

PSALMS, BOOKS 2-3

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 21

Psalms
Books 2-3

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins

Linda M. Maloney

Volume Editor

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor



A Michael Glazier Book

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*To my mother, Rose Farina Dombkowski (1922–2013),
who raised a feminist even though she was caught
in the web of patriarchy all her life.*

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Abbreviations

<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>FAO</i>	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
<i>FCB</i>	Feminist Companion to the Bible
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTS</i>	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>IFT</i>	Introductions in Feminist Theology
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>

JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
<i>JTOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JTOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OLT	Old Testament Library
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>ProEccl</i>	<i>Pro Ecclesia</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>SBL</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
SK	<i>Skrif en kerk</i>
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
SymS	Symposium Series
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Contributors

Katherine Brown is a doctoral candidate at The Catholic University of America researching the significance of the prophetic texts' materiality as bearing on their message. Brown is an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Dr. Lora F. Hargrove is the executive minister at Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Rockville, Maryland, and is a PhD student in systematic theology at the University of South Africa. She has served as a consultant for Columbia University on sexuality, sexual politics, and the black church and has been a consultant for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference around multiple justice-related issues. Dr. Hargrove is also the former director of Faith-based Outreach for the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of HIV/AIDS Policy. She is an independent consultant and writer whose focus is connecting faith, scholarship, and public policy.

Rev. Dr. Tiffany Houck-Loomis is a Jungian-oriented psychotherapist in private practice; lecturer in philosophy, religious studies, and pastoral care and counseling; minister of Word and Sacrament within the Reformed Church in America; author of numerous articles at the intersection of Hebrew Bible and depth psychology; yogi; and mother of two. She holds a PhD in psychology and religion and Hebrew Bible from Union Theological Seminary. Of mixed Jewish and Native American descent, she is currently writing for a faith-based educational resource called *Reading Between the Lines* (www.educationalcenter.org).

Amy Beth W. Jones earned her PhD in biblical studies at Drew University and is an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church. She is currently the director of external relations at Drew Theological School. She has written on the book of Ruth, Genesis 4, and narrative space and identity construction in the book of Judges.

Beth Norcross works in the area of eco-theology. Beth is the founder and director of the Center for Spirituality in Nature, which offers experiences in nature designed to deepen spirituality and encourage loving relationships with all earth's creatures (www.centerforspiritualityinnature.org). She is also the cofounder of the national Green Seminary Initiative (www.greenseminaries.org), which encourages seminaries to integrate care and engagement with creation into all aspects of theological education.

Rev. Yolanda M. Norton is a PhD candidate at Vanderbilt University in Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel whose research interests include womanist biblical interpretation and literary criticism. Her publications include chapters in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader* and *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament*. Yolanda has taught courses at Wesley Theological Seminary and Moravian Theological Seminary. She is an ordained clergywoman in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and has served the church in various capacities, including campus minister, children's pastor, and youth minister.

The Rev. Audrey Coretta Price is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and American Baptist Churches USA. She currently works as a director of Christian education in the UCC and is adjunct faculty at Wesley Theological Seminary. She is a PhD candidate at The Catholic University of America studying systematic theology with an emphasis on liberation theology. She brings an advocacy for social justice and womanist interests with a lens on theological aesthetics.

Dr. SuJung Shin is adjunct professor of biblical studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. Coming from a religiously diverse Korean cultural context, she offers various perspectives on religion and gender in our multicultural and multi-communicational world. Her research interests in the Hebrew Bible include dialogic hermeneutics of the Bible, Asian feminist readings of the text, interdisciplinary interpretations, and nonstructuralist approaches.

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 women 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 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, MI: 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 to

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: JPS, 2003), 110–11.

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 Sharon Ringe and Carol Newsom (Westminster John Knox Press, 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 Press, 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, MI: 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 Press, 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, GA: SBL). Four 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 Calduch-Benages (2014); *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni (2015); and *The High Middle Ages*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (2015). 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 Press, 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 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, GA: 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, 2002); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: 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, KY: 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* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

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

19. See Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (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 its

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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 Press, 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 Press, 2008).

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 postmodern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and values concealed in the

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: Sheffield University, 1978).

26. See, e.g., Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta, GA: 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, TN: Abingdon, 1993); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible*, BibInt 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

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 Rose 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 Theological Studies / 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 Books, 2009).

31. E.g., Gale Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 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, TN: Abingdon, 2006); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004).

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

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

Carolyn J. Sharp, *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, KY: 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, KY: 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 Press, 2011); Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone, eds., *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

40. E.g., Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, *SymS* 46 (Atlanta, GA: 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 Press, 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, Anglicans, and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants. 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

Because of these complexities, the editors of Wisdom Commentary series have chosen to use an existing translation, the New Revised

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

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

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

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, KY: 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.

Bibliography

Because bibliographies are quickly outdated and because the space is limited, only a list of Works Cited is included in the print volumes. A comprehensive bibliography for each volume is posted on a dedicated website and is updated regularly. The link for this volume can be found at wisdomcommentary.org.

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

Reading Books 2 and 3 of the Psalms (Pss 42–89)

Because seventy-three of the one hundred fifty psalms contain a superscription¹ linking them to King David (Hebrew: לדוד), many have concluded that the psalms speak in a masculine voice and therefore women cannot find a place in them. Certainly, royal psalms that concern the king (e.g., Ps 45) are overtly male focused, and the enthronement psalms (Pss 47, 93, 96–99) lift up God as King. The issue, however, is more nuanced. Marc Zvi Brettler suggests that women are excluded because the psalms were composed by male elites but that this does not exclude women from reciting them. Further, some psalms are “gender neutral” (e.g., 65 and 142), though one cannot say whether they are intentionally so.² Perhaps prayer, and especially women’s prayer, was not part of the priestly cult, but rather the folk tradition of ancient Israel,³ in which case the prayers of women outside of the Psalms may

1. The superscription is an introductory note, often printed in smaller type above the first verse of a psalm in most English Bibles. Superscriptions were added by ancient editors as the psalms were transmitted and collected.

2. See Marc Zvi Brettler, “Women and Psalms: Toward an Understanding of the Role of Women’s Prayer in the Israelite Cult,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor Matthews, Bernard Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, JSOTSup 262 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 25–56.

3. Israel Knohl, “Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship between Prayer and the Temple Cult,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 17–30. Knohl argues that the priests performed cultic duties in silence.

be helpful. As Lisa Davison points out, eleven women in the Hebrew Bible (including Hagar, Rebekah, Miriam, Deborah, Naomi, and Hannah) and three in the Apocrypha (Esther, Susanna, and Judith) offer prayers that are recorded.⁴ The prayers of these women can serve as “intertexts” (conversation partners) for interpretation of psalm prayer. This commentary will seek to use such intertexts and the stories of these praying women to suggest “plausible women’s voices within and behind the text.”⁵ Teasing out these voices will require our imaginative interaction with Psalms 42–89.

Gender and feminist analysis will help tease out these plausible female voices in books 2 and 3 of the Psalms. Like feminist analysis, gender analysis “is not a method, but a lens.”⁶ Using these lenses can generate questions to ask of psalm texts but cannot dictate one method to answer questions about gender, ethnicity, power, and class. It does not suffice simply to search out female images for God or the speaker in the Psalms, since gender is socially constructed. Consequently, this study will use a variety of methods to interpret the psalms, including ideological and postcolonial criticism. Central to my approach is rhetorical-critical analysis of metaphor, “the most basic building block of poetry,”⁷ since metaphor saturates the poetry of the book of Psalms. Derived from two Greek words, metaphor means literally to “carry across” or “transfer,” that is, to understand a lesser-known thing in terms of a better-known thing by juxtaposing the two. Metaphors are meant to suggest “a network of associations”⁸ that helps us see something new in the tension created by

4. Lisa W. Davison, “‘My Soul Is Like the Weaned Child That Is with Me’: The Psalms and the Feminine Voice,” *HBT* 23 (2001): 155–67. See also the work by Amy Kalmanofsky on Daughter Zion (the personification of Jerusalem) in the book of Lamentations, whose prayers and tears connect her to the suffering of others: “Their Heart Cried Out to God: Gender and Prayer in the Book of Lamentations,” in *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Deborah Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 53–65.

5. Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 6.

6. Beatrice Lawrence, “Gender Analysis: Gender and Method in Biblical Studies,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 333–48, at 333.

7. William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 3.

8. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.

bringing seemingly dissimilar or unconnected things together. Metaphor demands our imaginative engagement as readers in order to recognize this tension between the similar and dissimilar and sort through associations that such juxtaposition produces. The challenge is that different readers will not always agree on which associations are relevant, given both the choice of possibilities and the different life experiences readers bring to the text that shape those choices. The preoccupation of scholars with the setting from which the psalms emerged (cultic worship, family prayer, exile, Persian period) cannot be relied on to determine metaphorical associations. As Rolf Jacobson warns, there can be “no . . . rhetorical certitude” about the setting suggested by psalm metaphors because metaphors are multivalent.⁹ We, as readers, are also multivalent.

We can, however, as Kirsten Nielsen argues, look for other biblical texts using the same metaphors (“intertexts”) as keys to interpretation. The intertexts we choose can activate different nuances of the metaphor.¹⁰ Again, the choice of intertext may differ, depending on the reader’s gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors. Beth LaNeel Tanner has also looked at the Psalms through the lens of intertextuality, calling them a *bricolage* or mosaic patchwork “in which other texts are embedded implicitly or explicitly.”¹¹ This patchwork produces “gaps” and “contradictions” in understanding that invite readers in. Tanner suggests that psalm superscriptions are a form of canonical intertextuality. These superscriptions give us permission to read other psalms and narratives alongside one another. Superscriptions point to the narrative performance of the psalms and make the general particular so that readers can connect with the psalmist’s experience. This commentary will “imagine a superscription”¹² whenever possible, with an eye toward contemporary contexts and reader involvement.

An imagined superscription can tie the psalm to other figures in the biblical narratives, especially women, rather than exclusively to David.

9. Rolf Jacobson, “‘The Altar of Certitude’: Reflections on ‘Setting’ and the Rhetorical Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms*, ed. Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 3–18, at 17.

10. Kirsten Nielsen, “Poetic Analysis: Psalm 121,” in LeMon and Richards, *Method Matters*, 293–309, at 298–301.

11. Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms through the Lens of Intertextuality*, *StBibLit* 26 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 6.

12. Dave Bland and David Fleer, eds., *Performing the Psalms* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 27.

Imagined superscriptions can also embody psalm metaphors so that the reader might more readily experience those metaphors rather than simply analyzing them. Jacqueline Lapsley urges reading strategies for biblical narratives that invite the reader to enter into the story and be shaped morally by it.¹³ Reading strategies that help the reader empathize with female characters in narrative intertexts can also help the reader enter into psalm metaphors and recognize certain metaphorical associations overlooked in them. In Emanuel Levinas's terms, approaching the intertext as Other rather than as Object can lead to encounter with the psalm and its metaphors rather than simple, objective evaluation of them by those who stand outside.¹⁴ This kind of involved reading of intertext and psalm can create the space for what Danna Nolan Fewell calls "interruption," a reading strategy of stopping and questioning the text and bearing responsibility for what goes on in it. She argues that "interruption is a strategy for both reading and living. To interrupt means to question the story being told, to imagine the story being told differently, and likewise, to question one's life and to imagine one's life being lived differently."¹⁵

Carol Meyers warns that we cannot use the Bible alone to study Israelite women and recover their voices because of the Bible's distorted focus on nation rather than family and because of the urban elite context of many of its authors. Instead, women's lives must be reconstructed in terms of their economic contributions to the family, social networking, and professional roles in the larger community. These women's structures have not been noticed, "but 'unnoticed' does not mean 'nonexistent.'"¹⁶ Female guilds allowed for study, training, and the passing down of special knowledge in the areas of music traditions, prophetic roles, funerary services (professional keepers or reciters of dirges), psychological care and conflict resolution, and midwifery. Informal networks in peasant villages brought women together from several households to make bread and textiles and maintain the infrastructure of family and community

13. Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 11.

14. *Ibid.*, 12.

15. Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 34.

16. Carol Meyers, "Contesting the Notion of Patriarchy: Anthropology and the Theorizing of Gender in Ancient Israel," in Rooke, *A Question of Sex?*, 83–105, at 90.

life.¹⁷ This study will draw on the context of women's lives in ancient Israel as a frame for psalm interpretation.

Other interpreters have also noted the presence of women in public celebration and mourning. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeliën Van Dijk-Hemmes suggest that women participate in changing political situations with victory songs that both welcome warriors home and express public opinion, sometimes in a mocking or satirical way¹⁸ (e.g., 1 Sam 18:6-7; Judg 5; 11:34a; Exod 15:20-21). In Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 the personified Lady Jerusalem mourns her destruction with numerous metaphors drawn from the world of women. God calls on the mourning women to come and raise a lament over Jerusalem in 9:10-11, 17-22 (see also Jer 22:18-19). David calls the "daughters of Judah" to weep over the death of Saul (2 Sam 1:24). These texts too can serve as intertexts for psalm interpretation. Ultimately, every psalm text is an intersection with other texts and offers "an indeterminate surplus of meaningful possibilities. Interpretation is always a production of meaning from that surplus."¹⁹ This commentary invites readers to take part in such production.

17. *Ibid.*, 95–99. Meyers suggests that we speak of heterarchy (fluid, lateral gender interdependence at the household level for certain economic and social functions) rather than patriarchy or hierarchy, which rank elements vertically in subordinate order.

18. Brenner and Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 32–34.

19. Timothy Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 27–39, at 31.

Book 2 of the Psalter

(Pss 42–72)

The Psalter offers a “school of prayer”¹ that contains many different kinds of prayer articulating the entire range of human emotions. The book of Psalms as we have it emerged from a long process of transmission in ancient Israel. Editors divided the Psalter into five “books” to mirror the five-book division of the Torah (Pentateuch). Each of the five “books” ends with a doxology, that is, a speaking of praise to God (e.g., Ps 41:13). *Midrash Tehillim* explains this division: “As Moses gave five books of laws to Israel, so David gave five books of Psalms to Israel.”² John Vassar suggests that the five Psalm books serve as “a marker moving the reader back to the Pentateuch”³ as intertext (for “intertext,” see above, p. xliii). This fivefold division was probably imposed on various independently circulating collections of psalms that were important to different groups in Israel in different locations at different times. The psalms seem to move from a preponderance of laments in the first

1. Roland Murphy, “The Faith of the Psalmist,” *Int* 34 (1980): 229–39, at 237.

2. William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954), 5.

3. John Vassar, *Recalling a Story Once Told: An Intertextual Reading of the Psalter and the Pentateuch* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 4.

three books to hymns of praise in books 4 and 5, ending with Psalm 150, the “Great Hallelujah”: “Let everything that breathes praise the LORD.”

Much of recent psalms scholarship has been devoted to the editing process that led to the final, canonical form of the Psalter. Interpreters suggest that this process narrates the history of Israel from the kingship of David and Solomon (books 1 and 2, Pss 1–72) to the divided monarchy and the destruction of Jerusalem (book 3, Pss 73–89, with its many laments), to the Babylonian Exile (book 4, Pss 90–106), and, finally, return to the land and God’s rule (book 5, Pss 107–50).⁴ Books 1–3 show the failure of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7), and books 4–5 respond to this crisis of the loss of land, temple, and king by proclaiming God’s reign rather than the reign of an earthly Davidic king (especially Pss 93, 96–99). Many argue that this editing process also intentionally placed Psalms 1–2 at the beginning of the Psalter as an interpretive frame that moves the psalms out of worship into the realm of meditation and study of God’s Torah, or “instruction” (Ps 1:2). The content of this theological instruction is presented in Psalm 2: God rules.⁵ This understanding, if used exclusively, can undercut the performative power of the psalms and our imaginative participation in them.

4. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, “Psalms,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 221–31, at 231.

5. J. Clinton McCann Jr., “The Book of Psalms,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 639–1280, at 665. McCann suggests that God’s reign is seen eschatologically, as awaiting fulfillment.

Psalm(s) 42–43

Tears of Connection

Psalm 42 begins book 2 of the Psalter. Multiple ancient manuscripts combine Psalms 42 and 43 as a unit. Most interpreters read them together as one psalm, especially since Psalm 43 lacks a superscription, though the Septuagint and Vulgate insert “a psalm of David” at the beginning of Psalm 43. Psalms 42 and 43 share vocabulary and a refrain, which divides the combined whole into three sections or strophes: 42:1-5; 42:6-11; 43:1-5. How those strophes are connected reveals much about the interpreter and his or her subject location.

The superscription of Psalm 42 connects it to the Korahites. Like all of the 117 superscriptions in the Psalter, this one is numbered as v. 1 in Hebrew texts but stands unnumbered (usually in smaller type) in Protestant and Catholic Bibles. Psalm 42–43 introduces a group of Korah psalms in book 2 that includes 42–49, 84–85, and 87–88. According to 1 Chronicles 6:31-48 the Korahites were a guild of Levitical temple singers commanded by King David to sing and play on musical instruments (1 Chr 15:16) in praise of God. They were perhaps responsible for collecting and transmitting particular psalms. Though Chronicles cites harps and lyres as the chief instruments in the religious music of ancient Israel, the archaeological record (iconography, figurines, and seals) shows that other instruments were widespread in the culture, including pipes, trumpets, drums, and rattles, and that music was not exclusively the

Psalm 42:1–43:5

To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

¹As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
²My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?
³My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”
⁴These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to
the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of
thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted
within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again
praise him,
my help ⁶and my God.
My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of
Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.
⁷Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.
⁸By day the LORD commands his
steadfast love,
and at night his song is with
me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
⁹I say to God, my rock,

domain of men. The Bible records that drums and voices were used in religious celebrations and that women often played drums and danced, e.g., Judges 11:34–40 (Jephthah’s daughter lamenting before her death); 1 Samuel 18:6 (groups of women celebrating battle victories of Saul and David); and Exodus 15:20 (Miriam and a group of women celebrating the crossing of the Reed Sea). The small hand or frame drum, תוף, often translated as “tambourine,” was even known as a “women’s instrument.”¹ Some contend that it was a sexual symbol in the Hebrew Bible; Jephthah’s daughter bewails her virginity with a drum.²

1. Theodore Burgh, *Listening to the Artifacts: Music Culture in Ancient Palestine* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 34.

2. Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 30.

“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses
me?”

¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my
body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my
soul,
and why are you disquieted
within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again
praise him,
my help and my God.

^{43:1} Vindicate me, O God, and de-
fend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are deceitful and
unjust
deliver me!

² For you are the God in whom I
take refuge;
why have you cast me off?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because of the oppression of
the enemy?

³O send out your light and your
truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.

⁴Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise you with the harp,
O God, my God.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my
soul,
and why are you disquieted
within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again
praise him,
my help and my God.

If we read Numbers 16–18 (the story of Korah’s “rebellion”) alongside Psalm 42–43, several intertextual allusions emerge. John Vassar suggests that Psalm 42:2, 4 and Psalm 43:3-4 address the community returning from exile and longing for the temple. Though in Numbers Korah is swallowed up by the ground as punishment for challenging Moses’ authority, according to 1 Chronicles his sons eventually reestablish themselves in the temple. This sends a message of hope to the exiles. Korah may function as “the archetype of rebellion,” but his descendants become “the archetypes of restitution and return.”³

3. John Vassar, *Recalling a Story Once Told: An Intertextual Reading of the Psalter and the Pentateuch* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 61. J. Clinton McCann Jr., “The Book of Psalms,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 639–1280, at 852, also argues for an exilic audience by noting the many linguistic links between Ps 42–43 and Ps 44, a communal lament; these links suggest

Another allusion also emerges that is missed by many scholars, one that links Psalm 42–43, Numbers 16–18, and Numbers 12. Korah’s revolt mirrors Miriam’s challenge to Moses’ autocratic authority in Numbers 12. Both Korah and Miriam are punished directly by God. Perhaps Miriam’s voice can be heard in Psalm 42–43, lamenting her estrangement from God’s presence. An imagined superscription to Psalm 42–43 might read: “A psalm of Miriam, when she was shut out of the camp for seven days after challenging Moses’ leadership” (see Num 12:15).

Psalm 42–43 is an individual lament. Laments constitute one distinct literary psalm type identified by Hermann Gunkel in the 1920s in his pioneering work on form criticism. Others include hymns, thanksgivings, and royal psalms, each type having its own form and content growing out of a distinctive setting in life in which that psalm type functioned.⁴ Nearly one-third of the 150 psalms are laments, yet the laments are seldom used in worship. As “a legitimate complaint in faith to God,”⁵ a lament does more than complain. It seeks change from God with metaphorical, evocative, and provocative language, moving from complaint to praise in a process that can bring wholeness and healing to those experiencing brokenness and suffering. Basic trust in God’s power and willingness to receive the lament and change the situation undergird the form. Thus it is not surprising to find that in Psalm 42–43 “God is omnipresent in a poem which complains of his [*sic*] absence.”⁶ God is mentioned twenty-two times.

The opening simile (a more explicit metaphor) immediately pulls us into the pathos of the psalmist who laments not being in God’s presence in the sanctuary. Adele Berlin speaks of “a crossover effect” in the emotions of deer and human in vv. 1–2: “the deer longs (like a human) for water, and the human being thirsts (like a deer) for God.”⁷ Because the verb “long” is used twice in the first two lines and the verb “thirst” once

“that the ‘I’ of Psalms 42–43 speaks for the people.” He points to a similar linkage at the beginning of book 3. The “I” of Ps 73 is followed by Ps 74, a communal lament; these are the first two psalms of the Asaph collection. These initial pairings provide a context for reading subsequent psalms.

4. Denise Dombkowski Hopkins, *Journey through the Psalms* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002), 29.

5. *Ibid.*, 81. For what follows see pp. 82–121.

6. Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 109.

7. Adele Berlin, “On Reading Biblical Poetry: The Role of Metaphor,” in *Congress Volume* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 25–36, at 31.

in the third line, “incrementation” suggests that “the psalmist’s need for God is even greater than the deer’s need for water.”⁸ Because these verbs are third-person feminine singular in form, we would expect a feminine singular noun for deer (doe), to correspond to the feminine singular noun נפש (42:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11; 43:5), translated incorrectly as “soul” in many English Bibles.⁹ נפש is not to be conflated with the Greek idea of “soul” as separate from the body. The Hebrew literally means “throat,” “animation,” “vital self,” “individual person.”¹⁰ The throat is the place where thirst is experienced (see Pss 63:1; 143:6).

Images of female deer with heads lowered to drink are frequently found on Judean seals and bullae from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, representing the petitioner in prayer and worship. “The image of the doe is the projected ‘soul,’ the psalmist’s personal self . . . the person’s existential core, embodied in piety, fully dependent and vulnerable . . . like the doe whose head is stooped as it searches for water, her soul is ‘downcast’”¹¹ (see 42:5, 6, 11; 43:5). The problem with this analysis from a feminist standpoint is that often the default position for women in society is “fully dependent and vulnerable.” Perhaps this metaphor packs more transformative power for men of privilege. Renita Weems warns that “metaphors matter”¹²—they shape the way we view ourselves, one another, and the world. Consequently, readers must claim “our rights as readers to differ with authors” and, especially for the marginalized, must decide “whether the worlds that authors place us in are indeed worth inhabiting.”¹³

8. Ibid.

9. נפש (“stag”) in the MT usually refers to a male deer or buck, but the verb is feminine. Perhaps haplography of the נ of the verb has occurred; read נפש, “doe.”

10. Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*, trans. Armin Siedlecki (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 190.

11. William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 150.

12. Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 106. On the damaging effects of metaphor, see also Jacqueline Grant, “The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 199–218, at 200. She notes that “servanthood” as a metaphor for discipleship simply reinforces the social reality for black women in the United States that they have been “servants of servants”; “servanthood . . . has been servitude.”

13. Weems, *Battered Love*, 10.

Godly Servitude

Society often attempts to conflate the will of God with the will of individuals and communities who operate out of privilege and attempt to propagate oppression. As a result, black women have unwittingly internalized paradigms of oppression in ways that foster our own subjugation. With that in mind, it is important to highlight that the doe in Ps 42:1 is longing for God. The “downcast” posture of dependency and service is aimed toward the deity and not human beings and social structures that attempt to do us harm. Jacqueline Grant cautions against the wholesale acceptance of models of servitude, arguing

that this model of Christianity for black women has enabled our oppression. Rather than rejecting the model altogether, however, the womanist agenda cultivates a mind-set wherein we understand that our service to God need not be played out in ways that undercut our own interests. The imagery of the deer panting for water recalls the desperation brought on by the need to sustain and preserve one’s own livelihood. Black women who have been disregarded by society must bow down to find life. In doing so we must acknowledge that the truest godly servitude we might undertake is our care for our own neglected humanity.

Yolanda Marie Norton

How ironic that the thirsting psalmist is virtually drowning in her own tears (v. 3a): “My tears have been my food day and night.” Salty tears as solid food do not satisfy or sustain (see Pss 80:5; 102:9, where tears are a result of God’s anger). “Through tears, the psalmist ‘pours out’ her soul. She is on the verge of dissolution.”¹⁴ One could say that the psalmist has become water because of the frequency and duration (“day and night”) of her tears. Yet tears do not simply function negatively here. Tears seep through the numbness and isolation created by suffering; feeling nothing functions as an involuntary defense mechanism to keep trauma at bay.¹⁵ From a pastoral care perspective, tears are part of “relationship behavior,” that is, a way to express our need for connection, not simply an emotional release.¹⁶ The psalmist needs to be connected

14. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 133.

15. Kathleen O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 59.

16. Judith Kay Nelson, *Seeing through Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6. Quoted in Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel, *Grounded in the Living Word*:

to God, to “behold [ראה, ‘see’] the face of God” (42:2b)¹⁷ and be led to God’s dwelling (the temple or sanctuary; see Ps 63:1-2, 5, 8-9) to praise God (43:3-4). “To turn one’s face towards someone is the first condition for establishing communication.”¹⁸ “Face” (פנים) is the most common body part mentioned in the Psalms since it includes necessary organs for communication: eyes, mouth, ears. A repeated complaint in the laments is that God “hides” God’s face, which means that God is experienced by the psalmist as absent (see Pss 13:2; 27:9; 44:25; 69:18; 88:15; 102:4; 143:7). Connection with God in the sanctuary means protection, deliverance, and worship joy for the psalmist, in contrast to the psalmist’s current sense of abandonment and isolation.

The psalmist’s tears may function positively as a prompt for God’s hoped-for empathetic response.¹⁹ Too often in many societies, however, tears are seen as a sign of weakness and are associated with women. Yet prominent men in the Hebrew Bible weep. Jacob and Esau weep when they meet in Genesis 33:4; Joseph weeps three times when reunited with his brothers in Egypt (Gen 42:24; 43:30; 45:2); David weeps over his dead son Absalom (2 Sam 18:33). Cultural bias against men who weep spills over into our God images. Consequently, when God weeps (Jer 9:1, 10) and grieves with and because of the people, desiring connection with them,²⁰ there is resistance. For example, the Hebrew MT of Jeremiah 9:10 uses a common first-person singular imperfect verb: “I will take up weeping”; the “I” refers to God. Yet the NRSV, following the Septuagint and Syriac, translates an imperative from God to the people: “Take up weeping.” Some are reluctant to attribute grief to God because their core testimony affirms a God of strength. Tears signal “divine weakness and vulnerability.”²¹ Showing weakness and vulnerability are roles culture often assigns to women.

The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 145. Nelson works with attachment theory rooted in the parent-child bond.

17. Janowski, *Arguing with God*, 91–92.

18. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “Body Images in the Psalms,” *JSOT* 28 (2004): 301–26, at 306. In many Asian cultures, however, looking directly at someone is considered rude and disrespectful, suggesting that how the use of body parts is interpreted is culturally conditioned.

19. David Bosworth, “Weeping in the Psalms,” *VT* 62 (2013): 36–46, at 37.

20. For a fuller discussion, see Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded in the Living Word*, 145–48.

21. *Ibid.*, 147, 179–86. For “core testimony,” see Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

The Tears of Black Women

As a black woman I find it difficult to hear that tears are a mechanism for connection because this highlights the isolation we experience in society. The very construction of and adherence to the “Strong Black Woman” paradigm necessitates black women “remaining emotionally strong.”²² There is no public space for our tears and thus there is no way for us to be connected to others. If our tears are the sustenance on which our souls must feed, this “Strong Black Woman” icon starves black women daily. In that vein, Beverly Wallace describes the ways in which expectations of acceptable emotional responses from black women as emotionally invincible reveal themselves through “African American women’s anger, loneliness, and denial of pain.”²³

The lack of space in which to lament publicly, or even privately, is what renders black women speechless. Such space can help us to deal with the harshness and cruelty of life and grasp the totality of the trauma we experience through micro-

aggression, emotional cruelty, physical violence, and being rendered invisible. Lack of such space fills us with platitudes when we try to answer the question: “Where is your God?” Ultimately this feeling of isolation facilitates the anger best described in an interaction between Shug and Celie in *The Color Purple*:

She say, Miss Celie, You better hush. God might hear you.

Let ‘im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you.²⁴

More than shining a spotlight on the ways in which black women’s emotions have been stunted, Psalm 42–43 provides a challenge to examine the possibility of how black women might live. Emilie Townes explains that “womanist spirituality . . . is a social witness. It is born out of people’s struggle and determination to continue to find ways to answer the question, ‘Do you want to be healed’ with the Yes! of our lives and the work we do for justice.”²⁵ It is, indeed, too

22. Beverly Wallace, “A Womanist Legacy of Trauma, Grief, and Loss: Reframing the Notion of the Strong Black Woman Icon,” in *Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 43–56, at 43.

23. *Ibid.*, 44.

24. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 193.

25. Emilie Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 10.

simplistic to suggest that the final message of Psalm 42–43 is one of absolute resolution and optimism. As most African American women will tell you, however, the experience of trauma does not preclude the experience and articulation of hope. The need to intertwine an acknowledgment of the persistence of trauma with an expectation that the triumph of the divine agenda facilitates a care and nurturing of the victim's soul—in this case in the healing of the souls of black women—can best be understood in the words of Alice Walker: “Black writers seem always

involved in a moral and/or physical struggle, the result of which is expected to be some kind of larger freedom. Perhaps this is because our literary tradition is based on the slave narratives, where escape for the body and freedom for the soul went together, or perhaps this is because black people have never felt themselves guilty of global, cosmic sins.”²⁶

There is an eternal hope that one day God will listen to the cries and absorb the tears of black women, and the world will be a better place for it.

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Too little water (“thirst”) in v. 2 contrasts with too many tears in v. 3 (“day and night”) and too much water in v. 7 (“deep [תהום] calls to deep”). The psalmist's tears release memories of worship, of the noisy communal procession with shouts and songs to the house of God (42:4). These memories persist in the land of the Jordan and Mount Hermon in the north (v. 6), where God's “house” (temple or sanctuary) is not and God's absence is felt. Most interpreters view the “deep” (תהום) as chaos waters (Tiamat) challenging God, borrowing from ancient Near Eastern myths such as the *Enuma Elish*. Yet God has controlled and confined the primeval waters by the divine word in Genesis 1. Here and in Jonah 2:6 and Ezekiel 26:19 the waters threaten the psalmist with drowning, and the image suggests Sheol, the abode of the dead (see Pss 18, 32, 69, 88, 124, 144).²⁷ This reading releases the reader from the mental gymnastics of trying to imagine “billows” and “waves,” normally associated with seas, as characteristic of the less-than-mighty headwaters of the Jordan River (v. 6). Likewise, this

26. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 1983), 5.

27. Rebecca Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 98.

understanding underscores the paradox of juxtaposing God “my rock” (v. 9), “my help” (Pss 42:5, 11; 43:5) with the God whose absence threatens the psalmist with inundation by the waters of Sheol. Luis Alonso Schökel terms this contrast the heart of the psalm: “a dramatic tension in the soul between God and God,”²⁸ conveyed by the ambiguity of the image of water as both life-giving and life-threatening.

The psalmist grieves in Psalm 42–43 as a response to loss. Losses can be of several kinds.²⁹ The psalmist experiences material loss of the temple or sanctuary environs; relationship loss, that is, loss of connection with God; role loss as worshiper among other pilgrims; intrapsychic loss of an image of self as protected by God; and functional loss of vigor (being “cast down,” 42:5, 11; 43:5). In short, the psalmist is traumatized. The psalmist asks “why?” frequently; the Hebrew words למה and מה are used ten times. Grief is heightened by the taunts of people demanding, “where is your God?” (42:3, 10; see also Pss 79:10; 115:2).

These taunts suggest the victory of the enemy over Israel and its God (see also Isa 10:9–10) and perhaps the experience of exile, though many other periods in Israel’s history can also offer a context for them. Rolf Jacobson³⁰ argues that quoting this question from hostile others creates a role play in which the psalmist temporarily assumes the role of the other. In doing so, the psalmist dissociates from responsibility for the remark and expresses what is unacceptable, that is, his or her own doubt about God. Blasphemy becomes acceptable in the mouths of enemies. Consequently, “each time the enemies ask where the psalmist’s God is, the psalmist makes a mental pilgrimage to Zion.”³¹ The psalmist also offers a self-quotation in anticipation of what she will say to God in 42:9: “Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”

28. Luis Alonso Schökel, “The Poetic Structure of Psalm 42–43,” *JSOT* 1 (1976): 4–21, at 7. See Vassar, *Recalling a Story*, 60, who notes that God is “both succor and threat” in the Korah story of Num 16–18. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 134, seems to minimize this paradox in his view of the interrelated controlling metaphors of God as water, self as water, and worship as water. The “roar of cascading waters” and the “din of restive worship” are bound together by hyperbole; “the voice of many waters and the voices of many at worship blend together.”

29. For what follows, see Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1983), 36–46.

30. Rolf A. Jacobson, “Many Are Saying”: *The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter*, *JSOTSup* 397 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004).

31. *Ibid.*, 51.

This self-quotation juxtaposes the psalmist's faith with others' lack of faith. Together these two kinds of quotations both criticize enemies and, I would argue, lodge an implicit complaint against God, who allows the psalmist to suffer. They also self-characterize the psalmist in a way that negotiates community norms of what is acceptable speech about God. "Why are you cast down, O my 'soul'?" suggests that a faithful follower of God should not be so, given the community's theological portrait of a protective God of refuge. The question functions as rebuke.

Many interpreters contend that the refrain in 42:5, 11 and 43:5 charts the psalmist's progression from despair to pep talk to "shout of triumph,"³² corresponding to a focus on the past, the present, and an envisioned future. J. Clinton McCann insists that the refrain expresses the possibility of hope, which is heard "more clearly" at the end of Psalm 42–43.³³ These assessments move the psalmist too quickly to resolution and undercut the complexity of the psalmist's internal conversation. Each occurrence of the refrain ends with a descriptive phrase for God: "my help and my God." The use of the possessive adjective "my" claims relationship, which simultaneously expresses hope and critique: this is how I remember it and how it should be now, but it is not. In this vein William Brown suggests that the "I" of Psalm 42–43 is cast dialogically by the psalmist as the speaking "I" and his "soul" (נַפְשִׁי). These voices are interwoven but not fully melded, creating a "bifurcated" self not evident in 42:1-3. The refrain carries a "harsh, admonitory tone" that acts as prescriptive "critic" and "guide."³⁴ It is up to the speaker to resist or embrace this "I."

John Goldingay rightly sees no resolution in the psalm; God has not responded to the psalmist and little has changed. He appropriately suggests that the refrain functions as a motivation for God to act. God is meant to overhear the psalmist describing herself as being "cast down," since chances are that priest or prophet would rebuke her for saying so. Here an allusion to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 emerges. Eli, the priest at the

32. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 110.

33. McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 853. McCann notes that this psalm was sung when Augustine was baptized on Easter Sunday, 387 CE. "To hope in God means we live eschatologically" (854).

34. William P. Brown, "The Psalms and 'I': The Dialogical Self and the Disappearing Psalmist," in *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time*, Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms, ed. Joel Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, and W. Dennis Tucker (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2007), 26–44, at 40–44.

Shiloh sanctuary, rebukes Hannah with an accusation of drunkenness when she prays silently for a son. Further, the barren Hannah is taunted by her enemy, Peninnah, in vv. 6–7a (Peninnah is the other wife of her husband, Elkanah), and she is described as weeping, literally, “pouring out my soul” (v. 15) and refusing food (v. 7b). Like the psalmist, Hannah does not express anger toward Peninnah or Eli; instead, “Hannah directs her emotion inwards.”³⁵ We do not know the complete content of Hannah’s prayer outside of the vow she makes in v. 11, but one can imagine a similar internal conversation as part of her silent prayer. Another superscription for Psalm 42–43 might read: “A prayer of Hannah, when she made pilgrimage to Shiloh to pray for a son.”

Goldingay insists that in these refrains “the suppliant has to accept responsibility for his or her own encouraging.”³⁶ Similarly, Nelle Morton speaks of “hearing to speech” in women’s experience; women hear themselves or other women to expression.³⁷ If God is overhearing the refrain, then God becomes “the hearing one—hearing us [the psalmist] into our own responsible word.”³⁸ Korean women struggle to hear themselves into speech and cut through passive obedience and the numbness of self-hate rooted in *han*, the feeling of oppression and anger stuck inside them with no outlet.³⁹ From a pastoral care perspective, this psalm can offer an outlet for their pain. As “an arena of contestation”⁴⁰ that draws God, the psalmist, the enemy, and the congregation into a “dialogic exchange,” this psalm makes a True Self as it authorizes a sense of omnipotence by summoning God to action on the psalmist’s behalf.

35. Ellen van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 16 (2008): 1–24, at 12. Van Wolde notes that “none of the verbs [in the Hebrew Bible] designating anger are conceptualized with a female subject.”

36. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 26. In Hannah’s case, Elkanah does provide encouragement (1 Sam 1:8).

37. Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 127–28.

38. *Ibid.*, 129.

39. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 36–52, discussed in Hopkins, *Journey through the Psalms*, 112.

40. Walter Brueggemann, “Psychological Criticism: Exploring the Self in the Text,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 213–32, at 226. Brueggemann says this in connection with Ps 35, but it applies to this psalm as well. He draws from Object Relations Theory as espoused by D. W. Winnicott and Heinz Kohut and the notion of “good enough mother,” which expresses the notion of covenant.

As the psalmist is heard into speech she petitions God directly in 43:1 to “vindicate,” “defend,” and “deliver,” as well as to send out “light and truth” to lead the psalmist to God (43:3). Just as God’s “rod” and “staff” are personified in Psalm 23, so “light” and “truth” are personified here as guardians along the way to Zion.⁴¹ This way can be taught, studied, and revealed. In both the Psalms and ancient Near Eastern literature, God’s presence is expressed as light or solar theophany; “seeing God’s face” is often associated with light or shining⁴² and is rooted in temple theology. What the psalmist hopes for is light to pierce the darkness in which she finds herself wandering (42:9b, translated as “walk about mournfully” in NRSV). “Pathway . . . transforms the search for ‘refuge’ from aimless wandering into a pilgrimage.”⁴³

God is also repeatedly referenced as “refuge” in Ps 42–43. The network of associations spun by the idea of refuge includes such concrete images as “rock” (42:9), “help” (42:5, 11), and Zion, called “your holy hill” in Psalm 43:3. “Zion is the geographical embodiment of ‘refuge’” (Ps 2:6).⁴⁴ In Psalm 43:2 the psalmist declares: “you are the God in whom I take refuge.” These references express ambiguity. God as refuge is the psalmist’s hope, but at the same time this metaphor functions as a critique of God’s absence. This tension marks the life of faith.

41. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 41.

42. *Ibid.*, 84.

43. *Ibid.*, 42.

44. *Ibid.*, 19.