

PSALMS, BOOKS 4–5

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 22

Psalms
Books 4-5

Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford

Linda M. Maloney

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Barbara E. Reid, OP

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A Michael Glazier Book

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Abbreviations

ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.</i> Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCOT	Baker Commentaries on the Old Testament
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
BL	<i>Bibel und Liturgie</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CEB	Common English Bible
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentary
ECC	Eerdman's Critical Commentary

ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement series
KJV	King James Version
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LXX	Septuagint
MLBS	Mercer Library of Biblical Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> in Twelve Volumes
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review & Expositor</i>

SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SymS	Symposium Series
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WBiC	Westminster Bible Companion
WCS	Wisdom Commentary Series

Acknowledgments

When I was approached by Liturgical Press to write a “broadly feminist” commentary on books 4 and 5 of the Psalter, I was flattered, flabbergasted, and fearful. I had spent the previous twenty-five years of my academic career focusing on the shape and shaping of the book of Psalms: first its metanarrative and then the narrative shaping of smaller groups of psalms. This commentary for Liturgical Press would prove to be a whole new undertaking for me, expanding my reading and understanding of this well-loved book.

The studies of the Psalter I subsequently undertook revealed to me myriad topics addressed in the words of the Psalter that had somehow not surfaced in my previous studies of the book. First, the Psalter contains many feminine images of God and feminine understandings of God, both of which I was aware but never incorporated into my research and commentary on the book. And, equally important, the book addresses societal and human rights issues that continue to be concerns in our twenty-first-century world: economic disparities, power inequalities, social inequalities, ecological issues, and basic issues of human rights, among others.

This author’s assignment by Liturgical Press was to write 75 percent of the commentary and then, for the other 25 percent, incorporate other voices, voices rarely, if ever, included in a scholarly commentary on a biblical book. I have, over the years, cultivated strong ties to a number of universities in South Africa and have witnessed firsthand on many

occasions the deep-seated feelings of oppression by Africans living in South Africa, particularly females. Twenty-five years after the end of apartheid, issues of racial, economic, ecological, and social inequality remain a major issue for both blacks and whites in South Africa as they struggle to live together in a postapartheid world.

Thus I determined to incorporate South African voices as the contributing voices in this commentary on books 4 and 5 of the Psalter. A generous Sabbatical Research Grant from the Louisville Institute in Louisville, Kentucky, and a sabbatical leave from Mercer University allowed me to travel to South Africa for six weeks in the spring of 2018 and interview and recruit a group of mostly first-generation African theology students who contributed eighteen moving reflections to the commentary.

I am most grateful to the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University for giving me, over the years, the opportunities to pursue the research and writing agendas that I so love, and to the Louisville Institute for its support.

And, as always, my heartfelt love to my husband, Steve, for his patient indulging of my academic pursuits and all the time I spend in my study researching and writing. None of this would be possible without him.

Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford
Advent 2019

Contributors

Agnes Besigye (Nkuna) is an administrative assistant in the Department of Classics at the University of Pretoria. She is the only black person in her department at the university but does not feel in any way marginalized. She was born before the end of apartheid and has memories of it herself as well as what her parents and grandparents have shared with her.

Siphokazi Dlwati is a master's degree student in the Department of Theology at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. She also works in the department as a student academic adviser. She comes from a rural village in the Eastern Cape where tradition is very strong. Ancestor worship and belief in Jesus go hand in hand in her village, with much ritual surrounding appeasing the ancestors, often involving a costly purchase of a cow, a sheep, etc. Siphokazi is disturbed by the high cost of such rituals and has trouble reconciling them with faith in Jesus. She expresses concern about how the "academics" of theology can be translated to the church. She is an active member of a church called Divine Restoration Ministries.

William Chisa is from Malawi in central Africa and is a master's degree student at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg. William's master's thesis will be an examination of Malawi's stance on termination of pregnancies. In 2016 the government of Malawi began a reexamination of the current law that allows termination only if the life of the mother is at stake, with an eye to expanding it to cases of rape,

incest, and other circumstances. The Malawi Council of Churches has gotten involved in the debate. William would like to examine the debate using the story of the woman in Mark 5:25-34 as an example of someone who was considered unclean because of her condition but dared to approach Jesus and was healed.

Belinda Crawford is the program coordinator for Body Theology in the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal's Pietermaritzburg Campus. The word "ujamaa" is Swahili for "familyhood" or "extended family." The centre in Pietermaritzburg describes itself this way: "The Ujamaa Centre is an interface between socially engaged biblical and theological scholars, organic intellectuals, and local communities of the poor, working-class, and marginalized. Together we use biblical and theological resources for individual and social transformation."

Belinda is of mixed race and so her African mother could not keep her; she was raised in a reformatory school, a repository for children of mixed race during South Africa's apartheid era. That move probably saved her life, but Belinda did not know of her mixed parentage until her mother told her when she was twenty-two years old. Belinda states that she feels somewhat robbed socially and culturally because she does not belong in either the "white world" or the "black world" of South Africa. She has experienced a variety of religious contexts, including Conservative Pentecostal and Seventh-Day Adventist. She identifies as Seventh-Day Adventist. Before coming to the University of Kwa Zulu Natal she attended Heldeberg Bible College in Cape Town and, after graduation, ran a shelter for women and children there.

Nikki Carroll Hardemann is director of outreach and alumni relations at the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University. She completed her master of divinity degree at the McAfee School of Theology in 2005 and served in local churches and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Offices in Georgia before returning to McAfee in 2015.

Thanyani Mahanya is assistant to the deputy dean and head of the Department of Old Testament at the University of Pretoria. She was raised by her mother and grandmother after her grandmother took her mother away from a polygamist marriage. She states that women in South Africa are taught that family matters are private matters, so they should not be talked about. "We are not to air our dirty laundry." So women dress in their best finery for church and sit and talk as if they have no problems,

but many are very broken and damaged, often because of “the myth of marriage and motherhood.” She believes women need a safe place to talk and air their feelings, their hurts, their despairs.

Nellie Zania Mahlangu is a domestic worker in three households. While she completed high school and began training in computer science, she had to discontinue her studies and find work because of her family situation. She is the “head of house” at the moment, living with and caring for her unemployed mother, brother, sister, and nephew and raising a young son alone. She travels two hours each day to get to her work and then back home again, rising at four o’clock in the morning. She is very involved in the Zion Christian Church and would like to continue her education at some point in the future.

Christine Nel is the theology librarian at the University of Pretoria. She is Afrikaans and grew up on a farm in Kwa Zulu Natal. Her father and mother had African workers, but she states that they treated them like members of the family and many of the workers stayed on the farm for decades. She expressed a great love for African culture and for the African students with whom she works, saying that in so many instances her African friends were so much more open, willing to share, and embrace than her Afrikaans friends.

Gweneth Ntamo is a master’s degree student in the Department of Theology at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. She is a first-generation college student who started out in the sociology department (to please her parents) but knew all along that she wanted to do theology. She comes from the Isixhosa tribe of the Northern Cape but knows Afrikaans and English better than her own tribal language. She states that since she is light skinned she is regularly considered “colored,” that is, of mixed race; thus she often finds herself treated as an outsider because of her skin color and because she is in college. In her church, Empowerment Ministries International, she is ordained and runs home cells, is on the worship team, and teaches children’s Sunday School.

Yenziwe Shabalala graduated from the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in 2017 and now is a volunteer at the Ujamaa Centre at the university. She lives in a large extended household of ten persons and her mother is the only source of income for the family. She feels a great deal of pressure to contribute to the family income and has dreams of a food services

business on the campus of the University of Kwa Zulu Natal, since virtually none exists. Yenzi and her partners have made two proposals to the university but so far have not been successful in gaining a contract.

Yenzi is a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. She states that black women find it difficult to voice their opinions in the church and in society, and she is concerned to empower women, particularly from rural areas, to be able to do so. She states that she is “Afro-centric” but recognizes much gender inequality in the culture.

Lodewyk Sutton is Afrikaans and is professor of Old Testament in the Department of Theology at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. He came to theology after earning degrees in business and law and thus is also an advocate in criminal law in South Africa. He began his theological studies emphasizing the New Testament, but when he took Hebrew he “converted” to the Old Testament and took a special interest in warfare imagery in the book of Psalms.

Lesego Temane is an administrator, master’s degree student, and part-time lecturer in the Department of Theology at the University of Pretoria. She has a master’s degree in philosophy and is completing a master’s degree in theology. In addition, she is a minister in her church congregation, working in pastoral counseling and youth ministry.

Lesego described her father as an abusive man, and therefore she now views God as the father she never had. Thus she calls God “he” as a father figure, but she encounters many women who find it difficult to see God as “he” when they have been so hurt by men. And for many women, God is silent.

Foreword

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

Athalya Brenner-Idan

Universiteit van Amsterdam/Tel Aviv University

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is what it’s all about.

Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary

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

Barbara E. Reid, OP

General Editor

Wisdom Commentary is the first series to offer detailed feminist interpretation of every book of the Bible. The fruit of collaborative work by an ecumenical and interreligious team of scholars, the volumes provide serious, scholarly engagement with the whole biblical text, not only those texts that explicitly mention women. The series is intended for clergy, teachers, ministers, and all serious students of the Bible. Designed to be both accessible and informed by the various approaches of biblical scholarship, it pays particular attention to the world in front of the text, that is, how the text is heard and appropriated. At the same time, this series aims to be faithful to the ancient text and its earliest audiences; thus the volumes also explicate the worlds behind the text and within it. While issues of gender are primary in this project, the volumes also address the intersecting issues of power, authority, ethnicity, race, class, and religious belief and practice. The fifty-eight volumes include the books regarded as canonical by Jews (i.e., the Tanakh); Protestants (the “Hebrew Bible” and the New Testament); and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox Communion (i.e., Tobit, Judith, 1 and

2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, including the Letter of Jeremiah, the additions to Esther, and Susanna and Bel and the Dragon in Daniel).

A Symphony of Diverse Voices

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

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

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

Woman Wisdom

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

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

The New Testament frequently portrays Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. He invites his followers, "take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matt 11:29), just as Ben Sira advises, "put your neck under her [Wisdom's] yoke and let your souls receive instruction" (Sir 51:26). Just as Wisdom experiences rejection (Prov 1:23-25; Sir 15:7-8; Wis 10:3; Bar 3:12), so too does Jesus (Mark 8:31; John 1:10-11). Only some accept his invitation to his all-inclusive banquet (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; compare Prov 1:20-21; 9:3-5). Yet, "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" (Matt 11:19, speaking of Jesus and John the Baptist; in the Lukan 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 flourishing of human beings and all creation. Three waves of feminism in the United States are commonly recognized. The first, arising in the mid-nineteenth century and lasting into the early twentieth, was sparked by women's efforts to be involved in the public sphere and to win the right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave focused on civil rights and equality for women. With the third wave, from the 1980s forward, came global feminism and the emphasis on the contextual nature of interpretation. Now a fourth wave may be emerging, with a stronger emphasis on the intersectionality of women's concerns with those of other marginalized groups and the increased use of the internet as

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

Feminist Women and Men

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

Feminist Biblical Interpretation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another groundbreaking work is the collection *The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2015), which comprises twenty volumes of commen-

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

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

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

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

Methodologies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20. See, for example, Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Biblical Authority

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

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

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

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

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

Language for God

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

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

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

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

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

Nomenclature for the Two Testaments

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

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

Translation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Art and Poetry

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

Glossary

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

A Concluding Word

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

Wisdom Commentary, by making the best of current feminist biblical scholarship available in an accessible format to ministers, preachers, teachers, scholars, and students, will aid all readers in their advancement toward God's vision of dignity, equality, and justice for all.



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Author's Introduction

Wrestling with the Book of Psalms

How does one go about writing a feminist commentary on the book of Psalms in general and books 4 and 5 of the Psalter in particular? The Psalter mentions only one woman by name (Bathsheba). She appears in the superscription of Psalm 51 but does not figure in the poetry of the psalm itself. The remainder of the book refers to women sporadically, but only in very general terms: Psalms 22:9-10 (my mother); 27:10 (my mother); 35:14 (a mother); 45:9-15 (daughters of kings, a queen [consort], a princess, virgins); 48:6 (a woman in labor); 68:5, 25 (widows, girls [young women]); 71:6 (my mother); 78:63, 64 (girls [virgins], widows); 94:6 (the widow); 106:37-38 (their daughters); 109:9, 14 (wife, widow, his mother); 113:9 (barren woman, mother); 123:2 (a maid [female servant], her mistress [lady, queen]); 128:3 (your wife); 131:2 (mother); 139:13 (mother); 144:12 (our daughters); 146:9 (the widow); 148:12 (young women [virgins]).¹

But a few observations are in order. First, the reader may be interested to see that the book of Psalms offers no negative words about women as do some other biblical books, such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Ben

1. All Scripture references are to the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Sirach. In Proverbs, for instance, the “students” are warned to beware of “the lips and the speech of the loose/strange [זרה] woman” (Prov 5:3) whose “feet go down to death” (Prov 5:5), who “with much seductive speech . . . persuades . . . (and) with smooth talk . . . compels” (Prov 7:21). In the book of Ecclesiastes the teacher muses: “I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her” (Qoh 7:26). Ben Sirach writes: “Any iniquity is small compared to a woman’s iniquity; may a sinner’s lot befall her! . . . From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die. . . . Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, or else, when she finds liberty, she will make use of it” (Sir 25:19, 24; 26:10).

Second, the book of Psalms abounds in references to humanity in a generic, general, all-inclusive sense. The word אנוש, meaning human beings in general and variously translated in the NRSV as “mortals,” “human,” “human beings,” and “others,” occurs thirteen times.² אדם and the related term בני-אדם, translated variously in the NRSV as “one/ones,” “everyone,” “those,” “people,” “man/men,” “everyone,” “all people,” “mortal/mortals,” “humankind,” “human beings,” and “human/humans,” occur no fewer than fifty times.³

Third, an observation closely tied to the second: the human voices and players within individual psalms are rarely named specifically; they remain as generic manifestations of all walks of humanity. The singer of Psalm 106 says, “Remember me, O LORD . . . that I may glory in your heritage” (106:4-5); Psalm 73 laments the arrogant and the prosperity of the wicked (73:3); Psalm 37 offers assurance that “the righteous shall be kept safe forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off” (37:28); in Psalm 7 the psalmist pleads with God to “save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me” (7:1); in Psalm 122 the people cry, “Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (122:2). The voices and the players—“me,” “the arrogant,” “the wicked,” “the righteous,” “the children of the wicked,” “pursuers,” “our feet”—are not assigned gender but rather are portrayed as human beings in relation to God and to others. The words of the psalms are the words of all people in all places and times. The exigencies of life that women dealt with in the time of the formation of the biblical text, however, were intrinsically different from

2. See Pss 8:4; 9:19, 20; 10:18; 55:13; 56:1; 66:12; 73:5; 90:3; 103:15; 104:15 (2x); 144:3.

3. See, for example, Pss 8:4; 17:4; 21:10; 22:7; 36:6; 56:11; 66:5; 64:9; 76:10; 80:17; 89:47; 90:3; 107:8, 15, 21, 31.

those dealt with by men, for the most part, and that reality continues in many ways today.

Appropriating the Psalmic Words

A number of barriers present themselves when one attempts to read the Psalter from a feminist perspective. First, a "voice" is assigned to many psalms in their superscriptions, most often the voice of David (Pss 3–41, etc.), but also the sons of Korah (Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87–88), Asaph (Pss 50, 73–83), Heman (Ps 88), Ethan (Ps 89), Solomon (Pss 72 and 127), and Moses (Ps 90).⁴ This can make it difficult to "hear" the voice of all humanity in the psalms, since all those named are men and David and Solomon are royalty.

Second, commentators speculate that many of the psalms were recited at the temple in Jerusalem by priests and worshipers (often the king), thus effectively removing them from the realm of common humanity; this is especially true for women, who could enter the temple only as far as the women's court, and for men living in outlying towns and villages who could travel to the temple only for the occasional holy day. Hans-Joachim Kraus states, for instance, that the *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 4 may be easily assumed to be "an experience in the temple" in which "an innocent person who has been persecuted and accused" has had his rights restored through a divine verdict in the temple.⁵ He further contends that "the '*Sitz im Leben*' of Psalm 24" is "a cultic antiphonal song, a liturgical ceremonial address, which doubtless is connected with an entrance of the holy ark to the temple in Jerusalem."⁶ In books 4 and 5 the enthronement Psalms, 93–100, seem almost universally to be associated with temple worship,⁷ and Kraus writes that Psalm 113 "is unquestionably a cultic hymn that has been intoned by a group."⁸

4. The Korahites, the Asaphites, Heman, and Ethan were cultic singers during the reigns of David and Solomon. See 1 Chr 6:31-48; 9:19-34; 15:16-22; 2 Chr 5:11-13.

5. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 146.

6. *Ibid.*, 312.

7. See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 474–75, for a full bibliography. See also Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2 vols., trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962).

8. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993), 367. See also Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 134.

Third, God as king and God as judge—both overtly masculine images—are arguably the dominant words describing God in the Psalter.⁹ God as king first appears in Psalm 5: “Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God” (v. 2), and it occurs no fewer than twenty-five times in the book.¹⁰ Psalm 7:8 states: “The LORD judges [ידין] the peoples,” and we find this metaphor no fewer than twenty-five times as well.¹¹

These two are not the only metaphors for God in the book of Psalms, however. One powerful image has its roots in Exodus 34:6-7, where God pronounces God’s self-identity to Moses on Mount Sinai. One of God’s self-descriptive words is רחום, translated most often as “merciful” or “compassionate.” The word derives from the noun רחם, which literally means “womb.” References to God’s רחום and רחמים, God’s “womb love,” perhaps, occur no fewer than twenty times in the book of Psalms.¹² In Psalm 119:156 we read: “Great is your mercy [רחמים], O LORD; give me life according to your justice.” In an interesting juxtaposition of metaphors, Psalm 103:13 affirms: “As a father has compassion [בִּרְחַם אָב] for his children, so the LORD has compassion [יְהוָה רַחַם] for those who fear him.” And in Psalm 77:9 the psalm singer cries out, “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion [רַחֲמֵינִי]?” bringing to mind the words of 1 Samuel 1:6, a notice that YHWH had “closed” Hannah’s womb (רחם), and the words of Isaiah 66:9 in which God asks “shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb [מִלֵּיד]?”¹³

Psalm 22 takes the metaphor a step further and connects God’s self-identification with “womb-love” to the physical referent for the metaphor. In verse 10 the psalmist cries to God: “Upon you I was cast from my birth” (literally “the womb,” רחם). Here God is intimately tied to the life-giving womb and is further pictured as midwife.¹⁴ Phyllis Trible describes the image in Psalm 22 as a “semantic movement from a physical

9. “Judge,” however, in contemporary times is becoming more and more an occupation of both women and men.

10. See Pss 5:2; 10:16; 24:7, 8, 9, 10; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2; 47:6, 7, 8; 48:2; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 89:18; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 145:1; 149:2.

11. See Pss 1:5; 7:6, 8, 11; 9:4, 7, 16; 50:4, 6; 51:4; 67:4; 75:2, 7; 76:8, 9; 82:2, 8; 94:2; 96:10, 13; 98:9; 110:6; 119:84; 143:2; 149:9.

12. See, for example, Pss 25:6; 40:11; 69:16; 77:9; 79:8; 103:13.

13. The word “womb,” רחם, does not occur in Isa 66:9, but the context strongly suggests such an understanding. Hence the NRSV translation.

14. See L. Juliana M. Claasens, “Rupturing God-Language: The Metaphor of God as Midwife in Psalm 22,” in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 166–75.

organ of the female body to a psychic mode of being."¹⁵ We find similar imagery in Psalm 71:6. There the psalm singer cries out to God: "Upon you I have leaned from my birth [מֵעַד]; it was you who took me from my mother's womb [literally "belly, inward part," מֵעַד אִמִּי]."

Another prominent metaphor for God in the Psalter is "refuge," often imaged as shelter under the wings (כַּנְפַיִם) of God. We read in Psalm 17:8, "Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings [כַּנְפַיִם]"; in Psalm 36:7, "All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings [כַּנְפַיִם]"; and in Psalm 61:4, "Let me abide in your tent forever; find refuge under the shelter of your wings [כַּנְפַיִם]."¹⁶ Protective wings bring to mind the image of a mother bird caring for her young, keeping them warm, providing shelter, and warning off predators (as we see in Matt 23:37).¹⁷

Finally, wisdom is a prominent feature in the Psalter. The characterization of wisdom in the biblical text is multifaceted and ever-evolving. Wisdom is depicted variously as something of a consort or feminine counterpart to God in the books of Job, Proverbs, Ben Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch. She is hidden from and inaccessible to humanity according to Job 28; she is present in the midst of humanity, crying out in the streets and at the entrance to the city gates in Proverbs 1, and she was there at creation, working beside God and delighting in the human race in Proverbs 8. In the Wisdom of Solomon she is sought after as the desired spouse of Solomon, having the "knowledge" of "things of old" and giving "good counsel"; she teaches "self-control and prudence, justice and courage" (Wis 7:22–8:9). In Ben Sirach, Wisdom states that she "came forth from the mouth of the most high" (Sir 24:3) at creation and was destined to dwell in Israel. The sexually evocative language of Ben Sirach equates the pleasures of knowing Woman Wisdom with the pleasures of knowing the Torah (Sir 24:19–22). Ben Sirach 24:23 states, in fact, "All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law [νόμον] that Moses commanded us," and Baruch 4:1 says, "She is the book of the commandments of God, the law [νόμος] that endures forever."

15. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 33.

16. See also Pss 57:1; 63:7; 91:4.

17. For a full treatment of this metaphor see the commentary on Psalm 91, along with Carolyn Blevins, "Under My Wings: Jesus' Motherly Love; Matthew 23:37–39," *RevExp* 104 (2007): 365–74. Joel LeMon offers an alternate view of the "winged image" of יהוה in the Psalter: see his *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2010).

The book of Psalms equates wisdom with Torah, specifically in Psalms 1 and 119, thereby inviting the reader to hear in the wisdom psalms and the wisdom elements of the psalms the voice of Woman Wisdom, the feminine iteration of ΥHWH , calling humankind to search out the path to a right relationship with ΥHWH through obedience to the Torah. Athalya Brenner reminds us that in the book of Proverbs Torah (תורה) is attributed to the mother figure, never to the father (1:8; 6:20; 31:26; the NRSV translates each instance of Torah [תורה] in these verses as “teaching” rather than “law”).¹⁸ Claudia Camp maintains that in the Psalter Wisdom actually replaces the earthly king as the mediator between God and humanity.¹⁹

The Metaphors of the Psalms

Feminist interpretation of the book of Psalms cannot confine itself solely to finding biological sex-specific “female attributes and affinities” of God, such as womb-love (רחם, compassion) and a mother’s protective wings (כנפיים). Melody Knowles writes: “Naming and associating behaviors as feminine runs the danger of composing an essentialized femininity that conforms to socially prescribed behaviors and attributes—reifying ‘feminine’ into a construction that constricts women instead of understanding it as cultural performance.”²⁰ The biblical text is essentially a patriarchal document that presents an androcentric view of the world. The presentation of women is, by and large, a “constricted” one that reflects the traditional male-dominated role of women in ancient Israelite society—mother, daughter, widow, queen, seductress, etc.²¹ Thus feminist interpretations often involve reading “against the text” or “from the underside of the text,” asking “What is the text not telling us?” and “What is the text trying to tell us, but cannot?”

18. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 119.

19. Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 272–80; see also Silvia Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney and William McDonough (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 26–68; and Gerlinde Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9: Traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien*, FAT 16 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996), 300–303.

20. Melody D. Knowles, “Feminist Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 424–36, at 426.

21. There are exceptions, of course: see, for example, Tamar (Gen 38); Deborah (Judg 4–5); Abigail (2 Sam 25); and Huldah (2 Kgs 22).

Therefore when we as readers encounter and contemplate metaphors in a quest to understand the God of the Hebrew Bible, we must keep in mind a number of things. First, a metaphor is nothing more than, nothing less than, a linguistic symbol. It attempts to tie a hard-to-describe, perhaps indescribable object or concept to one that is familiar and understandable to readers and hearers. Scholars use a number of terms to describe the relationship between the two entities, including "tenor" (the object or concept) and "vehicle" (the metaphor), "target domain" (the object or concept) and "source domain" (the metaphor), "primary subject" (the object or concept) and "secondary subject" (the metaphor), "occasion" (the object or concept) and "image" (the metaphor).²² Whatever the language used to describe the relationship between the metaphor and what it is attempting to describe, it is in the end simply the juxtaposition of language symbols.

Second, metaphors are "contextually conditioned," that is, semantic and cultural contexts impact how a writer constructs a metaphor, how that metaphor is received by the reader or hearer, and how it is interpreted. David Rensberger writes: "Metaphor, simile, and their kin are inherently both accurate and inaccurate. They point toward some truth about an entity, but they do not claim to express entire truth or pure truth; not *everything* about the thing compared is meant to apply to the entity under discussion."²³ The metaphors the psalm singers use to describe and attempt to understand God are human constructs, employing images and ideas that other human readers or hearers are able to appropriate from their own life experiences. The biblical text is the product of a male-dominated undertaking; therefore we as readers and interpreters of the Psalter must be sensitive to its use of language about God and about humanity.

Third, William P. Brown, in *Seeing the Psalms*, reminds us:

When metaphors . . . become literalized to the point that they exclude other metaphors for the same subject or target domain, particularly in the case of God, they function as idols. . . . Put theologically, if any metaphor, no matter how profound, becomes absolutized, as though it were itself considered ultimate, idolatry becomes the norm.²⁴

22. William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 5.

23. David Rensberger, "Ecological Use of the Psalms," in Brown, *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, 613.

24. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 10.

The beauty of metaphoric imagery for God in the Psalter is that it allows for a multiplicity of conceptualizations or, as Luis Alonso Schökel suggests, “a vast collection of interwoven images.”²⁵ Therefore we should not, ought not, be constrained to a single metaphoric conceptualization of God in the book of Psalms.

Words for All People

The Psalter is a rich and varied collection of poetry from the life of ancient Israel that expresses a wide range of emotions and feelings, including joy, sorrow, fear, oppression, hurt, amazement, and yearning, and it addresses a wide variety of topics, such as interpersonal relationships, enemies, illnesses, national crises, the splendor of creation, the goodness of God, Israel’s history, and personal sins, nearly all of which are not tied or restricted to any specific historical or easily identified personal event.²⁶ What this means is that the words of the psalmists are genderless and timeless; they are the words of every person in every time and place and testify to the multifaceted dimensions of humanity’s relationship with God and one another in all times and places. The experiences of each person affects how they appropriate the words of the book of Psalms into their own lives. Women, for the most part, will hear its word differently than will men, and women of privilege will read the Psalter’s word differently from women living in poverty and

25. Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, trans. Adrian Graffy (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998), 10.

26. Psalm 71’s words, “Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel” (v. 4), or Ps 101’s “I will study the way that is blameless. When shall I attain it? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is base” (vv. 3–4) lack a specific referent and are open to myriad appropriations.

In addition we must view the superscriptions, such as Psalm 51’s “A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba,” as initial “hooks” on which to “hang” the psalms, that is, as initial “story worlds” for their words. But we must not leave the psalms “anchored” in the past. The sentiments expressed in them are not time-, class-, or gender-exclusive; they are the words of every human. Thus we read the heartfelt words of Psalm 13, “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (v. 1); Psalm 81’s glorious “Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob. Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp” (vv. 1–2); and the wonder of Psalm 139: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (v. 13).

oppression. The Psalter's words meet every person in their own place and time and circumstance.

Another dimension to "finding the feminine" in the Psalter is attention to cultural and social location. Feminist interpretations of the biblical text ask, "How would a feminine-gendered person read and appropriate a text?" Feminine images of God, women, and/or the voice of Wisdom need not be present in the text in order for us to "find the feminine." In examining the psalms in books 4 and 5 of the Psalter this author will attend to issues in reading the psalms that, while not exclusively the concern of "feminine-gendered persons," are or may be of special concern to them: marginalized voices; economics; power inequities; the environment; access to education; food distribution; violence against women, men, and children; and so forth. The commentary will examine the texts of each psalm in its entirety, attempting to understand how a particular psalm functioned in its "original" setting and suggesting how it might be heard and appropriated in the twenty-first century.

Two insightful examples of "finding the feminine" in psalms outside the scope of this commentary volume may be found in Ulrike Bail's 1998 essay "'Oh God, Hear My Prayer': Psalm 55 and Violence against Women" and Maria Häusl's 2002 essay "Ps 17—Bittgebet einer kinderlosen Frau?" Bail suggests that the words of Psalm 55 could be the prayer of a woman who has suffered rape at the hands of a close acquaintance. She stresses that neither the original historical setting of the psalm nor its original author can be known and therefore we are permitted to appropriate the text to various acts of violence, including rape.²⁷ Häusl, in like manner, reads Psalm 17 as the prayer of a childless woman asking for protection from tormentors (and, in an interesting aside, in v. 8 we encounter the image of "the shadow of God's wings").²⁸

Many Perspectives

Melody Knowles reminds us that "because feminist criticism self-consciously foregrounds the experience of the interpreter, it is never a

27. Ulrike Bail, "'O God Hear My Prayer': Psalm 55 and Violence against Women," in *Wisdom and Psalms*, FCB, 2nd ser., ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 242–63.

28. Maria Häusl, "Ps 17—Bittgebet einer kinderlosen Frau?," in *Wer darf hinaufsteigen zum Berg YHWH's? Beiträge zu Prophetie und Poesie des alten Testaments*, ed. Hubert Irsigler (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2002), 205–22.

Book 4 of the Psalter
(Pss 90–106)

Psalms 90–92

So That We May Gain a “Heart of Wisdom”

Psalms 90–92 open book 4 of the Psalter. Scholars have long recognized a connectedness among the three psalms, one that includes wisdom motifs, concern with the human condition, and finding security in יהוה.¹ With Erich Zenger, I consider Psalms 90–92 to be “*eine Komposition*” (a single composition) that is linked by keyword motifs, by questions in one psalm that are answered in a following psalm, and with a Mosaic *inclusio*.² We can see movement in the three psalms from lament in Psalm 90 to promise in Psalm 91 to thanksgiving in Psalm 92.³

1. See David Howard, “A Contextual Reading of Psalms 90–94,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann Jr., JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book Four of the Hebrew Psalter* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 18–31; Jerome Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 93–96.

2. Erich Zenger, “The God of Israel’s Reign over the World,” in *The God of Israel and the Nations: Studies in Isaiah and the Psalms*, ed. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 167–68.

3. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 442.

Psalm 90

The “storyline” of the Psalter (see the introduction, pp. l–lv) places Psalm 90 in the period of the Babylonian exile of the Israelites, but it calls to mind the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness wanderings—another time in the people’s history when they were outside the land of promise and longing to return. I read the psalm as a “lament,”⁴ a plea to God that continues the despairing questions posed at the end of Psalm 89—“How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?” (Ps 89:46).

It is the only psalm in the Psalter attributed to Moses and echoes many of the words uttered by Moses in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. In Exodus 32:12, in the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, Moses pleads with God to “turn” (שׁוּב) and “change your mind” (נַחֵם), the same Hebrew words used in verse 13 of Psalm 90, though נַחֵם is translated as “have compassion” in Psalm 90. The words of Psalm 90:1, “you have been our dwelling place in all generations,” echo Moses’s words in Deuteronomy 32:7, while the words of Deuteronomy 32:14 are reiterated in Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world,” and the unusual morphological forms “days” (יָמֵי) and “years” (שָׁנֹת) in Psalm 90:15 occur also in Deuteronomy 32:7. Marvin Tate writes: “The similarities of language between Ps 90 and the song of Moses in Deut 31:30–32:47 was probably the starting point for either the composition of Ps 90 and/or its assignment to Moses.”⁵ David Noel Freedman suggests that “the composer of the psalm based it on the episode in Exodus 32 and imagined in poetic form how Moses may have spoken in the circumstances of Exodus 32.”⁶ Many commentators label book 4 the “Moses Book.” Outside of book 4, Moses is mentioned only one time in the Psalter (77:21). In book 4, however, he is referred to seven times (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32).

On the surface, then, Psalm 90 seems very nationalistic and male (Moses)-oriented, recalling the events that led to the formation of Israel as a national identity during the wilderness wanderings and the hope of national survival during the Babylonian exile. But we must not forget that women, as well as men, endured the hardships of the exodus

4. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 442.

5. Marvin M. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 438.

6. David Noel Freedman, “Other than Moses . . . Who Asks (or Tells) God to Repent?,” *BRev* 1 (1985): 59.

Psalm 90:1-17

<i>A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.</i>	
¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.	like grass that is renewed in the morning;
² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.	⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.
³ You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."	⁷ For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.	⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream,	⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh.

from Egypt and the exile in Babylon and carried the memories of them. After the Israelites crossed the Reed Sea in Exodus 15, Miriam led the women in song and dance according to the words of verses 20-21.⁷ Thus, Miriam—though mentioned only sporadically in the biblical text⁸—was, I suggest, an ever-present reality, especially among the women and children, during the wilderness wanderings, as were other strong women. What were their roles among the travelers? Women heavy with pregnancy, enduring childbirth, nursing infants, tending to crying toddlers,

7. Some scholars suggest that the whole song in Exod 15:1-21 was sung by Miriam and the women of the Exodus. Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:7; and Jer 31:4 indicate that women were the leaders of the victory songs and dances at the conclusion of battles. George J. Brooke, "A Long-Lost Song of Miriam," *BAR* 20 (1994): 62–65, proposes that a separate Song of Miriam, partially suppressed in the book of Exodus, has survived in the Dead Sea Scrolls text 4Q365. See also Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam*, SBLDS 84 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows," *BRev* 5 (1989): 14–25; J. Gerald Janzen, "Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who Is Seconding Whom?," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 211–20; and Wilda C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

8. Exod 2 and Num 12 and 20.

Psalm 90:1-17 (cont.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>¹⁰The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.</p> <p>¹¹Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.</p> <p>¹²So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.</p> <p>¹³Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!</p> | <p>¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.</p> <p>¹⁵Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.</p> <p>¹⁶Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.</p> <p>¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!</p> |
|--|--|

and worrying about the source of the next meal surely turned to them for encouragement and advice. And thus I maintain that we are able to read women’s voices within the text of Psalm 90.

The words of verse 2 are particularly evocative. A literal translation of the Masoretic Text (MT)⁹ is, “Before the mountains were born, you, God, writhing in labor [the verbal root is חיל in the *polet* verbal stem] birthed the earth [אֶרֶץ] and the habitable world [הַבֵּל].”¹⁰ “Earth” is the same word used in conjunction with “heavens [שָׁמַיִם]” in the creation story in Genesis 1:1 to describe the universal creation. “Habitable world,” on the other hand, tends to connote the inhabited places on the earth—places of solidity and permanence.¹¹

The history of translation of the verb חיל in Psalm 90 is an interesting study. The Septuagint (LXX), along with Aquila, Symmachus, the Vul-

9. The Masoretic Text (MT) is the basis of most Hebrew Bibles today and is the standard text for critical study of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. It is the text of the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, dating to 1008 CE and housed in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg.

10. Deut 32:18 contains similar language—“you have forgotten the God who writhed in labor with you.”

11. Heinz-Josef Fabry and N. van Meeteren, “חיל,” *TDOT*, 4:344–55. See also Prov 8:31.

gate, and the Targums, alters the *polel* form to a *polal* translation, making “the earth and the inhabited world” the subject of a passive *polal* verb rather than the object of an active *polel* verb—thus it (the earth and the inhabited world) “was formed, or came to birth.”¹² Were the LXX translators and those who followed wrong in their reinterpretation of the text? Eugene Boring posits that language suggestive of YHWH as what he terms “earth mother” may have “sounded too much like Canaanite or Greek fertility goddesses to the LXX translators.”¹³

The concerns of the LXX translators, however, were not the concerns of later translators. While they maintained the Masoretic Text’s active verbal aspect, they failed to convey fully the rich meaning of לָּבַד in Psalm 90. English translations, beginning with the Geneva Bible of 1560 and continuing with the Common English Bible of 2011, render the verb variously as “you formed,” “you brought forth,” and “you birthed.” The *qal*, *polel*, *polal*, and *hifil* stem forms of לָּבַד , in almost every instance of their occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, are used in reference to the birthing process,¹⁴ and where they are not, they connote twirling, writhing, or great distress.¹⁵ Verse 2 of Psalm 90 thus depicts the creator God writhing in childbirth, bringing forth the world.¹⁶

12. Interestingly, this passive translation was retained in the Douay-Rheims translation of 1610 and the New Jerusalem Bible produced in 1985.

13. M. Eugene Boring, “Psalm 90—Reinterpreting Tradition,” *Mid-Stream* 40 (January–April 2001): 119–28, at 123. He quotes Andre Lacocque, who maintained that to consider the development of Scripture as complete with the establishment of its final redaction is “almost as though one were to give the funeral eulogy of someone yet alive.” André Lacocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xii. He refers also to the words of Northrop Frye, who maintains that every text is a “picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning.” See Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 427.

14. See Deut 32:18; Isa 13:8; 23:4; 26:17, 18; 45:10; 51:2; 54:1; 66:7, 8; Jer 4:31; Job 15:7; 39:1; Ps 51:5 (7); Prov 8:24, 25; 25:23.

15. See Deut 2:25; Isa 23:5; Jer 4:19; 5:3, 22; 51:29; Joel 2:6.

16. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 431, translates the phrase as “you travailed with.” Various Christian communities’ patriarchal conceptions of God seem to be so strong that they have missed or downplayed a powerful feminine image of the God of the Israelites. L. Juliana M. Claassens, in *Mourner, Mother, Midwife* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), asserts that female images, e.g., birthing, take on greater prominence in exilic/postexilic experience of traumatized Israel. See especially chapter 3: “God as Mother.”

The feminine imagery continues as the singer of Psalm 90 reminds God of the fragility of human life. The terms “humankind” (אִנוּשׁ)¹⁷ and “mortals” (בְּנֵי-אָדָם) in verse 3 are reminiscent of Psalm 8’s and Psalm 144’s wonder at humanity’s place in the created order.¹⁸ In 90:16 the psalm singers request that God reveal God’s works (פְּעֻלֹתַיִם) and majesty (הַדָּר) to the people and their children (בְּנֵיהֶם). While all members of the Israelite community were concerned with the survival of the people, a feminist reading of these verses highlights the vulnerability of the unborn, newborn, and young children and their mothers during difficult times like the wilderness wanderings and the Babylonian exile. Infant and mother mortality rates were high in the ancient Near East, and thus I suggest that when a woman in exile in Babylon heard the words of Psalm 90 her mind conjured up images of the great vulnerability of women, newborns, and young children, each of whom were important keys to the survival of ongoing generations.

The central focus of Psalm 90, in my opinion and that of many others, is verses 11–12.¹⁹ The psalmist acknowledges the power (עֹז) of God’s anger and requests of God, according to the NRSV, “teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart [לִבֵּב חֲכָמָה].” This commentator suggests a translation of “teach us to number our days so that we may approach what we do with a heart of wisdom.” The phrase “a heart of wisdom” is unique to Psalm 90 but, interestingly, the phrase “wise of heart [לִבֵּב חֲכָמָה]” is used four times in the Exodus narratives to describe the craftsmen who constructed the tabernacle and fashioned its furnishings.²⁰ Do the words of Psalm 90:12—“and we will approach what we do with a heart of wisdom”—suggest that the people were being admonished to be content with whatever tasks and endeavors confronted them daily? Erich Zenger writes: “If ‘wisdom’ means the art of living, then the ability here asked of God to say yes to life and to live that yes (in the midst of the many things that deserve a no) is Wisdom’s art of living par excellence.”²¹ The closing words of Psalm 90 appear to validate such an understanding of “a heart of wisdom.” In verse 14 the people ask God to “satisfy us” (שָׂבַע)

17. The text of the NRSV has “us,” while the MT has “humankind” (אִנוּשׁ).

18. See Ps 8:4 and Ps 144:3.

19. See, for instance, Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 422.

20. See Exod 28:3; 31:6; 36:1, 2. In addition, Woman Wisdom is depicted in Prov 8:30 as אֲבוּן, “master worker” (NRSV) or “master of crafts” (CEB).

21. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 423.

“with your steadfast love [חַסֵּד²²], so that we may rejoice [רִנֵּן] and be glad [שִׂמְחָה],” and in verse 17 they request that God “prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!” The word translated “prosper” is כּוֹן, which means “to establish, set up, fix in place.” The singers of Psalm 90 were asking God not for prosperity but rather for a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment for the works of their hands, whatever those works might be.

Thus with Moses’s words in Psalm 90 the women and men in the time of the wilderness wanderings and the Babylonian exile cry out to God, who birthed the world (v. 2), to remember that they are mere mortals (v. 3) and to turn and change God’s mind (v. 13) about their present situation. In the meantime they ask that God give them “a heart of wisdom” (v. 12) so that they might find meaning and importance in the work of their hands (v. 17).

***“Sister, Your Silence Is Not
a Show of Strength”***

*“Lord, you have been
our dwelling place in all
generations. . . . Satisfy
us in the morning with
your steadfast love, so that
we may rejoice and be glad
all our days.” (Ps 90:1, 14)*

Women in my culture are taught as they are brought up that home affairs are private. Thus they often do not share their problems with others but rather feel they must be strong and deal with them on their own. This is the case even in many Christian communities, and thus we women dress up in our finest clothes and sit together in silence, pretending that everything in life is fine because to do otherwise would show a lack of faith. The

sad reality is that many women are abused in their homes: wives in polygamous marriages, subject to incest and rape, left to raise children on their own, poorly educated, and forced to work long hours to provide food and shelter for their families. These women sitting together silently in church honestly look good. But do not be fooled, every imaginable secret is found in the house of God. My sister is an abused wife, my sister is in a polygamous marriage, my sister has been raped, my sister is a substance addict, my sister is filled with insecurities and depression, my sister is hungry, my sister’s husband has abandoned her.

Sister, your silence is not a show of strength. Sister, sharing

22. For a discussion of חַסֵּד, see the commentaries for Pss 92:2 and 103:8.

your pain is not a lack of faith. So many women live with their situation of pain for so long that they come to believe that that is how life was meant to be for them and that they have no other choice. God's people have problems, and what we all need to do is face them. They come with the turf of a world that has been turned upside down by sin. It is not a matter of lack of faith or not being saved. It is a fact of life in a fallen world. The church is filled with private problems, with practical, real-life issues. In chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews great "heroes of the faith" are celebrated: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab,

Gideon, David, Samuel, the prophets, and great women of faith. Each of them faced difficulties, but they did not sit in silence. They spoke up and they acted and God blessed them.

The singers of Psalm 90 recall that God has been their "dwelling place" for all generations, recall their fragile human state, and cry out to God to "satisfy" so that they can "rejoice." Stand up, sister, and don't be afraid to speak! Express your anger, your fear, your doubt, your pain. Demand that God satisfy you so that you may rejoice!

Thanyani Mahanya

Psalm 91

Psalm 91 seems to offer an answer to the people's plea to God in Psalm 90:13 and 14 to "turn [שׁוּב] . . . have compassion [נַחֵם]. . . and satisfy [שָׂבַע] us in the morning," thus affirming Erich Zenger's characterization of Psalm 91 as "promise."²³ In words of confident praise the singer of the psalm celebrates the many ways that God cares for and ultimately "satisfies" (שָׂבַע) (v. 16) those who trust.

Psalm 91 opens in verses 1-2 with vivid imagery of a God who shelters, delivers, and provides refuge. The verses also present an awkward verbal construction: masculine singular participle ("you who live," יֹשֵׁב), followed by a third-person masculine singular imperfect ("who abide," יִהְיוּן), and then a first-person singular imperfect ("[I] will say," אֶמַּר). Hermann Gunkel suggests that the awkward verbal construction of verses 1-2 could be resolved by adding אֶשְׂרִי to the beginning of verse 1 and altering the Masoretic Text's first-person common singular imperfect form of אֶמַּר in verse 2 to a masculine singular participle—thereby not

23. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 442.

Psalm 91:1-16

- ¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
²will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
⁵You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
⁸You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
¹⁰no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
¹²On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

requiring an emendation of the consonantal text.²⁴ This would render a translation of "Content is the one who lives in the shelter of the Most High; that one will abide in the shadow of the Almighty, saying to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress.'" Whether אֲשֶׁר־י was omitted or is simply to be understood (Gunkel does not make this clear), such a conjecture's wisdom ties²⁵ bolster the argument that Psalm 91 is an answer to Psalm 90:12's request for "a heart of wisdom." If Psalm 91 begins with

24. Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski, MLBS (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 222–35.

25. See Pss 1, 112, and 119, for example.

אשרי (overt or implied), then we are able to read its words as the path to that “heart of wisdom” requested of God by the singers of Psalm 90:12.

Verse 1 of Psalm 91 states that the one who lives in the shelter of the Most High (על יי) will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty (שדי).²⁶ Some suggest that the basic meaning of the word “Almighty—Shaddai” is “breast” (שד),²⁷ while others maintain that “mountain” is the referent²⁸ and thus understand “Shaddai” as “God of the mountains.” But let us move backward to Psalm 90:2 and then forward to Psalm 91:4 as we attempt to find a meaning for verse 1’s use of “Shaddai.” Psalm 90:2 depicts God birthing (חיל) the earth and the inhabitable world, and in verses 3, 12, and 14 the psalmists request that God give “humankind [אנוש]” and “mortals [בני-אדם]” a “heart of wisdom [לבב חכמה]” and that God “satisfy [שבט] humanity.”

The epithet “Shaddai” in Psalm 91:1 may be understood as a reference to the nurturing, nourishing God who gave birth to the earth (Ps 90:2) and now suckles it—satisfies it—as it learns to have a “heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). References that tie nurturing breasts to God and God’s goodness are numerous in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 49:25 connects the blessing of Shaddai with the breasts (שדים) and the womb (רחם). In Isaiah 66:11, Zion is a “consoling breast” (שד). Naomi laments in Ruth 1:20-21, “Shaddai [שדי] has dealt bitterly with me [and] . . . brought calamity upon me,” a reflection perhaps of her now “barren” state, and in Psalm 22:9-10 the psalmist says to God: “you kept me safe on my mother’s breasts [שדי אמי]. On you I was cast from my birth [רחם].”²⁹ Job 20:21 suggests that the children of the wicked will “drink the wrath” of “Shaddai” (שדי).³⁰

Verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 91 employ avian imagery to depict the dangers that especially threaten young birds—the fowler’s snare and the threat of predators—to provide assurance that God will shelter the psalmist with protective wings (כנפים) and pinions and will ensure safety and

26. Only here and in Ps 68:15 is God called “Shaddai” in the Psalter.

27. See especially Harriet Lutzky, “Shadday as a Goddess Epithet,” *VT* 48 (1998): 15–36; and Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 60–62.

28. See, e.g., Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 52–53.

29. The Midrash on Ps 22 attributes the psalm to Esther. *Esth. Rab.* 6:5; *y. B. Meg.* 13a.

30. References to God as “Shaddai” are most numerous in the books of Genesis (6x) and Job (23x). Interestingly, the only reference to God as Shaddai outside the biblical text is found in the Deir Allah inscriptions.

nurturing.³¹ While there are varying understandings of winged-god images in the ancient Near East,³² in the context of Psalms 90 and 91 $\Upsilon\eta\omega\eta$'s winged protection in 91:4 is best understood as the protection a mother gives to the child she has born, suckled, and taught to live with wisdom in a world where adversity presents itself on every side. Thus the psalmist will not fear, in the words of verses 5 and 6, the terror and pestilence of the night or the arrow and destruction of the day.

The words of verses 7-13 continue the theme of protection by the birthing, nurturing God: the wicked will be punished (v. 8), no evil will come near your tent (v. 10), you will not dash your foot against a stone (v. 12), and you will tread on the lion and the adder (v. 13). J. Clinton McCann writes: "The psalmist affirms that no place, no time, no circumstance that befalls us is beyond God's ability to protect us."³³ God's repeated promise to care for and protect the psalm singers leads to the declaration in verse 16 that God will finally "satisfy [שבע]"—the very request made by the psalmists in 90:14. These words of promise, of course, are heard in dissonance by those whom God has not satisfied in the midst of so many trials and setbacks in life. But they perhaps offer a hope of the eventual-ity of satisfaction to those who seek to live with a "heart of wisdom."

Psalm 92

Psalm 92, a thanksgiving psalm, culminates the three-psalm grouping of Psalms 90–92 that begins with lament (Ps 90) and continues with promise (Ps 91).³⁴ In Psalm 92 all that is asked for in Psalm 90 and promised in Psalm 91 comes to fruition.

The superscription provides a description of the psalm, "A psalm," and further indicates its function, "A song for the Sabbath Day." The psalm opens with calls to praise (vv. 1-5) and continues with descriptive

31. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 430. The image of God's sheltering wings occurs six times in the Psalter, in Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; and 91:4. In addition, Jesus employs sheltering wings imagery in his lament over Jerusalem in Matt 23:37 and Luke 13:34.

32. See Joel LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2010), for a full treatment of the varying viewpoints.

33. J. Clinton McCann Jr., "The Book of Psalms," in *NIB*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 1047. See McCann further, p. 1048, for commentary on the use of vv. 11-12 in Luke 4:9-12. See also Matt 4:6.

34. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 442.

*Psalm 92:1-15**A Psalm.**A Song for the Sabbath Day.*

¹It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O
Most High;
²to declare your steadfast love in the
morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
³to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
⁴For you, O LORD, have made me
glad by your work;

at the works of your hands I sing
for joy.

⁵How great are your works, O LORD!
Your thoughts are very deep!
⁶The dullard cannot know,
the stupid cannot understand this:
⁷though the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction
forever,
⁸but you, O LORD, are on high
forever.

words about YHWH's good works on behalf of the psalm singer and the righteous ones (vv. 6-15).

The words of verse 1 are rich with references back to Psalms 90 and 91 that precede it and glimpses forward into the enthronement psalms (Pss 93–100) that follow. The epithet “Most High” (עליון) recalls the opening words of Psalm 91 (v. 1), while “name” (שם) echoes the psalm's closing words (v. 14). In the middle of Psalm 92:1 the verb translated “sing praises” (זמר) prepares readers for the songs of praise they will encounter in the enthronement psalms (see Pss 95:2 and 98:4, 5). The retrospect and prospect continue throughout Psalm 92. In verse 2 the psalm singer celebrates YHWH's steadfast love (חסד) in the morning (בקר) and YAHWEH's faithfulness by night (לילה), confirming Psalm 91:5's promise of protection from the terror of the night (לילה) and the arrow by day (יומם). A key word in this verse is “steadfast love” (חסד). It has to do with relationship—one based on the covenant made between God and the Israelites at Sinai. The word describes both who God is and what God does as well as who the people of God are to be and what they are expected to do; thus it encompasses both the internal character and the external actions that are required to maintain a life-sustaining relationship between God and people.

Psalm 92:3-4 invoke the lute, the harp, and the lyre in praise of God's good care, just like the lyre, the trumpets, and the horn in Psalm 98:5, 6. The verses' “glad[ness]” (שמחה) and “sing[ing] for joy” (רנין), along with the cause of that gladness and joyful singing, God's “work” (פעל, v. 4), recall the “rejoicing” (רנין) and “gladness” (שמחה) of Psalm 90:14 and the

- ⁹For your enemies, O LORD,
for your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.
- ¹⁰But you have exalted my horn like
that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me fresh oil.
- ¹¹My eyes have seen the downfall of
my enemies;
my ears have heard the doom of
my evil assailants.
- ¹²The righteous flourish like the palm
tree,
and grow like a cedar in
Lebanon.
- ¹³They are planted in the house of the
LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our
God.
- ¹⁴In old age they still produce fruit;
they are always green and full of
sap,
- ¹⁵showing that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no
unrighteousness in him.

praise of God's "work" (פעל) in Psalm 90:16. Additionally, the psalmist's anticipation of gladness and joyful singing in Psalm 92:4 is realized in the gladness expressed in Psalms 96:11 and 97:1, 11, 12, and the joyful singing in Psalms 95:1; 96:12; 98:4, 8.

An interesting occurrence of joyful singing (רין) as we find in Psalm 92:4 is in Proverbs 1:20. There we read that (Woman) Wisdom "cries out" (רין) in the street, proclaiming her words of admonition to those who will listen. Further, references to the "dullard" (בער), the "stupid" (כסיל), and the "wicked" (רשעים) in Psalm 92:6, 7 are found frequently in the book of Proverbs³⁵ and perhaps are used purposefully by the singer of Psalm 92 to tie the words of verse 4 not only to the pleas of the psalmist in Psalm 90 and the joyful words of the enthronement psalms but also to the admonitions of (Woman) Wisdom in Proverbs. Psalm 90:12 requests of God "a heart of wisdom"; Wisdom provides that path but the dullard, the fool, and the wicked cannot know it. Verse 7 of Psalm 92 continues by stating that the wicked sprout like "grass" (עשב), and "evildoers" (פעלי און) "flourish" (צוין), recalling the words of Psalm 90:5, 6 that the years of the psalmist are like "grass" (עשב) that "flourishes" (צוין) in the morning but fades and withers in the evening. Following the path of Wisdom and achieving a "heart of wisdom" results in a very different fate.

35. "Dullard" occurs in Prov 12:1 and 30:2; "fool" is found some fifty times in the book (see, e.g., 1:22; 9:13; 12:23; 17:21; 26:1; 29:11), and the very common "wicked" occurs over seventy times (see, e.g., 3:33; 10:6; 12:5; 15:6; 21:4; 29:7).

The words of verses 12-14 of Psalm 92 are particularly intriguing from a gender standpoint. Here the “righteous” (צַדִּיק), in contrast to the “dullard,” the “stupid,” the “wicked,” and “evildoers” (92:6-7), are likened to the palm tree and the cedar of Lebanon. The two are common images of strength and longevity in the ancient Near East, set alongside one another in poetic parallelism. The palm tree (תָּמָר, *tamar*) here is most likely the date palm,³⁶ a long-lived tree that provided many staple items of the ancient Near Eastern diet for both humans and animals as well as wood for various household projects. It is also a symbol of life-giving water in the biblical text. Recall that just after crossing the Reed Sea the wandering Israelites came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees.³⁷ Tamar (תָּמָר) is, additionally, the name of three female biblical characters: the daughter-in-law of Judah in Genesis 38, the daughter of David in 2 Samuel 13, and the daughter of Absalom in 2 Samuel 14.³⁸ The word is used in Song of Songs 7:7-8 as a metaphor for a desirable woman, where we read: “You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters.” Judges 4:5 states that Deborah sat under a palm tree as she judged Israel.³⁹ Thus the palm tree was often associated with the feminine and fertility.⁴⁰

The cedars (צִדְדִּים) of Lebanon convey a more masculine imagery. They were connected with longevity, majesty, and strength and were symbols of royal power. King Hiram of Tyre sent wood from the cedars of Lebanon to build David’s palace (2 Sam 5:11; 7:2, 7) and to Solomon for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5:6-10). The singer of Psalm 29 cries, “The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon” (v. 5), and in Song of Songs the protagonist describes her lover’s appearance as “like Lebanon, choice as the cedars” (5:15).⁴¹ Thus the palm tree and the cedar of Lebanon were two powerful images of the strength and resilience of the people of God—one feminine, the other masculine.

36. Richard D. Patterson, “Psalm 92:12-15: The Flourishing of the Righteous,” *BSac* 166 (2009): 271–88, at 275.

37. See Exod 15:27 and Num 33:9. See also Deut 34:3 (Jericho) and Judg 1:16; 3:13.

38. See Gen 38:6; 2 Sam 13:1; 2 Sam 14:27.

39. See also Isa 9:14 and Joel 1:12 as examples of judgments on the people of Israel.

40. See also Peter Schäfer, *Mirrors of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

41. See also Judg 9:15; 2 Kgs 19:23; Job 40:17; Pss 104:16; 148:9; Isa 2:13; 14:8; 37:24.

The tree imagery of Psalm 92 recalls the metaphoric imagery of the wisdom psalm that opens the Psalter in which the righteous person, the one called “happy” (אַשְׁרֵי, Ps 1:1), is likened to “a tree planted by streams of water” (1:3). In addition, the righteous person in Psalm 1 “meditates” (הִגִּיד, v. 2) on the Torah, the same verbal root that occurs in Psalm 90:9, “our years come to an end like a sigh [הִגִּיד],” and in Psalm 92:3 “to the melody [*higgiyon*, from the root הִגִּיד] of the lyre,” perhaps suggesting an additional tie between the Psalter’s opening words of wisdom and the wisdom elements of Psalms 90 and 92 (see the introduction, pp. xlv–xlvi).⁴²

Psalm 92 continues in verse 13 with an assurance that the righteous will be planted in the “house” of YHWH and will thrive in its courtyards. Verse 14 promises that “in old age they [will] still produce fruit” and will be “always green and full of sap.” The promised fertility of the righteous in Psalm 92 renders null and void Psalm 90’s lament that “You sweep [our years] away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers” (vv. 5-6).⁴³

Those especially concerned with the vulnerability of the young, the newborn, and those yet to be born in the exilic community in Babylon, and those concerned with the vulnerable in today’s world, hear in the words of Psalm 90 the admonition that the next generation will indeed survive *if* the people embrace the “wise heart—heart of wisdom” for which the singer of Psalm 90:12 asks and will be “satisfied” (Ps 90:14) with the “work of our hands” (90:17); accept Psalm 91’s promise of being “satisfied” with long life (Ps 91:16); and embrace the assurance of Psalm 92 that “the righteous [will] flourish” (92:12). Having heard the words of assurance that God will satisfy their needs, the people now offer praise to the source of their hopeful expectation for the future in the words of book 4’s enthronement psalms (Pss 93–100).

42. The root הִגִּיד occurs only twenty-five times in the Psalter.

43. See also Ps 92:8.

Psalms 93–100

God Is Sovereign: Let the Earth Give a Ringing Cry

Psalms 93 and 95–99, along with Psalm 47, are categorized as enthronement psalms. They depict YHWH as sovereign over creation (Pss 47:2; 93:1; 94:2; 95:4-5; 96:10), more majestic than all other gods (Pss 95:3; 96:4-5; 97:9), able to conquer the chaos of raging waters (Pss 93:3-4; 95:5; 98:7-8), and an arbiter in matters pertaining to human welfare (Pss 94:2, 10; 96:13; 99:4). The enthronement psalms have five basic characteristics:

1. Concern with all the earth, all peoples, or all nations
2. References to other gods
3. Songs of exaltation and kingship
4. Characteristic acts of YHWH: making, establishing, sitting, judging, etc.
5. Expressions of the attitude of praise before the heavenly king¹

1. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC 20 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 474.

This commentary will include Psalms 94 and 100 in its examination of the enthronement psalms, offering rationales for reading the somewhat disturbing Psalm 94 within the context of praise of the enthronement psalms and understanding Psalm 100 as a closing doxological psalm for the group.

According to the storyline of the Psalter (see the introduction, pp. 1–1v), book 4 is set in the period of the Babylonian exile and its psalms call to mind the time of the wilderness wanderings, the two times in the history of the ancient Israelites when they were outside the land promised to them by God, anticipating a return. Three psalms in book 4 precede the enthronement psalms. Psalm 90 calls on the God who, according to verse 2, “formed” (“birthed,” חיל) the “earth” (ארץ) and the (habitable) “world” (הבל) to remember that the psalm singers are mere humans (אנוש) and mortals (בני־אדם) (v. 3). The psalmists ask God in verse 12 to give them a “wise heart” (“heart of wisdom,” לבב חכמה) and plead with God to “turn” (שוב) and “have compassion” (רחם) (v. 13) and to “satisfy” them (שבע) (v. 14).

Psalm 91’s words of promise follow; the God who birthed the earth now suckles it (שרי, v. 1), protects it under motherly wings (כנפיה, vv. 3–4), and finally “satisfies” (שבע, v. 16). Psalm 92, a psalm of thanksgiving, provides rich connections to Psalms 90 and 91 and glimpses of what the reader will encounter in the enthronement psalms. The words “Most High” (על־יון) and “name” (שם) in Psalm 92:1 echo the beginning and ending of Psalm 91 (vv. 1 and 14), while the “gladness” (שמחה) and “joyful singing” (רנין) at God’s “work” (פעל) in Psalm 92:4 recall the words of Psalm 90:14–16 and anticipate the words of Psalms 96:11; 97:8; 100:2 (שמחה) and 95:1; 96:12; 98:8; 100:2 (רנין). Psalm 92 continues with the promise that, in contrast to the “wicked,” who will sprout like the “grass” (עשב, v. 7) that, according to Psalm 90:5–6, “fades and withers,” the righteous, female and male, will be planted in the “house of the LORD” (v. 13) and even in old age will “flourish” and be “green and full of sap” (v. 14).

Psalms 90–92 thus may be read as words of assurance to the exilic community that God creates, nourishes, protects, and teaches to have a “heart of wisdom” and then ultimately “satisfies,” regardless of life’s exigencies. Having heard the words of assurance that God will satisfy their needs in Psalms 90–92, the people now offer praise to the source of their hopeful expectation for the future as they celebrate God’s sovereignty over them and all the earth in the words of book 4’s enthronement psalms.

Psalm 93

Verse 1 begins with the words, “The LORD is king [יהוה מלך].” The word translated “is king” is actually a verbal form (as it is in Pss 96:10; 97:1; 99:1)² and is better translated as “reigns,” as we find in the CEB, the NIV, the NASB, and the KJV.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

The difference between “is king” and “reigns” at first glance may seem minor, but “is king” immediately brings to mind male images of God. Since the phrase יהוה מלך is a metaphor using words to attempt to describe God’s relationship to the world and its inhabitants, a translation of מלך that evinces a broader metaphorical conception, such as “reigns,” allows for both feminine and masculine metaphorical imagery of God. The metaphors the psalm singers use to describe and attempt to understand God are human constructs, employing images and ideas that other human readers or hearers are able to appropriate from their own life experiences. The biblical text is the product of a male-dominated undertaking; therefore we as readers and interpreters of the Psalter must be sensitive to its use of language about God. For more on metaphors for God, see the introduction, pp. xlvi–xlviii.

Verse 1 ends, “He has established [בין] the world [תבל]; it shall never be moved [מוט].” A translation that encompasses the rich meaning of the Hebrew words is “As well, the habitable world [תבל] stands firm [בין]; it will not be shaken [מוט].” תבל, which refers to the earth’s habitable spaces, places of solidity and permanence for God’s creation,³ occurs fifteen times in the Psalter, with six occurrences in the six enthronement psalms.⁴ The only occurrence of the word in book 4 outside of the enthronement psalms is in Psalm 90:2, where we read that God birthed (חיל) the earth (ארץ) and the habitable world (תבל). Psalm 93:1 states confidently that this habitable world, birthed by God,⁵ is firmly established; it cannot be moved.⁶

2. The noun form of מלך occurs in Pss 95:3; 98:6; 99:4.

3. Heinz Josef Fabry and N. van Meeteren, “תבל,” *TDOT*, 15:557–64.

4. Pss 93:1; 96:10, 13; 97:4; 98:7, 9.

5. See the commentary for Ps 90:2.

6. See Ps 96:10, where these words are repeated as a further affirmation of God’s sovereignty over the world.

Psalm 93:1-5

<p>¹The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; ²your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. ³The floods have lifted up, O LORD,</p>	<p>the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. ⁴More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD! ⁵Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.</p>
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Verses 3-4 abound with references to water. Verse 3's "The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring" conjures up images of overwhelming inundation and potential death.⁷ Water was a common metaphor for chaos in ancient Near Eastern stories—chaos that needed to be overcome in order to create the world.⁸ But according to verse 4, "more majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD." In the context of Psalm 93 and in the overall context of book 4, the words of verses 3 and 4 assure the reader and hearer that in the process of birthing the habitable world God overcame the primordial chaos, and the waters that threatened are less majestic than the majesty of God. An added note of assurance to the readers and hearers of the psalm is the fivefold repetition of YHWH ("the LORD" in the NRSV), God's personal name revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14) in verses 1, 3, 4, and 5.

Psalm 94

Most commentaries do not include Psalm 94 in the grouping of enthronement psalms in book 4. The psalm is classified as a community lament and further as an imprecatory or vengeance psalm, based on

7. See also Pss 42:7; 46:2-3; 69:1-2; 88:7.

8. See, for example, the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish*, the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, and the Egyptian stories of Ra and Apep. In Gen 1:2-3 we read "and darkness was over the face of the deep [תהום] and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light.'" See also Job 38:8-11; Ps 77:16; 104:5-9; Prov 8:27-29; Jer 5:22.

Psalm 94:1-23

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| <p>¹O LORD, you God of vengeance,
you God of vengeance, shine forth!</p> <p>²Rise up, O judge of the earth;
give to the proud what they
deserve!</p> <p>³O LORD, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?</p> <p>⁴They pour out their arrogant words;
all the evildoers boast.</p> <p>⁵They crush your people, O LORD,
and afflict your heritage.</p> <p>⁶They kill the widow and the stranger,
they murder the orphan,</p> | <p>⁷and they say, “The LORD does not see;
the God of Jacob does not
perceive.”</p> <p>⁸Understand, O dullest of the people;
fools, when will you be wise?</p> <p>⁹He who planted the ear, does he not
hear?
He who formed the eye, does he
not see?</p> <p>¹⁰He who disciplines the nations,
he who teaches knowledge to
humankind,
does he not chastise?</p> |
|--|---|

the twofold use of the word “vengeance” (נָקָם) in verse 1.⁹ Are words of vengeance appropriate in a celebration of the sovereignty of God? In addition, Psalm 94 makes no mention of God as sovereign (מֶלֶךְ) as do the other psalms classified as “enthronement.” A number of characteristics of Psalm 94, though, confirm its integral function within the group.

First, while Psalm 93 celebrates God’s sovereignty and majesty and affirms the stability of the (habitable) world, Psalm 94 calls on God to act on Israel’s behalf against the proud (v. 2), the wicked (vv. 3, 16, 20), those who “pour out their arrogant words” and “boast” (v. 4), those who “crush” and “afflict” (v. 5), those who “kill the widow and the stranger” and “murder the orphan” (v. 6), the “dullest of the people” and “fools” (v. 8), and the evildoers and “those who contrive mischief” (v. 20).¹⁰ The word translated “proud” (הָאִוִּי) in 94:2 is from the same verbal root as the word translated “majesty” in 93:1, while “crush” (שָׁדַח) in reference to what the wicked do to the people of God in 94:5 is the same word used in 93:3 to describe the roaring of the floods. Thus the two psalms contrast the proud and wicked who assert their own “pride” and “crush” the people with the “majestic” God who calms the “roaring” chaos of threatening waters.

9. For a full discussion of “imprecatory,” see the commentary for Ps 109.

10. God as a God of vengeance is a common theme in the Old Testament. See, for example, Deut 32:35; Pss 8:3; 18:48; 99:8; 149:7; Isa 1:24; 34:8; 35:4; 61:2; Jer 5:29; 11:20; Ezek 25:17; Nah 1:2.

Psalm 94:1-23 (cont.)

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|---|---|
| <p>¹¹The LORD knows our thoughts,
that they are but an empty breath.</p> <p>¹²Happy are those whom you
discipline, O LORD,
and whom you teach out of your
law,</p> <p>¹³giving them respite from days of
trouble,
until a pit is dug for the wicked.</p> <p>¹⁴For the LORD will not forsake his
people;
he will not abandon his heritage;</p> | <p>¹⁵for justice will return to the
righteous,
and all the upright in heart will
follow it.</p> <p>¹⁶Who rises up for me against the
wicked?
Who stands up for me against
evildoers?</p> <p>¹⁷If the LORD had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in
the land of silence.</p> <p>¹⁸When I thought, “My foot is slipping,”</p> |
|---|---|

In the ancient Near East a people’s stability, livelihood, and protection were ensured by allegiance to the ruler of the city or district, the (habitable) land of their inheritance. Being subject to the ruler guaranteed a secure way of life.¹¹ If people moved beyond their own city or district they were likely to come under a different ruler, one who might or might not look favorably on them.

When the Israelites left Egypt and settled in the Promised Land one of the first issues they faced was how to have a ruler who would guarantee their safety and a good way of life (1 Sam 8–16). The prophet Samuel anointed Saul and then David as king over the Israelites, but when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the people captive such a protected and guaranteed life disappeared. Israel no longer had its own king—its own protector. Its people were subjects of a foreign king. Imagine the fear, the questions, the searching. Who would protect them, guarantee their livelihood and survival as individuals and as a people, and mete out justice? Embracing God as sovereign was a way for the Israelites in captivity in Babylon to maintain a sense of identity as royal subjects, not of the Babylonian king, but of their own divine ruler.

Specifically named in the complaint against the wicked in Psalm 94 is their oppression of the widow (אלמנה), the stranger (גר), and orphans (יתום) (v. 6). Repeatedly in the biblical text these three are named as the most vulnerable in society, those who require special consideration and

11. See Pss 72; 107:33-43; 145 for models of an ideal sovereign in ancient Israel.

<p>your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.</p> <p>¹⁹When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.</p> <p>²⁰Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who contrive mischief by statute?</p> <p>²¹They band together against the life of the righteous,</p>	<p>and condemn the innocent to death.</p> <p>²²But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.</p> <p>²³He will repay them for their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness;</p> <p>the LORD our God will wipe them out.</p>
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care.¹² Such care was especially important to the women in the community, and we thus may hear the voices of women as well as those of men calling on God as sovereign to “right this wrong.”

Second, Psalm 94 employs language that connects it to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 and 33, reinforcing book 4’s ties to Moses.¹³ The singer of Psalm 94 calls on the God of “vengeance” (נִקְמָה) in verse 1 to act on behalf of the people and states in verse 18 that God kept her “foot” (רֵגֶל) from “slipping” (מוֹט). In Deuteronomy 32:35, Moses speaks these words of God to the people, “Vengeance [נִקְמָה] is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot [רֵגֶל] shall slip [מוֹט].” Psalm 94’s use of the words “vengeance” in verse 1 and “foot” and “slip” in verse 18 is framed by “foot” in Psalm 91:12, “moved [מוֹט, slip]” in Psalm 93:1, and “vengeance” (“avenger” in the NRSV) in Psalm 99:8, forming something of an *inclusio* with a center in the words of Psalm 94.¹⁴ Additionally, the psalmist’s request of YHWH in 94:1 to “shine forth” (יִפֶּעַ) parallels Moses’s description of YHWH’s appearance from Mount Sinai (Deut 33:2).

Third, Psalm 94 uses wisdom language echoing that found in the opening psalms of book 4, particularly Psalm 92. The dullard (בֶּעֶר) and the stupid/fool (בִּסִּיל) who cannot know or understand in 92:6 are called on to do so in 94:8.¹⁵ The wicked (רָשָׁעִים) and evildoers (פְּעֻלֵי אֵיזֵן) who sprout

12. See, for instance, Lev 19:10, 34; Exod 22:21; Deut 24:17; Isa 1:23; Mal 3:5.

13. See the commentary for Ps 90.

14. Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, StBibLit 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 40.

15. While “dullard” (בֶּעֶר) occurs only twice in the book of Proverbs (12:1; 30:2), “stupid/fool” (בִּסִּיל) occurs some fifty times.

like grass and flourish in 92:7 and exult and pour out arrogant words in 94:3–4 find their end with YHWH’s justice in 94:16. Both psalms contrast the fate of the wicked (רשעים; Pss 92:7; 94:16) with the fate of the righteous (צדיק/צדיק; Pss 92:12; 94:15).¹⁶

Verse 12 of Psalm 94 is a wisdom saying introduced by “happy” (אשרי) and declaring that the “law” (תורה) is the path to a life well-lived, paralleling the wisdom sayings in Psalms 1 and 119. The Psalter equates wisdom and Torah and invites the reader or hearer to recall the words of Woman Wisdom, who, according to Proverbs 8, was there at creation, God’s “delight” (שעשעי, v. 30) who in turn “delights” (שעשעי, v. 31) in the “human race” (בני־אדם, v. 31). Kathleen O’Connor writes of Woman Wisdom that in all the texts in which she appears “the most important aspect of her existence is her relationships. . . . She is closely joined to the created world. . . . She exists in it as if it were a tapestry of connected threads, patterned into an intricate whole of which she is the center.”¹⁷

The word “delight” (שעשעי) occurs five times in Psalm 119,¹⁸ always in reference to the Torah (the law), further confirming the connection between Wisdom and Torah. At creation God delighted in Wisdom, who in turn delighted in humanity. That delight continues with adherence to the Torah. Claudia Camp suggests that, in the Psalter, Wisdom (identified with Torah), actually replaces the earthly king as the mediator between God and humanity.¹⁹ Thus in the context of book 4’s enthronement psalms, Psalm 94 affirms God’s sovereignty and status as judge and arbiter (vv. 1–2) but also provides a tangible connection to God in the form of Wisdom as embodied in Torah (vv. 12–15).

Psalm 95

Psalm 95 begins with a call to “sing [רנין]” and “make a joyful noise [רועי]” with “songs of praise [זמר]” (vv. 1–2). The verb רנין in 95:1 recalls the words of Psalm 90:14, in which the people implore God: “Satisfy us in the morning. . . so that we may rejoice [רנין] and be glad all our days.” רנין, better

16. “Wicked” (רשעים) and “righteous” (צדיק/צדיק) each occur well over one hundred times in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Qoheleth.

17. Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 59.

18. Verses 24, 77, 92, 143, and 174. Outside of Ps 119 and Prov 8, the term occurs only in Isa 5:7 and Jer 31:20.

19. Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 272–80.

Psalm 95:1-11

- ¹O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the
rock of our salvation!
- ²Let us come into his presence with
thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him
with songs of praise!
- ³For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- ⁴In his hand are the depths of the
earth;
the heights of the mountains are
his also.
- ⁵The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands
have formed.
- ⁶O come, let us worship and bow
down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our
Maker!
- ⁷For he is our God,
and we are the people of his
pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
- O that today you would listen to his
voice!
- ⁸Do not harden your hearts, as at
Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the
wilderness,
- ⁹when your ancestors tested me,
and put me to the proof, though
they had seen my work.
- ¹⁰For forty years I loathed that
generation
and said, “They are a people
whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways.”
- ¹¹Therefore in my anger I swore,
“They shall not enter my rest.”

translated as “give a ringing cry,” is almost always used in a positive sense in the Hebrew Bible and is connected with joyous outbursts—never with cries of oppression, warfare, etc.²⁰ An interesting occurrence of רִנָּן is in Proverbs 1:20. There we read that Wisdom “cries out [רִנָּן] in the streets,” proclaiming her words of admonition to those who would listen. The occurrence of רִנָּן in Psalm 95:1 and Proverbs 1:20 signals for the reader or hearer ties between Wisdom’s “ringing cry” in Proverbs, Psalm 94’s wisdom call to heed the “law” (הוֹרָה, vv. 12-15), and the “ringing cry” (רִנָּן) celebrating God’s sovereignty over creation in Psalm 95.

Psalm 95:3 states, like Psalm 93:1, that the God of Israel is sovereign (מֶלֶךְ)²¹ but adds that God is sovereign over all gods (בְּלֹא־אֱלֹהִים). Verses 4 and 5 echo the creation language of Psalm 93, but with words that speak less about chaotic waters and more about God’s creative work—“the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains,” “the sea . . . and the dry land, which his hands have formed.” The only direct mention of

20. Jutta Hausmann, “רִנָּן” (*rānan*), *TDOT*, 13:515–22.

21. For a discussion of God as “sovereign,” see the excursus for Ps 93.

water occurs in verse 5, where the psalmist says, “the sea is his, for he made it.” Even so, the final verses of Psalm 95 (vv. 8-11) recall one of the Israelite people’s times of grumbling during the wilderness wandering. The story of Meribah and Massah, related in Exodus 17, is about provision of water. It occurs not long after God delivered the people from the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea (Exod 14–15). The people camped at Rephidim but there was no water to drink. They complained against Moses, saying, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” (Exod 17:3). God instructs Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with his staff, and water comes gushing out (Exod 17:6).²² The God who tamed the chaotic waters at creation (Gen 1:2) and provided water to the thirsty Israelites in the wilderness continues to provide the essential elements of life to God’s people. The words of Psalm 95:8-11 would have been powerful to the Israelites in exile in Babylon and to members of the postexilic community; they remain powerful words today to women and men living in various “wildernesses” and “exiles.”

Psalm 96

Psalm 96:1 calls the people to sing to the Lord a “new song” (שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ).²³ The new song comes as a response to the history lesson in Psalm 95:8-11, which reassures the reader or hearer that the creator God who is sovereign over all can and will tame the chaotic waters and turn them into sustaining waters, and, as Marvin Tate suggests, “The ‘new song’ is to express a new realization and acknowledgment that the future belongs to Yahweh.”²⁴

The words of verses 1-4 affirm the universal nature of God’s rule. “All the earth” is called to sing the new song; thus the reader or hearer is urged to “declare his glory among the nations [גוֹיִם]” and “his marvelous works among all the peoples [עַמִּים]” because YHWH is “above all gods” (כָּל-אֱלֹהִים); see Pss 95:3 and 97:9).²⁵ In 96:9 the psalmist calls on “all the earth” to “tremble” before the Lord. The word translated “tremble” is derived from חָיַל, the same verbal root used in Psalm 90:2 in reference to the beginnings of the world, where God birthed (חָיַל, “formed” in the

22. Other references to Meribah and Massah occur in Num 20:2-13, 24; Deut 6:16; 9:22; 32:15; 33:8; and Pss 81:7; 106:32.

23. The same phrase opens Ps 98.

24. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 514.

25. Judg 11:34; Sam 18:7; and Jer 31:4 indicate that women were the leaders of the victory songs and dances at the conclusion of battles.

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Author

Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford is the Carolyn Ward Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, Georgia. She holds a PhD in biblical studies from Baylor University and is the author of several articles and books on the Psalms. DeClaissé-Walford is an active participant in and part of the steering committee of the Book of Psalms Section of the Society of Biblical Literature and is also the Old Testament editor for the Word Biblical Commentary series.

Volume Editor

Linda M. Maloney, PhD, ThD, is a native of Houston, Texas. She studied at St. Louis University (BA, MA, PhD), the University of South Carolina (MIBS), and Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, where she earned her ThD in New Testament in 1990 under the direction of Prof. Gerhard Lohfink. She has taught at public and private colleges, universities, and seminaries in the United States and was academic editor at Liturgical Press from 1995 to 2005. She is a priest of the Episcopal Church (USA) and lives in Vermont and California.

Series Editor

Barbara E. Reid, OP, is a Dominican Sister of Grand Rapids, Michigan. She holds a PhD in biblical studies from The Catholic University of America and is Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP, Distinguished Professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. Her most recent publications are *Wisdom's Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretation of the Scriptures* (2016) and *Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections on Year A, B, C* (3 vols.; 2011, 2012, 2013). She served as vice president and academic dean at CTU from 2009 to 2018 and as president of the Catholic Biblical Association in 2014–2015.