughout the book as a whole. Namely, the commentary will show that one of the central issues of 2 Kings is the construction and assertion of the masculinity of Israel's god, YHWH. Narrating the various masculine contests and challenges faced by YHWH, 2 Kings aims to defend and assert the prowess, power, and virility of this deity. The most potent and important of these conflicts is the contest between YHWH and other gods, usually Baal, for the religious fidelity of Israel and Judah who are envisioned and portrayed as women. Maleness is thus bound up with YHWH's singularity and demand for exclusive worship. By examining how the masculinity of YHWH as well as that of other monarchic figures in 2 Kings is depicted, this commentary hopes to decipher and elucidate the ways in which the feminine was imagined and constructed in contradistinction.

Gendered meanings and messages conveyed by 2 Kings are not monolithic and univocal, however. The text at points admits that the dichotomous constructions and dualities that it asserts are indeed too simplistic to capture the complex relationship between a people and its deity. Thus, as I will argue, while the biblical text proclaims the mascu-

linity and prowess of YHWH, it also simultaneously deconstructs and upends this assertion at the conclusion of the book when it describes Israel and Judah's destruction by foreign nations. Hence, though the narrative attempts at points to salvage and rescue the masculinity of the god YHWH, the dissonant ending to this book, concluding with the exile and desolation of both Israel and Judah, cannot help but elicit a counter-reading, not just of the preceding narratives, but also of the masculinity of YHWH, which is so aggressively avowed and defended in them. Hence, as strongly as the masculinity of YHWH is proclaimed so in equal measure the narrative admits of doubts and insecurities to this claim—doubts that are exposed and explored at the end of 2 Kings as Israel and Judah are exiled and desolated and as the temple of YHWH in Zion is ruined and demolished.

Because this work focuses on the construction, assertion, and finally deconstruction of YHWH's masculinity in 2 Kings, I will not use a gender-neutral term to refer to God in this commentary. Doing so would undermine and muddle the claim posited in this research that the masculine depiction of YHWH is purposeful and significant. Moreover, it would take away from the argument made at the end of this commentary that the description of Israel and Judah's, and thus possibly YHWH's, downfall works to undermine, question, and challenge the assertion of the indisputable masculinity and power of YHWH. Hence, I deliberately utilize the masculine pronoun.

Preceding Research

In the analysis of the depiction and characterization of YHWH, this work has much benefited from Cynthia Chapman's important work on the gendered significance of warfare in the ancient Near East.¹⁰ Especially useful has been her careful elucidation of the ways in which gender, especially the masculinity of ancient Near Eastern monarchs including YHWH, was imagined and constructed in the ancient Near East. Her work has been crucial in uncovering the gendered lens through which ancient Israelite writers viewed their deity and their kings.

Aside from Chapman's research, this work has been informed by *The Women's Bible Commentary*, especially the commentary on 1 and 2 Kings

10. Cynthia Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, HSM 62 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

by Claudia Camp,¹¹ as well as the essays presented in a series of feminist companions to different portions of the Hebrew Bible, which was edited by Athalya Brenner.¹² Along with these works, two other commentaries, different in tone and focus, must also be mentioned as particularly helpful to the formulation of this work. The first is the commentary on 1 and 2 Kings by Gina Hens-Piazza.¹³ Though her research is centered on a theological reading of 1 and 2 Kings, her voice provided a much-needed perspective on a text that has usually been read and studied by male scholars. Her comments about the ethical and theological concerns that are undeniably present and struggled with in 2 Kings have been instrumental to my theological engagements with and understanding of this particular text.

Also insightful and helpful but in a different manner is the historically and archaeologically centered commentary on 2 Kings by Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor.¹⁴ Just as Hens-Piazza's work provided a much-needed theological perspective on 2 Kings, so Cogan and Tadmor's commentary provided equally valuable historical and archaeological insights into the ancient Near Eastern background of this particular text. Cogan and Tadmor's work reminds us with special urgency that the figures in 2 Kings are located in a particular social and historical context. Though certainly the stories of ancient women and men can be (and have been) used as a useful lens through which to reflect on the situations and problems in the modern world, a better understanding of the ancient world in which these characters were supposed to have lived and breathed, and from which these writings emerged, is equally important. Cogan and Tadmor's research helped to fill out the ancient Mediterranean universe that forms and informs the literary and historical contextual background of the stories in 2 Kings.

Social Location

Speaking of context, knowing my social location will help readers gain a better understanding of my reading. Undoubtedly, my background influences the questions, issues, and concerns that I bring to 2 Kings and

11. Claudia Camp, "1 and 2 Kings," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 102–16.

12. Especially useful was Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, FCB 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

13. Gina Hens-Piazza, *1–2 Kings*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

14. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

thus shapes my interpretation. As a 1.5-generation Korean American female scholar of the Hebrew Bible, I am largely the product of two different contexts. The first is that of a patriarchal, structured, and religiously conservative immigrant community in which I was raised. And the second is the mostly white colleges and universities in the Northeastern parts of the United States where I received my training.

Both contexts shape what I find interesting and important about the biblical text. In particular, the social location of my upbringing makes me especially sensitive to issues pertaining to women and to those whom society regards as unimportant and marginal. Indeed, I believe that my Korean American background played a crucial role in my decision to pursue the study of the Hebrew Bible. In hindsight, pursuing doctoral studies was an act of rebellion against a context that favored men as the only appropriate pupils for the study of all things related to God. The second context was similarly influential, though in a different manner. My scholarly training in a Near Eastern program taught me that the knowledge of the ancient Near East is critical for an understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a result, classical historical-critical approaches still remain important tools in my toolbox.

Aside from my own voice and reading, this commentary, as well as others in the Wisdom Commentary series, aims to provide a variety of voices and perspectives through the addition of shorter, discrete essays on topics related to the 2 Kings text written by other authors from a variety of backgrounds. This commentary on 2 Kings has been enriched by these other viewpoints and interpretations.

Composition and Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History

Finally, a brief discussion must be had about a much-debated issue concerning the compositional and redactional history of the Deuteronomistic History¹⁵ (DtrH), a term coined by German scholar Martin Noth.¹⁶ The writers/editors who assembled, composed, and edited the Deuteronomistic History are designated as the Deuteronomistic Historian (DH).

15. For a good, readable summary, see Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), esp. 101–16. For a more detailed overview, see Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, “Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues,” in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 24–141.

16. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

Like many American scholars, I generally assent to the double redaction of the Deuteronomistic History associated with Frank Moore Cross,¹⁷ which has been further refined by other scholars.¹⁸ I maintain that there were at least two redactions of the DtrH:¹⁹ a first preexilic redaction of the DtrH that likely stemmed from the reign of King Josiah, and a second, later redaction that occurred after the destruction of Judah, during the exile. Many European scholars, especially of the Göttingen school, have argued that there were additional redactions beyond these two and that the redactions should be categorized and understood differently.²⁰

17. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–89.

18. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, AB 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 29–38; idem, “Levitical History and the Role of Joshua,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 241–61; Mordechai Cogan, “Israel in Exile—The View of a Josianic Historian,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 40–44; Richard Friedman, *The Exile and the Biblical Narrative: The Formation of the Deuteronomistic History and Priestly Codes* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, VTSup 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 135–44; Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); Jon D. Levenson, “From Temple to Synagogue: 1 Kings 8,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 143–66; idem, “Who Inserted the Book of the Torah?” *HTR* 68 (1975): 203–33.

19. In my work, I also argued for an earlier redaction during the reign of King Hezekiah. See Song-Mi Suzie Park, *Hezekiah and the Dialogue of Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 73–77, 192–95. So also W. Boyd Barrick, “On the Removal of the ‘High Places’ in 1–2 Kings,” *Bib* 55 (1974): 257–59; Baruch Halpern and D. S. Vanderhoof, “The Editions of Kings in the 7th–6th Centuries B.C.E.,” *HUCA* 62 (1991): 179–224; Ian Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 133–56; Manfred Weippert, “Fragen des israelitischen Geschichtsbewusstseins,” *VT* 23 (1973): 437–38; Francolino J. Gonçalves, *L’expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la littérature hébraïque ancienne*, *EBib* 7 (Paris: Gabalda, 1986), 73–76.

20. The Göttingen School proposes (at least) three layers of redaction of the DtrH. See Rudolf Smend, “The Law and the Nations: A Contribution to Deuteronomistic Tradition History,” in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, trans. P. T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 95–111; trans. of “Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte,” in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. W. Wolff (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 494–509. See also Walter Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche*

These ideas have been challenged,²¹ and the discussion of the composition and editing of the DtrH has grown complex and technical. This study will not delve into the intricacies of the authorship and redactional history of 2 Kings. Not only is this commentary intended to be accessible to a wide audience, but the focus of this work is centered on different queries and concerns. Namely, the purpose of this research is to read the individual narratives in 2 Kings with an eye toward issues of gender. As such, I have tried to interpret the narratives in 2 Kings largely without much recourse to editorial or redactional matters. Though historical issues are discussed in the commentary, this research has largely focused on literary aspects of 2 Kings.

Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972); Timo Veijola, *Die Ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975); idem, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977).

21. Römer and de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH)," 129–41; John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

2 Kings 1:1-18

Feminine Powers and Masculine Rivalries

The book of 2 Kings begins with a seemingly inconsequential tale about an unhappy accident of Ahaziah, the king of Israel, and his subsequent demise following his attempt to consult the foreign god, Baal-zebul, about his healing. The message of the narrative seems straightforward: seeking other deities instead of YHWH, the god of Israel, will lead to death and destruction. The pericope at the beginning of 2 Kings reveals several masculine rivalries—between YHWH and the human king, between YHWH’s messengers and those of the monarch, and, finally, between YHWH and Baal as the ultimate deity of life and healing—that add nuance to this message about YHWH’s singularity. These rivalries, which are found throughout 2 Kings, elucidate the central theme of the book as whole: the masculine contest for the loyalty and fidelity of Israel and Judah—nations that are personified in the biblical text in female categories as daughters, wives, or lovers of YHWH (see Hos 1–3; Isa 54; Jer 3, 14; Ezek 16, 23). As Jan Tarlin correctly notes, the Elijah cycle and perhaps also 2 Kings in its entirety can thus, “quite convincingly, be read as a manifesto of patriarchal Yahwism.”¹

1. Jan Tarlin, “Toward a ‘Female’ Reading of the Elijah Cycle: Ideology and Gender in the Interpretation of 1 Kings 17–19, 21 and 2 Kings 1–2.18,” in *Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 208.

Ahaziah's Fall and the Fight for Masculine Power (1:1-8)

The division between the First and Second Books of Kings is an artificial one, first introduced into the codices of the Septuagint.² Second Kings immediately begins where 1 Kings left off—in the immediate aftermath of the death of King Ahab of Samaria. Right after the enthronement of Ahab's son Ahaziah as king, 2 Kings states that Moab, which had been under Israel's subjugation since the time of King David (2 Sam 8:12), took advantage of the country's political transition by rebelling against its Israelite colonizer (2 Kgs 1:1). The story of Moab's rebellion will find its conclusion in 2 Kings 3.

Some commentators view 2 Kings 1:1 as an insertion due to its succinctness and haphazard nature and also because the note about Moab is repeated in 2 Kings 3:5.³ Moab foreshadows and colors the story of Ahaziah, king of Israel, and Elijah, YHWH's prophet, found in 2 Kings 1. Second Kings 1:1 shows that the reign of King Ahaziah, like all the monarchs in Samaria, will be judged negatively by the biblical writer. Moreover, it also sets the scene for the larger demonstration of YHWH's power through his prophet Elijah at the conclusion of this first chapter.

The end of 2 Kings 1 should be viewed as a theologically gendered response to the notification of the loss of Moab's vassalage mentioned in the first verse (2 Kgs 1:1). Moab's successful overthrow of Israel's powers would certainly have raised doubts about the power and, hence, the masculinity of Israel's deity, YHWH.⁴ The narrative that follows 2 Kings 1, which speaks about the apostasy of and subsequent illness and death of the northern king Ahaziah, addresses these doubts by explicating the reasons why God allowed Israel to lose part of its colonial territories: because of the impiety and faithlessness of Israel's king. The story thus

2. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor note that the line concerning Moab's rebellion is repeated as a catch-line at the end of the Third Kingdom and the beginning of the Fourth Kingdom in the LXX Vaticanus manuscript in order to show the connection between the two books (Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988], 22).

3. Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, trans. Anselm Hagedorn, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 229.

4. On masculinity, warfare, and kingship, see Cynthia Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, HSM 62 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

2 Kings 1:1-8

¹After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

²Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury." ³But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron?' ⁴Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.'" So Elijah went.

⁵The messengers returned to the king, who said to them, "Why have you returned?" ⁶They answered him, "There came a man to meet us, who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him: Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but shall surely die.'" ⁷He said to them, "What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?" ⁸They answered him, "A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist." He said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

works to shift the blame for this loss of territory from YHWH to King Ahaziah, whose apostasy is clearly evident in his desire to consult Baalzebub after his fall. Questions about the masculine colonizing power of YHWH raised by Moab's successful rebellion are fueled by the account of the apostate northern king, Ahaziah.

From a postcolonial perspective, subtle justifications of and explanations for Israel's subjugation and colonization of Moab are present throughout the biblical corpus. The story about the origins of the Moabites, who are depicted as distant relatives of the Israelites through Abraham's nephew Lot, as well the offspring of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:30-38), serve to defend Moab's subjugation and colonialization by Israel: Moab is related to Israel, and, thus, Israel has a right to rule over it. Indeed, it might be that the Davidic genealogy in Ruth 4 served as a rationale for David's conquest of Moab. Moreover, considering their incestuous origins and past, the Moabites are said to be impure, not part of the chosen elect, and thus justifiably lesser. Indeed, Deuteronomy 23:3 seems to hint that Moab's illegitimate birth has something to do with their perpetual disqualification from admittance

into the assembly of God. Hence, Moab's vassalage to Israel is explained as proper and natural: The better, purer country and people rightfully will rule over its lesser relations. Sexuality, genealogy, and foundation narratives are utilized to validate colonial power and conquest as well as to shore up and subtly address possible suspicions about the loss of power and masculinity of YHWH. Politics, such as the loss of colonial rule over Moab by Israel during the reign of Ahaziah, thus intersects with issues of ethnicity, sexuality, and theology.

The power of YHWH, which is undermined with the notice of Moab's rebellion, is reasserted in the next verse (1:2), which tells of King Ahaziah's accident. The king of Israel falls through the lattice window on the upper chamber and is injured. According to John Gray, these windows refer to entire upper-story balconies that were closed by screen-work.⁵ Interestingly, lattice windows will reappear in the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman later in the book, in 2 Kings 4. Besides leading to his subsequent death, as well as signifying spiritual descent, Ahaziah's fall from the top of the house to the bottom constitutes the first of many physical movements, both vertical and horizontal, described in this chapter.⁶ These movements, as Jan Tarlin shows in her work on the Elijah narratives, are significant. Particular movements, she argues, take on a gendered meaning and are intimately related to issues of power, as we will see in the following narratives about the prophet Elijah in 2 Kings.⁷

As a result of the injuries caused by his sudden physical movement downward, Ahaziah sends messengers horizontally (וישלח מלאכיהם) and in so doing makes a religious mistake: he sends envoys to Ekron (*Khirbet al-Muqanna*), one of the five cities of the Philistines (see 1 Sam 6:18; 18:30; 29:3, 4, 9), to inquire of or consult (דרש)—a “technical term for oracular inquiry”⁸—the local god of the city, Baal-zebul. Though the name of this deity is not found in extrabiblical texts, according to several commentators, Baal-zebul appears to be a compound name consisting of the name for the Canaanite deity בעל, *Baal*, and the Hebrew term זבוב, *zebul*, meaning “flies.” As such, it probably refers to a local manifestation of this deity. Greek versions and Josephus also render the name of the deity that Ahaziah consults as *Baal muion* (“Lord of the Flies”). Most

5. John Gray, *I and II Kings*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 463.

6. Robert Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 605–10.

7. Tarlin, “Toward a ‘Female’ Reading,” 208.

8. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 24. Also, Gray, *I & II Kings*, 463.

likely, *zebul* is a parody of *zebul* (“prince”), which, as the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra show, was an epithet of Baal. Interestingly, according to John Gray, some of the earliest New Testament texts also support reading Beelzebul instead of Beelzebub/Baal-zebul (Matt 10:25; 12:24; Mark 3:22; and Luke 11:15-19).⁹

Explaining the meaning of this deity’s name, Gray notes that flies were seen as bearers of disease. If so, the deity appears to have been associated with death and, hence, related to the recovery from death or to healing. This would explain why Ahaziah seeks out this foreign deity after his fall. Karel van der Toorn argues that Baal-zebul was probably a Syrian storm god who “had power to revitalize the sick.”¹⁰ Van der Toorn, using Arvid Tangberg’s work,¹¹ suggests that sculpted flies, which served or signified the apotropaic or healing function, might have adorned the statue of this deity.¹² F. Charles Fensham, however, posits instead that Ahaziah sent messengers to Baal Zebub, which he translates as “Baal, the Flame,” for magical advice.¹³ Considering the technical nature of the verb (שָׁרַף), it could be that Ahaziah sent messengers to the deity whom he deemed was in charge of death and revitalization to find out whether he would die or live from his accident. Richard Nelson argues that, similar to the oracle of Zeus at Dodona where rustling leaves were utilized, Baal-zebul may refer to an oracle at Ekron “where messages were interpreted from the sound of buzzing flies.”¹⁴

The movement of Ahaziah’s messengers, however, is stopped in its tracks or reversed as Elijah, the prophet of God, is sent by an angel of the Lord to confront the king’s messengers shortly after they are dispatched to the Philistine town.¹⁵ Meeting the messengers on their way to Ekron, Elijah tells them to go to their king and ask a rhetorical question, implying that he has no need to go to a foreign deity to discern the outcome of his injury. Rather, according to YHWH, the king will not recover but die (v. 3). Repetition

9. Gray, *I & II Kings*, 463.

10. Karel van der Toorn, “Ba’al-Zēbūb,” in *NIDB*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 1:374.

11. Arvid Tangberg, “A Note on Ba’al-Zebub in 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16,” *SJOT* 6 (1992): 293–96.

12. Van der Toorn, “Baal-Zebub,” 1:373.

13. F. Charles Fensham, “A Possible Explanation of the Name Baal-Zebub of Ekron,” *ZAW* 70 (1967): 363.

14. Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 155.

15. Cohn, “Convention and Creativity,” 609.

and movement abound in this passage: the divine message is first given ostensibly from God to an angel who then delivers it to Elijah (1:3-4). The message is then passed from Elijah to Ahaziah's messengers who are forced to reverse their journey, a boomerang back to Ahaziah to deliver Elijah's oracle of death. In so doing, the messengers of the king are inverted into becoming messengers for Elijah who will deliver "a message the king did not request."¹⁶ This, in turn, leads to Ahaziah's triple commission of military officials to bring Elijah to him. At the end, Ahaziah's attempt to get back up, to recover from his fall, through horizontal motion seems to have failed utterly as he is destined to never recover and get back up again. According to Robert Cohn, all of these movements serve "to drive the power of YHWH ever nearer to the apostate king"¹⁷ as well as to demonstrate the triumph of divine power over human monarchic power. Moreover, it confirms the authority of Elijah, the prophet,¹⁸ whose name is mentioned eight times in the narrative in contrast to the single mention of King Ahaziah.

From a feminist perspective, the emphasis on prophetic and divine power has important gendered meanings and implications. The power of YHWH as conveyed through YHWH's prophet, Elijah, is manifested through and intertwined with depictions and demonstrations of masculine authority. For example, when his messengers return to the king after their aborted mission to Ekron to relay Elijah's message, Ahaziah is able to identify the prophet who they met on their journey because of their description of Elijah as a hairy man—literally, as the lord (*baal*) of hair, an evident wordplay on the word "baal"—who wears a leather belt around his waist (vv. 5-8). Paronomasia is used to show how the messengers who are sent to the "Lord of Flies" (*Baal-zebub*) are stopped and met on the road by the "Lord of Hair" whose personal name translates to "YHWH is my God" (*Elijah*). Or to put it differently, the God of the "Lord of Hair" is YHWH.

The emphasis on Elijah's hair is significant. Not only does his hair indicate Elijah's status as a Nazirite (Num 6:1-21)¹⁹ and his religious affiliation as a true prophet of YHWH, but, as Susan Niditch has shown,

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 610.

18. So also Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 158.

19. On the Nazirite vow and hair, see Susan Niditch, *My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man: Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 81-94.

hair has gendered meanings.²⁰ The hairy aspect of Elijah, similar to that of Samson, symbolizes the feral, wild, masculine nature of this prophet.²¹ Like Enkidu, Elijah is outside society, uncultured, and, hence, unfeminized.²² The hairiness of Elijah emphasizes the wildness and masculinity of the prophet and thus the wild masculinity of the God whom he serves—the masculinity of whom, as we noted earlier, is threatened with the successful rebellion of Moab and the subsequent consultation of a rival deity, Baal-zebul, by the Israelite king, Ahaziah.

The Masculinity of YHWH and the Feminine Powers of Life (1:9-18)

This threat to YHWH's masculinity and power is further addressed in the conclusion of 2 Kings 1, which describes the confrontation between Elijah and the military personnel sent by Ahaziah.

After King Ahaziah identifies the prophet who sent his messengers back to him with the oracle about his coming demise, the king tries to talk to Elijah face-to-face. To do so, he dispatches a series of military officials to coerce the prophet to come before him. The first two officials fail to convince the prophet to leave the top of the hill and are promptly consumed by fire, which Elijah calls down from the sky (2 Kgs 1:9-12). The third and last official is more successful. After begging and kneeling before Elijah, the prophet is told by an angel to follow this last official back to the palace to see the king (1:13-15). Anticlimactically, however, when Elijah reaches the king, he merely repeats the oracle of doom, which he stated earlier to the king's traveling messengers. The narrative quickly and neatly ends by telling the reader that Elijah's oracle came to pass and that Ahaziah died (1:16-17).

A certain circularity is evident in this chapter. As 2 Kings 1 begins with Ahaziah's unsuccessful dispatch of messengers to Baal-zebul, so the chapter concludes with a series of unsuccessful dispatches of Ahaziah's messengers to Elijah, who sits atop a mountain, unwilling to come at the

20. *Ibid.*, esp. 66–67, 96–99, 112–18, 121–32.

21. Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), esp. 19–53, 85–108; *idem.*, “The Wild Man in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 217–33. Also Niditch, *My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man*, 63–114.

22. Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero*, esp. 19–53, 85–108; Mobley, “The Wild Man in the Bible,” esp. 220–23.

2 Kgs 1:9-18

⁹Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" ¹⁰But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

¹¹Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. He went up

and said to him, "O man of God, this is the king's order: Come down quickly!"

¹²But Elijah answered them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

¹³Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. So the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated him, "O man of God, please let

summons of the king. Oddly, even though the third and last messenger is successful in getting the prophet to visit Ahaziah, he is ultimately unsuccessful as this leads to another declaration of Ahaziah's impending death. Hence, the healing power of Baal-zebub is nullified even before it can be authenticated, as YHWH's messenger interrupts the movement toward Ekron. Indeed, the power of YHWH seems to center around movement in this chapter: YHWH is shown as having the ability to interrupt or stop movement, including that toward life or toward death. As we will see in other stories about Elijah and Elisha, YHWH can cause death to reverse itself (2 Kgs 2; 4:8-37, 38-41).

YHWH's authority over movement, which is related to his authority over life and death, is emphasized in the repetitive narrative about the interaction between Ahaziah's messengers and the prophet who has ascended a hill. Nelson discusses the tightly wound narrative pattern of this pericope, which once again emphasizes directions for the purposes of highlighting divine power.²³ He notes that the three encounters between Elijah and Ahaziah's messengers each follow a tripartite pattern: the captain of the fifty speaks, first demanding and then asking and finally entreating Elijah to descend (1:9, 11, 12-14); this is followed in each case by Elijah's response (1:10a, 12a, 15a); finally, the narrator provides an assessment (1:10b, 12b, 15b). Moreover, each of the three scenes begins with an upward movement of the captains and ends with the down-

23. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 155-56.

my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight. ¹⁴Look, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight.” ¹⁵Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So he set out and went down with him to the king, ¹⁶and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron,—is it because there is no

God in Israel to inquire of his word?—therefore you shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you shall surely die.”

¹⁷So he died according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. His brother, Jehoram succeeded him as king in the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son. ¹⁸Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

ward movement of either fire or, finally, Elijah himself. Movement thus is linked to power.

Moreover, the authority and power of YHWH as the true giver of life and death is further accentuated by the downward descent of the fire (שָׁח, *ʿēsh*) of God, which consumes and kills the first two captains sent by Ahaziah to Elijah, or in another evident wordplay, “the man” or אִישׁ, *ʾish*, “of God” (1:7). The function of YHWH as the source of life (i.e., the giver and provider of food) is symbolized in his portrayal as a storm or thunder god who brings rain and, therefore, rejuvenation of the fields and crops.²⁴ This ability to provide food, as Cynthia Chapman has shown, is again intimately linked to visions of royal masculinity. She writes that the credentials of royal masculinity in the ancient Near East were defined by military prowess, ability to provide for his subjects, and royal status.²⁵ All three are asserted in the description of the annihilation of the first two captains by fire from heaven: The descent of fire and the death of Ahaziah’s messengers affirms YHWH’s military prowess or divine power over that of human royal power. Moreover, by depicting YHWH as the source of the fire from heaven or thunder, the text shows YHWH as the true storm god over against the false storm deity, Baal. As such, YHWH is shown to be the real source of rain, food, and thus life and also death; hence, YHWH’s authority is affirmed. Correspondingly, the authority of

24. Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics Against Baal Worship*, POS 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), esp. 50–85.

25. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare*, 30–39.

Elijah as the true and authentic messenger and servant of this true storm god, YHWH, is also emphasized by depicting the horrifying end of the first two military officials who fail to treat Elijah with the proper respect.

The assertion of YHWH as a storm/thunder god and thus as life-giver and creator has a gendered meaning. Though not wholly surprising considering the patriarchal nature of this literature, a male god is said to be the origins of and the producer of creation, crops, and thus life. The natural creative feminine powers of life-giving and creating are thwarted and replaced in the biblical text as emanating from a male god,²⁶ whose masculinity as well as that of his prophet is asserted in a variety of ways: the description of Elijah as hairy and wild and the assertion of YHWH as the true storm god, the master of movements, and the lord of life and death. Hence, this chapter is not only about Elijah and YHWH's authority and power but about the depiction of this authority as manifested in God's masculine attributes. As we will see, *2 Kings* will frequently depict YHWH's procreative, reproductive, and healing powers as intimately intertwined with his masculinity.

Interestingly, though this pericope strongly asserts that YHWH, the wild, male, storm god, is master over life and death, in a deconstructionist move, the text depicts this deity and his servant as mainly inducing or proclaiming death in *2 Kings* 1. While the narrative proclaims that YHWH is the god of life and healing, it shows YHWH and his messengers as the god of death. As such, perhaps we can see here a subtle undermining of the idea that correlates life, procreation, and reproduction with masculinity, not femininity. By aligning masculinity with death and not life in *2 Kings* 1, the message might be that life is more associated with the power of the feminine. The chapter appropriately ends with the notice of more death, that of Ahaziah, the apostate king, who is further damned and emasculated in the text with the notice that he left no progeny (v. 17).

26. On the assertion of sacrifice as a patriarchal means by which to overcome natural, female birth, see Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

2 Kings 2:1-25

Feminine Powers and Masculine Reproduction

Concluding the cycle of stories about the prophet Elijah, 2 Kings 2 depicts the continuation of this prophet's work in the figure of his successor, Elisha. Similar to the story of the call of Joshua after Moses' death, this narrative, which constitutes one of the few descriptions of prophetic succession in the Hebrew Bible,¹ serves to validate Elisha's prophetic ministry and leadership by directly connecting it to the authority and power of his mentor, Elijah. In so intimately linking Elijah and Elisha, this chapter is less about the end of Elijah's ministry on earth as it is about the ways in which Elijah, as a valid and true prophet of YHWH, defies death in order to continue his earthly mission.

Elijah lives on in two ways according to 2 Kings 2: First, he never undergoes a physical, mortal death as he is taken to the heavens in a whirlwind. Elijah's death-defying conclusion leads to his transformation as a precursor to the messiah in the New Testament and postbiblical

1. Robert P. Carroll, "The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *VT* 19 (1969): 403. Note that Moses, whom Elijah imitates, is also considered a prophet in the biblical tradition and, as such, there are not one but two prophets who get to appoint a successor, Moses and Elijah (Rachel Havrelock, *The River Jordan* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011], 138).

traditions.² Second, Elijah's ministry carries on in that of Elisha, his successor, who confirms Elijah's perpetuation by doubling and repeating many of the same miracles that Elijah performed earlier in Kings.³ In depicting those associated with YHWH, such as the prophet Elijah, as overcoming and not being subject to death, 2 Kings 2 offers a strong contrast to the preceding chapter, which depicted the early demise of the apostate king, Ahaziah, for his consultation of the foreign god, Baal-zebub.⁴ As in the preceding chapter, 2 Kings 2 is also intent on showing the ways in which YHWH equals life while associating Baal and the other gods with death. In so doing, the text again closely connects life-giving abilities with YHWH's masculinity and power. The natural, normative reproductive powers associated with the feminine are thus replaced and subverted by a more androcentric vision of procreation and regeneration.

Elijah's Goodbye and Gendered Meanderings (2:1-6)

This pericope describes how Elijah, before he is taken by YHWH, makes his final visitation rounds to the various Israelite prophetic groups with his protégé, Elisha.

Elisha insists on accompanying his master despite several attempts by Elijah to dissuade him (2 Kings 2:1-2). That this is Elijah's farewell tour seems to be known to all the prophetic colleagues the two encounter (v.

2. In later Jewish traditions, Elijah is expected to return as the forerunner of the Messiah, and at the Passover Seder, an extra cup of wine—Elijah's Cup—is always placed on the table in anticipation of his return. Moreover, in the New Testament, Elijah, in the form of John the Baptist, is presented as Jesus' forerunner (Matt 11:14; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17) and also appears with Moses at Jesus' transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8 // Matt 17:1-9 // Luke 9:28-36). Elijah also, along with Enoch, makes an appearance in Revelation 11, which tells of two unnamed prophets who will appear on earth just after the mysterious Seventh Seal is opened and just before the day of God's wrath. For more on the fascinating *Nachleben* of Elijah and the Elijah traditions, see J. Edward Wright, "Whither Elijah? The Ascension of Elijah in Biblical and Extrabiblical Traditions," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, David Satran, and Ruth A. Clements, JSJSup 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 595–608.

3. See n. 11 in this chapter.

4. For other connections between 2 Kings 1 and 2 Kings 2, see Judith A. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," in *Elijah and Elisha in Socio-Literary Perspective*, ed. Robert B. Coote (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1–35; Joel S. Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel: Elijah and Elisha in the Theological Geography of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 129 (2010): 281–97.

2 Kgs 2:1-6

^{2:1}Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here;

for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵The company of prophets drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

3). The conclusion to Elijah's earthly ministry, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor note, perfectly fits the movement and elusiveness that characterized the stories of his career in 1 Kings.⁵ Jan Tarlin puts it more directly, calling the Elijah narrative cycle in that book a "labyrinthine journey of a moving target."⁶ Interestingly, this wandering, according to Tarlin, has a gendered significance. She maintains that the nonteleological journeying of Elijah undermines the "discursive authority within the text," and, in so doing, the Elijah cycle can be read as characterizing a "'female' narrative."⁷

Though Tarlin's argument is enticing, the narratives of Elijah's and later Elisha's flitting and aimless movements better fit the trajectory and structure associated with the "epic of the losers" as outlined in David Quint's monumental study.⁸

5. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 33.

6. Jan Tarlin, "Toward a 'Female' Reading of the Elijah Cycle: Ideology and Gender in the Interpretation of 1 Kings 17-19, 21 and 2 Kings 1-2.18," in *Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, FCB 5, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 213.

7. *Ibid.*, 214.

8. David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and General Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

*Excursus on
the Epic of the Losers
and the Epic of the Winners*

Focusing on the “politicization of epic poetry,” David Quint, in his work *Epic and Empire*,⁹ argues that two narrative models are evident in classical literature. The first is the epic of the winners. Exemplified by the *Iliad*, the epic of the winners consists of a narrative that is linear, teleological, and closed. In contrast to this model, the epic of the losers, which is exemplified by the *Odyssey*, is meandering, endless, repetitive, and aimless. Some texts, such as the *Aeneid*, utilize both models to make a political point. The first six books of the *Aeneid*, with its description of the pointless wanderings of Aeneas and the Trojans, initially follow the model of the epic of the losers. At the end of the poem, however, the *Aeneid* reverts to the model of the epic of the winners as it concludes with a lengthy description of a battle in which the Trojans emerge as victors over the Latins. This victory sets the context for the coming reign of Augustus.

As evident, these narrative models not only convey political meanings but also coexist in dialectical tension. Though

Quint does not touch on biblical literature, the aimless wanderings of Elijah and later Elisha seem to embody the trajectory of the losers. Considering the intertwined relationship between the two models, however, these initial wanderings stress a future inversion in which these prophets and their deity, YHWH, will emerge as the true winners.

The aimlessness that characterizes Elijah’s (and later Elisha’s) story does not so much as undermine authority—and, therefore, should not be considered “feminine” *per se*—as it depicts the movements of outsiders looking for and in search of a teleology and, hence, power. In other words, the Elijah and Elisha cycle can be read as an attempt by underdogs, losers, or outsiders to transform their story into that of the winner through the maximization and emphasis on the masculine powers of their god, YHWH, the source of their own prophetic prowess. As in the preceding chapter, a strong sense of insecurity about the status and masculine power of YHWH can also be detected in this chapter and indeed in the entire cycle of stories about these two prophets.

9. Quint, *Epic and Empire*.

The Female Spirit and Masculine Procreation (2:7-9)

After refusing to leave the side of his mentor Elijah a third time, Elisha follows Elijah, and they cross the Jordan while fifty of the “company [literally ‘sons’] of the prophets”—perhaps a reference to a guild, order, or class of prophets¹⁰—watch them (on the “sons of the prophets,” see discussion on 2 Kgs 4). In a repetition of the exodus event, Elijah splits the waters of the Jordan by striking it with his mantle so that he and Elisha can cross over (2 Kgs 2:8).

Later in this chapter, immediately on the heels of Elijah’s ascendance into heaven, Elisha, in mimicry of his master, will again divide the waters of the Jordan with Elijah’s mantle, thus confirming his status as Elijah’s prophetic heir (2 Kgs 2:14-15). Indeed, the sons of the prophets, who are witnesses to the double water demonstration, reconfirm the succession by saying: “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him” (2 Kgs 2:15).

Elisha, like Joshua, affirms his position by mimicking the predecessor’s water-splitting miracle. A strong emphasis on doubling and repetition can be detected. Worth noticing is that the doubling is itself doubled as Elisha repeats Elijah’s early action, which in itself mimics Joshua’s imitation of Moses.¹¹ David Zucker points out that the placement of this episode at Gilgal further analogizes Elisha and Joshua. Gilgal is the site of Joshua’s first encampment after Israel crossed over the Jordan (Josh 4–5).¹² As noted earlier, the significance of the doubling, in part, lies in the fact that the narrative asserts the continuation of Elijah’s ministry in the form of Elisha and, hence, the continual presence of YHWH and his power in Israel.

From a feminist perspective, however, the doubling also works to assert and stress the masculine forms of regeneration and procreation. Like the previous chapter, 2 Kings 2 is also centered on male relationships. For example, the all-male group of prophets—the sons of the prophets—who serve the male deity, YHWH, is mentioned four times in the narrative (2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 7, 15-16). Some scholars speculate that the

10. Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 31.

11. David Zucker states that Elijah is “Moses *redivivus*” and notes the similarities between the Elijah/Elisha and Moses/Joshua narratives (“Elijah and Elisha: Part I; Moses and Joshua,” *JQR* 40 [2012]: 225); see also Carroll, “The Elijah-Elisha Sagas,” 410–14; Dale Ralph Davis, “The Kingdom of God in Transition: Interpreting 2 Kings 2,” *WTJ* 46 (1984): 388.

12. Zucker, “Elijah and Elisha,” 229.

2 Kgs 2:7-9

⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the

other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

sons of the prophets were those whom Elijah had emboldened in his religious battle against Jezebel. It was then appropriate for them to appear during Elijah's departure. Yet the gender composition of this farewell party seems strikingly one-sided. Where are all the women during this mixed farewell/promotion celebration? Where are the daughters of the prophets? Where are the wives of these sons of the prophets? Second Kings 4 mentions that some of these prophets were married. Are there no women who came into contact with Elijah or who were touched by his ministry? What about the widow at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:9-24)? The context for this reference was the description of the desperate economic situation of the widow of one of these prophets.

Some scholars have argued that women prophets might have been part of this cohort (see commentary on 2 Kgs 21)¹³ and that the correct designation for this group is the "children of the prophet" (see commentary on 2 Kgs 4). Though the ambiguities of the language make it impossible to ascertain whether this cohort was gender inclusive, in this case, 2 Kings 2:7 specifies that Elijah's colleagues were all men. More important, the complete absence of women better fits the theme and message of this pericope. The utter absence of women stresses the fraternal bond of this prophet and his group and, in so doing, emphasizes the masculinity of YHWH—to whom the service of all these prophets is bound. Therefore, the narrative also asserts the masculine forms of procreation associated with YHWH, which eschews, undermines, and replaces the natural, feminine modes of reproduction. Elijah does not die so much as spawn or split off like a

13. Mercedes L. García Bachmann, *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), esp. 161–76, 174; Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 15.

tendrils of a starfish in the form of Elisha, who embodies within himself a substantial portion of Elijah in the reception of a double share of his spirit.¹⁴ Thus, it is through the masculine energy and power of Israel's patriarchal God, YHWH, that these prophets derive their energy and power, even the power to double themselves, defying the very logic of natural death and female childbirth. The message of the pericope is clear: This is how the prophets of the male God, YHWH, reproduce and live on. No children or women are needed.

Excursus:

*The Various Occupations
of Women in the Ancient World*

Although often unrecognized, proximity of women to blood, birth, sickness, and death makes it very likely that the same women who helped as midwives were also healers and advisors, prepared the dead for burial, and perhaps even directed the burial rites, especially since corpses were polluting. . . . Whether more emotional, more unprotected by the social system, more flexible to perform in different circumstances, or more barred

from the official ritual practices—for whatever reason, women seem to have occupied this niche throughout cultures and times, being needed, respected and also feared and suspected. What we call in general “sorcerers” (health practitioners and religious specialists) belonged probably to every social stratum and served those around them: examples range from King Saul seeking a medium he himself had banned to Rebekah seeking an oracle to understand what was going on in her womb.¹⁵

Mercedes L. García Bachmann

After following his master around Israel on his goodbye tour, Elisha is allowed a final gift request from Elijah for his demonstration of loyalty (v. 9). Elisha requests to receive a double share of Elijah's spirit. Elijah responds that this is a difficult request (v. 10). Most scholars explain that Elisha's request is an indication of his position as Elijah's rightful

14. On the “spirit of the Lord,” see Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “The ‘Spirit of the Lord’ in 2 Kings 2:16,” in *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 306–17.

15. García Bachmann, *Women at Work*, 12–13.

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