

HAGGAI AND MALACHI

WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 39

Haggai and Malachi

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A Michael Glazier Book

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*For my Hebrew Bible Prophets students,
with gratitude for all that they have taught me
in the last decade,
and for my parents, with love.*

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CurBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
CV	<i>Communio Viatorum</i>
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
IFT	Introductions in Feminist Theology
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>

<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JOTT</i>	<i>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NWSA</i>	<i>National Women's Studies Association</i>
<i>SBL</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>StBibLit</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Literature</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Foreword

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

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

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

These commentaries on biblical books will retain nonauthoritative, pluralistic viewpoints. And yes, once again, the weight of a dedicated series, to distinguish from collections of standalone 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., Sir 24:23-34; Bar 3:9-4:4; 38:2; 46:4-5; 2 Bar 48:33, 36; 4 Ezra 5:9-10; 13:55; 14:40; 1 Enoch 42.

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

Feminism

There are many different understandings of the term "feminism." The various meanings, aims, and methods have developed exponentially in recent decades. Feminism is a perspective and a movement that springs from a recognition of inequities toward women, and it advocates for changes in whatever structures prevent full human flourishing. Three waves of feminism in the United States are commonly recognized. The first, arising in the mid-nineteenth century and lasting into the early twentieth, was sparked by women's efforts to be involved in the public sphere and to win the right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave focused on civil rights and equality for women. With the third wave, from the 1980s forward, came global feminism and the emphasis on the contextual nature of interpretation. 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.¹ 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 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."² 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 out-

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

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

standing intelligence."³ One story preserved in the Talmud (b. Berachot 10a) tells of how she challenged her husband, Rabbi Meir, when he prayed for the destruction of a sinner. Proffering an alternate interpretation, she argued that Psalm 104:35 advocated praying for the destruction of sin, not the sinner.

In medieval times the first written commentaries on Scripture from a critical feminist point of view emerge. While others may have been produced and passed on orally, they are for the most part lost to us now. Among the earliest preserved feminist writings are those of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), German writer, mystic, and abbess of a Benedictine monastery. She reinterpreted the Genesis narratives in a way that presented women and men as complementary and interdependent. She frequently wrote about feminine aspects of the Divine.⁴ 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.⁵

Another pioneer, Christine de Pizan (1365–ca.1430), was a French court writer and prolific poet. She used allegory and common sense to subvert misogynist readings of Scripture and celebrated the accomplishments of female biblical figures to argue for women's active roles in building society.⁶

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

3. 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, here lii.

4. 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).

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

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

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.⁷

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).⁸ 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.⁹ Another prominent abolitionist, Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883), a former slave, quoted the Bible liberally in her speeches¹⁰ and in so doing challenged cultural assumptions and biblical interpretations that undergird gender inequities.

Another monumental work that emerged in nineteenth-century England was that of Jewish theologian Grace Aguilar (1816–1847), *The Women of Israel*,¹¹ 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

7. 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.

8. 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.

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

10. 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>.

11. 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*.

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.¹²

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

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

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

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

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 Schottroff 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.¹³ A multivolume project, *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*, edited by Irmtraud Fischer, Adriana Valerio, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Christiana de Groot, is currently in production. This project presents a history of the reception of the Bible as embedded in Western cultural history and focuses particularly on gender-relevant biblical themes, biblical female characters, and women recipients of the Bible. The volumes are published in English, Spanish, Italian, and German.¹⁴

Another groundbreaking work is the collection *The Feminist Companion to the Bible Series*, edited by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2001). To date, nineteen volumes of commentaries on the Old Testament have been published, with more in production. 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 Press, 2001–2009), contains thirteen volumes with one more planned. These two series are not full commentaries on the biblical books but comprise collected essays on discrete biblical texts.

Works by individual feminist biblical scholars in all parts of the world abound, and they are now too numerous to list in this introduction. Feminist biblical interpretation has reached a level of maturity that now makes possible a commentary series on every book of the Bible. In recent decades, women have had greater access to formal theological education, have been able to learn critical analytical tools, have put their own in-

13. *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Everett R. Kalin, Nancy Lukens, Linda M. Maloney, Barbara Rumscheidt, Martin Rumscheidt, and Tina Steiner (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

14. The first volume, on the Torah, appeared in Spanish in 2009, in German and Italian in 2010, and in English in 2011 (Atlanta, GA: SBL). For further information, see <http://www.bibleandwomen.org>.

terpretations 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.¹⁵ In the Wisdom Commentary series, the authors will explain their understanding of feminism and the feminist reading strategies used in their commentary. Each volume treats the biblical text in blocks of material, not an analysis verse by verse. The entire text is considered, not only those passages that feature female characters or that speak specifically about women. When women are not apparent in the narrative, feminist lenses are used to analyze the dynamics in the text between male characters, the models of power, binary ways of thinking, and dynamics of imperialism. Attention is given to how the whole text functions and how it was and is heard, both in its original context and today. Issues of particular concern to women—e.g., poverty, food, health, the environment, water—come to the fore.

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.¹⁶ Feminists recognize that the examples of biblical characters can be both

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

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

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."¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ *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.

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

Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

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

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

active agents in creating religious heritage.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

Literary critics analyze the world of the text: its form, language patterns, and rhetorical function.²² 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 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.²³ Narrative critics study the

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

20. 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.

21. See Gina Hens Piazza, *The New Historicism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

22. 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*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). Another pioneer in feminist literary criticism is Mieke Bal (*Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]). For surveys of recent developments in literary methods, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

23. 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).

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Feminists also use other postmodern approaches, such as ideological and autobiographical criticism. The former analyzes the system of ideas that underlies the power and values concealed in the text as well as that of the interpreter.²⁷ The latter involves deliberate self-disclosure while reading the text as a critical exegete.²⁸ Performance criticism attends to how the text was passed on orally, usually in com-

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

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

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

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

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

munal settings, and to the verbal and nonverbal interactions between the performer and the audience.²⁹

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.³⁰ 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."³¹ Methods and models from sociology and cultural anthropology are used by feminists to investigate women's everyday lives, their experiences of marriage, childrearing, labor, money, illness, etc.³²

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

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

31. Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 9. See also Musa W. Dube, ed., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000); Cristl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

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

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."³³ 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.³⁴ Similarly, many U.S. Hispanic feminists speak of themselves as *mujeristas* (*mujer* is Spanish for "woman").³⁵ Others prefer to be called "Latina feminists."³⁶ 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.³⁷

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

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

34. 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; Nyasha Junior, "Womanist Biblical Interpretation," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 37–46; Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988).

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

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

37. 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).

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.³⁸

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.³⁹

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 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.⁴⁰

38. 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, GA: SBL, 2011).

39. E.g., Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, SBLSymS 46 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2008); Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America, Women from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

40. E.g., Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: A Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986).

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.⁴¹ Some have followed traditional Jewish practice, writing *G-d*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted *G*d*.⁴² Others draw on the biblical tradition to mine female and non-gender-specific metaphors and symbols.⁴³ 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.

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 nomencla-

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

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

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

ture: 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.⁴⁴ Moreover, for Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Eastern Orthodox believers, the Old Testament includes books written in Greek—the Deuterocanonical books, considered Apocrypha by Protestants. The term "Jewish Scriptures" is inadequate because these books are also sacred to Christians. Conversely, "Christian Scriptures" is not an accurate designation for the New Testament, since the Old Testament is also part of the Christian Scriptures. Using "First and Second Testament" also has difficulties, in that it can imply a hierarchy and a value judgment.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

Because of these complexities, the editors of 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

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

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

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

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 is 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.

Bibliography

Because bibliographies are quickly outdated and because the space is limited, only a list of Works Cited is included in the print volumes. A comprehensive bibliography for each volume is posted on a dedicated website and is updated regularly.

The link for this volume is: wisdomcommentary.org.

A Concluding Word

In just a few short decades, feminist biblical studies has grown exponentially, both in the methods that have been developed and in the num-

ber 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.

Author's Introduction

Haggai, Malachi, and Feminist Studies in Masculinity

Known for its variety, postexilic prophecy in the Hebrew Bible includes warrior-like locusts in Joel, visions in Zechariah to rival any drug-induced hallucination, and the laugh-out-loud meltdowns in Jonah. Questions of identity bind them together: what does life after political and religious trauma look like, and will the view be a pleasant one? Written about a century apart, Haggai and Malachi come out of communities in crisis. For Haggai, the people and the land will never amount to anything until the restoration of the temple. For Malachi, the disregard of the now-built temple parallels disrespect for God. Both books describe an unstable environment, where human and divine authority can be challenged and previously fixed notions of masculinity become shaky. A male God's male followers no longer obey their leader. But this sentence may link preexilic and postexilic prophecy. As beginning Hebrew Bible students learn, the canon has a primary theological message, "Obey God or face the consequences," and the prophets repeatedly rail against their listeners' failure to follow instructions.

As a rhetorical critic, I focus primarily on language and argumentation—what do the prophets say and how are they heard, both in their postexilic context and today? I will argue against the prophetic depiction of the religious community as inexcusably unmotivated. In difficult

economic times, the first rule is survival. While Nehemiah may not have liked it, it may have been necessary for the Levites to return to their fields when the sacrifices got low (Neh 13:10). Furthermore, as a feminist critic, I find that the prophets sound like bullies, meaning God sounds the same way. And who would want to worship such a God? If all language is designed to persuade, I admit that the prophets do not persuade me either to build a temple or to kill a goat. Haggai accomplishes his mission, but Malachi may not have, and that suggests the ancient audience felt as resistant to his message as I do. Resistance to authority, whether the authority is well-intentioned or self-serving, may be a common trait of the human condition.

Haggai and Malachi (along with Zechariah) conclude the prophetic canon. Both texts are postexilic, written after Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon in 539 BCE and gives the Judean exiles in Babylon and throughout the empire permission to return home (Ezra 1:1-4 // 2 Chr 36:22-23). Unlike most prophetic texts (Ezekiel being a notable exception), Haggai's four oracles include precise date markers from August to December 520 BCE: the second year of King Darius in the sixth month; the seventh month; and two on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Hag 1:1, 2:1, 2:10, 2:20). The prophet delivers a specific message: rebuild the temple. And he successfully encourages the initially reluctant people in Jerusalem to get to work.¹ Haggai does not mention the temple's completion in 515 BCE, suggesting to scholars that the book received its final form before that date.² While the first and third oracles include brief comments placed in the people's mouths, Haggai's primary genre is the "word of the LORD" pattern common in prophetic literature. In contrast, Malachi uses a dialogical format as a way to condemn the people for numerous violations of the covenant between them and God. Through the messenger (Malachi), God speaks more, but the people do not remain silent. Written sometime after 515 BCE, and possibly by an unhappy priest, Malachi describes a rebuilt but allegedly malfunctioning temple system in need of repair and renewed standing in the people's eyes.

1. Mark J. Boda, "Majoring on the Minors: Recent Research on Haggai and Zechariah," *CurBR* 2 (2003): 46.

2. Seth Sykes, *Time and Space in Haggai-Zechariah 1-8: A Bakhtinian Analysis of a Prophetic Chronicle*, *StBibLit* 24 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 131; John Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 42, 51.

The books have different structures but share a common theological problem: how to persuade the people to obey divine imperatives. Interestingly, Mark J. Boda notes that Haggai and Malachi have the highest ratio of messenger formulae (e.g., "says YHWH") in the prophetic canon.³ Comparing these two prophets to Amos, fourth on the list of messenger formulae, Boda concludes that increased appearances of the phrase suggest a problem with "the authority and authenticity of his prophetic words"; the heavy presence of messenger formulae in Haggai and Malachi "may be a window into a sceptical attitude of the Persian community towards prophecy that may have been fostered by the late pre-exilic crisis in the prophetic movement."⁴ Both Haggai and Malachi assume the validity of the theory of divine retribution in which God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, but even with that assumption, each book portrays God as a parent struggling to maintain or regain control over rebelliously apathetic children. Haggai's God promises future blessings, while Malachi's God resorts to threats. The difference between the two may come from the historical context of the biblical texts.

Both books lend themselves to diachronic and well as synchronic interpretations. As a rhetorical critic, methodologically I have chosen at times to focus solely on the text (synchronic) and at other times to include such things as names, dates, and times (diachronic).⁵ The fact that the prophet Haggai wants to persuade a community one generation removed from a crisis-inducing exile shapes his language, which chastises the returned exiles, but speaks even more harshly against the nations (Hag 2:6-7, 21-22). In contrast, Malachi's railing against his community comes generations after the exile, when perhaps less justification remains for the people's bad behavior; life, by now, should be "back to normal," and the temple should receive the respect and offerings that are its due. How each community responds to the prophet depends on both historical context and subject location.

Context and location are needed, since by itself, the phrase "subject location" may be limiting from a feminist theoretical perspective. In a 2005 essay for the *NWSA Journal*, Aimee Carrillo Rowe argues for a

3. Mark J. Boda, "Haggai: Master Rhetorician," *TynBul* 51 (2000): 298.

4. *Ibid.*, 299.

5. Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 159.

feminist rethinking of subject location. Rowe suggests that focusing on the subject limits the interconnections all subjects have with other people and communities.⁶ While writing specifically about the feminist turn to the subject, Rowe's words apply to Haggai and Malachi as well: "What often gets overlooked in the framework of 'identity' (or 'location' as above) are the ways in which dominant identity categories interpellate subjects through regulatory practices that essentially condition belonging."⁷ In other words, while both prophets (and particularly Malachi) use specific identity markers to describe their interlocutors, those markers attempt to limit the ways that the people in both books should be understood. The categories function as rhetorical weapons; the prophets want the reader/listener to see the people as *they* do. If, however, "one of the tasks of feminist criticism is to expose the culturally based presuppositions embodied in classic discourse,"⁸ then resisting the prophets' identification of the people as "subjects," specifically disobedient worshipers, and thinking about how the people in that postexilic time and place may have viewed their world is a useful feminist exercise.

Haggai and Malachi lend themselves to feminist analysis because of the intersectionality of gender, class, and religion with relationships of power and authority. Underneath the two books runs a strong and often nasty undercurrent of power—who has it, who does not, and who wants it? Danna Nolan Fewell notes in her definitions of feminist criticism that "gender is a matter of power. . . . Men have power over women socially, politically, and economically. Race and class further complicate the hierarchy of dominance. Such hierarchy is inscribed in our classic texts, presupposed as if it were natural law rather than cultural construct."⁹ In her New Testament scholarship, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes intersectionality as the "multiplicative structures of oppression . . . that determine and diminish all of our lives."¹⁰ Haggai and Malachi both describe a hierarchy in which God, through designated male representa-

6. Aimee Carrillo Rowe, "Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation," *NWSA Journal* 17 (2005): 16.

7. *Ibid.*, 28.

8. Danna Nolan Fewell, "Feminist Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, rev. and exp. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 270.

9. *Ibid.*, 269–70.

10. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 12, 13.

tives, exercises power over other men. The priests and prophets speak; the masses should obey.

Because of the tendency to view hierarchy as all men above all women, without always considering that not all men are equal, Schüssler Fiorenza's definition of kyriarchy offers a helpful feminist theoretical foundation for readings of Haggai and Malachi. Schüssler Fiorenza writes as follows: "I have argued for a redefinition of the concept of patriarchy to mean not simply the rule of men over women but rather a complex social pyramid of graduated dominations and subordinations. Because feminist discourses continue to use the term 'patriarchy' in the sense of gender dualism, I introduced in *But She Said* the neologism 'kyriarchy,' meaning the rule of the emperor/master/lord/father/husband over his subordinates. With this term I mean to indicate that not all men dominate and exploit all women without difference."¹¹ Unlike "patriarchy," "kyriarchy" reveals that men can and do dominate other men in particular contexts, which is precisely what we hear in Haggai and especially Malachi.

Instead of patriarchy or kyriarchy, Carol L. Meyers argues persuasively for the use of "heterarchy" to describe the idea of different power arrangements within a society, recognizing that such arrangements need not always be vertical ones. She writes: "Perhaps [heterarchy's] most attractive feature is that it does not eliminate hierarchies but rather recognizes that there can be a variety of heterarchies that may or may not intersect with each other. That is, heterarchies and hierarchies are not mutually exclusive concepts but rather interactive or dialectical ones."¹² As father and master in Malachi, God demands obedience from his sons and slaves. They never grow up and become the father. And yet, they are men, who argue with each other about how to behave (or not). Heterarchy reveals—and my commentary explores—the tension between the expected obedience of earthly men to the divine "man," which the prophets articulate, as well as the resistance to that expectation.

Precisely because of the questions Haggai and Malachi raise about masculinity, masculine language and male pronouns for God appear intentionally in this commentary. Most contributors to this series will not use male-dominant language, and I understand and usually agree with this, regularly avoiding any pronouns for God in my scholarship. In this case, however, I make an exception. Since I argue that both books

11. *Ibid.*, 14.

12. Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 197.

describe a crisis between a personified male God and his male followers, the pronouns matter and should be heard in their original linguistic context. Hebrew has no neuter, as Rebecca Marie Jones (one of this volume's contributing voices) learned in her research about gendered language in Reform Jewish prayer books. While gender-neutral language for God may sound "better" in English, the Hebrew language and imagery for God remain masculine, whether one says the male pronouns or not. From a rhetorical perspective, language matters; hearing the pronouns will hopefully draw the reader into the ancient masculine drama that Haggai and Malachi describe.

The God described in Haggai's and Malachi's attempts to assert divine authority may also be explained using the language of masculinity studies as well as feminist theory. Historical studies indicate "that definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations."¹³ In the social world of Haggai and Malachi, "authentic men" worship God and support the hierarchical temple structure, reestablishing the building and bringing a steady supply of offerings. This priestly oriented identity acts as a type of hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant masculine ideal in a particular cultural or social context.¹⁴ As Raewyn W. Connell notes, "'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable."¹⁵ Haggai's call to rebuild the temple reinforces the position of the priests; as recipients of the sacrifices, the restoration of the temple literally restores their livelihood. They and their political and religious supporters eventually persuade the people to heed the rebuilding call, and "it is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony."¹⁶

A challenge to the priests' masculine hegemony, however, comes in Malachi. The sacrifices decrease in quality (Mal 1:6-14) and quantity (Mal 3:8-12), and even the priests themselves appear to reject their own authority by accepting the new state of sacrificial affairs (Mal 2:1-9). The

13. Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 29.

14. *Ibid.*, 37.

15. *Ibid.*, 76.

16. *Ibid.*, 77.

connection between masculinity and power, an “insight . . . of Fundamental importance,”¹⁷ has broken down, and the prophet’s attempts to reinforce tradition meet with sustained resistance from the people. Connell argues that men “who reject the hegemonic pattern have to fight or negotiate their way out.”¹⁸ In the case of Malachi, the men neither fight nor negotiate; they simply refuse to play along.

But why stop playing? In Hag 1, the people’s reluctance to stop everything else and rebuild the temple may be due to the importance of everything else—rebuilding ruined homes left vacant from the exile, reestablishing fields and vineyards, and restoring flocks and herds. Malachi’s context is more elusive. The prophet suggests in Mal 1 that the people have the resources and simply will not contribute to the temple. Therefore, the people are greedy. The chapter, however, suggests that the people believe the sacrificial system no longer works: if offerings to God do not bring the expected rewards, why bother making offerings at all? Therefore, the people are in theological crisis. Since they do not get to speak for themselves, we may never know whether they were greedy, destitute, both, or neither. Malachi’s emphasis on animal sacrifices, however, presumes an audience not stricken by poverty because the poor did not have to sacrifice animals that they neither had nor could afford (Lev 5:11-13).

Practically, the refusal to play along triggers social consequences. According to Num 18, the priests and Levites deliberately receive no land; as full-time servants of God, their duties keep them from agricultural tasks. Instead, they receive tithes and offerings from the other Israelites, of grain, wine, oil, and meat. If those offerings diminish, then the food source for the priests and their families diminishes as well. Malachi’s protest about sacrifices and tithing and insistence upon their restoration serves more than a religious purpose. By arguing for the continuation of the existing structure of protein exchange (the people give food to the priests), the prophet describes what anthropologists call resource flow, or how goods and services move from one group or community to

17. *Ibid.*, 42.

18. *Ibid.*, 37. Similarly, gender studies scholar Todd W. Reeser (*Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* [West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], 34) states that “no discursive construct can remain stable once it is articulated, even when an articulation of masculinity is invested with power by virtue of its official status. When masculinity is viewed as an imposed form of power, then the imposition of power necessarily leads to resistance against it, even as that resistance may or may not be outside the original field of power.”

another, within or beyond a country's borders.¹⁹ In this case, the priests perform religious rituals, connecting the people to God, and receive foodstuffs in exchange. Resource flow, however, is not just about economics. A society's structure determines what goes where and to whom.²⁰ While flow charts can be circular, social structures are often both vertical and horizontal, and the priests stand at the head of the religious line in Malachi's community. Their duties supposedly cannot be performed by anyone else, giving them power and authority to demand the fruits, carbohydrates, and protein that are their due.

In a society of limited resources, however, the flow chart can break down. In Belize, for example, the *dugu* ceremony, performed on behalf of the seriously ill and designed to appease their ancestors, requires the sacrifice of numerous fowl (all male), plus the occasional male pig.²¹ Most of the food goes to the living guests and not the dead ancestors; anthropologist Carol Jenkins notes, "Since it is the living who give voice to the wishes of the ancestors, increased demands for sharing are clearly an expression of contemporary social stresses."²² Occasionally, the ancestors call for a new temple as well. The *dugu* ceremony celebrated by the Garifuna in modern Belize and the understanding of resource flow both illuminate rhetorical elements in Haggai and Malachi. Just as the biblical prophet speaks for God, the *buyai*, or shaman, speaks for the ancestors, and like Haggai's God, the ancestors may insist upon the construction of a new temple, where the people share as opposed to hoard their resources.²³ While this system reaches a crisis point in Malachi, in both biblical books and among the Garifuna, the cultures' spirits insist upon respect, which the people tangibly deliver through sacrifices of time and financial resources.

In the following chapters, I will expand upon Haggai's and Malachi's portrayal of the image of God as a threatening complainer, willing to

19. Josephine Smart, "The Global Economy and South China Development in Post-1978 China: Relevance and Limitations of the Flexible Accumulation Approach," *Urban Anthropology* 28 (1999): 412. Food chain may be the more common term, but resource flow (unlike the food chain) addresses more than food. And Malachi's connection of the flow (or lack thereof) to blessings and curses fits more within the description of resource flow.

20. *Ibid.*, 422.

21. Carol L. Jenkins, "Ritual and Resource Flow: The Garifuna 'Dugu,'" *American Ethnologist* 10 (1983): 433-34.

22. *Ibid.*, 435.

23. *Ibid.*, 433, 435-36.

starve or burn his children into submission, because this portrayal raises important exegetical and theological issues. Each chapter functions as a critical reflection/meditation upon the biblical text. Using the work of other scholars and my own scholarly senses, I describe what I think the text means, occasionally asking more questions than I can answer. This approach is deliberate. Rhetorical and feminist critics (and I am both) argue for the inevitability and the recognition of subjectivity. In her essay on rhetorical criticism, Patricia K. Tull notes that “when contexts change, interpretation is altered.”²⁴ In other words, what a biblical text may have meant 2,500 years ago may not be what it means today. Rhetorical critics reject the idea of “*the meaning*” of a text, instead suggesting that a text may mean a number of things. Not even rhetorical criticism has a single meaning.²⁵ Furthermore, feminist critic Julia M. O’Brien states that our lives, personal and professional, influence our scholarship.²⁶ She writes, “Evaluative discourse implies an evaluator whose personal, historical, and social circumstances influence the evaluation, and to fail to acknowledge the power of the personal paradoxically grants it ultimate power—*uncontested power*.”²⁷ As such, I make no claims for either personal objectivity or exegetical definitiveness. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz reminds scholars that the study of another culture is an incomplete art as well as a social science; uncertainty remains inevitable, and the work depends on a scholar’s best educated guesses. Charles Segal, however, notes that “some readings [of a text] may be better than others.”²⁸ I have tried to offer textually accurate readings here.

The interpretations of Haggai and Malachi belong to me and represent only me, being neither the first nor the last word on the texts. Instead, they are a “contribution to an ongoing conversation.”²⁹ And I am blessed

24. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 158.

25. *Ibid.*, 168.

26. Julia M. O’Brien, “On Saying ‘No’ to a Prophet,” in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2/8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 214–16.

27. *Ibid.*, 215.

28. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 25, 29; Charles Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986), 370.

29. The quotation comes from Professor Molly Gower during a department colloquium on April 10, 2014, in which this introduction was the topic of conversation. I thank her for the insight, which helped me clarify what I mean regarding objectivity and definitiveness.

enough to have friends in the fields of sociology and theology who are Jewish, Christian, and secular contributing to this volume. Their voices make this work a stronger example of rhetorical and feminist commentary. O'Brien noted almost twenty years ago that "despite the growth of feminist and postmodern interpretations in the academy as a whole, these perspectives have not yet surfaced significantly in Malachi studies."³⁰ Haggai can be accurately substituted for Malachi in the previous sentence. The number of feminist sources on both books remains small. So, this volume not only adds to the number but also seeks to inspire many more.

30. Julia M. O'Brien, "Malachi in Recent Research," *CurBS* 3 (1995): 90.

Haggai 1:1-15

The Art of Persuasion

Haggai's first prophetic words offer a plain message of negative divine retribution—God punishes the disobedient. The community's failure to begin reconstruction of the temple has caused significant financial hardship. Haggai insists that the people must rebuild the temple in order to rebuild their own economy. Although the prophet argues simply, directly, and at length in Hag 1:1-12, his words do not elicit a simple, direct, or quick response. Haggai then utters another prophecy in 1:13, and more divine activity takes place before the reconstruction project gets underway. Haggai's words achieve their intended purpose, but not immediately. This suggests that the people earnestly "consider how [they] have fared" (Hag 1:5, 7) and ponder the "word of the LORD" (Hag 1:1). They take their time, making time itself—specifically when to act—a significant theme in the passage.

Haggai's activity begins "in the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month" (1:1). The date corresponds to the beginning of Elul, or August/September 520. The only other books that begin with such a precise date marker are Ezekiel and Zechariah, and, with only one exception, each of Haggai's prophecies takes place on a specific day. So, time clearly matters to the prophet. But why is this particular time important?

Haggai goes to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, the political and religious leaders, with a message about time: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say *the time* has not yet come to

Hag 1:1-15

¹In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ²Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house. ³Then the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ⁴Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵Now therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider

how you have fared. ⁶You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.

⁷Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. ⁸Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. ⁹You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the LORD of

rebuild the Lord's house" (1:2; emphasis mine). Almost twenty years have passed since the exile's end in 539 BCE, but the people are still not ready to take on the project of restoring the temple, according to the prophet. Opposing delay, Haggai retorts, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your *paneled* houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (1:4; emphasis mine). The Hebrew word פָּנֶה, translated as "paneled" in the NRSV, literally means "to cover, cover in"; "panel" is the third definition, and it suggests a decorated, elaborate home.¹ Covered houses, however, are basic, plain structures that have roofs. The distinction matters. If the people's houses are paneled, then they have disposable income that could be used to improve the dreadful state of God's house. If the houses are only covered, then the people are barely getting by and may be justifiably disinclined to take on the temple project, with its demands upon time and treasure. Based on Haggai's description of the people's circumstances in verses 6 and 9-11, the houses appear to be only roofed² as opposed to paneled in cedar.³ The people observe their economic situa-

1. BDB, 706.

2. John Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 128; Janet E. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 183.

3. David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 48, 50.

hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. ¹⁰Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors.

¹²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of the prophet

Haggai, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the LORD. ¹³Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, saying, I am with you, says the LORD. ¹⁴And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts their God, ¹⁵on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

tion—poor crop yields, lack of adequate food and clothing, drought, and “the problem of inflation”⁴—and conclude that they cannot afford to rebuild the temple at this time.⁵ The phrase “paneled houses” may therefore be hyperbole or a reference to the homes of the wealthy few,⁶ but the majority is not as fortunate.

A number of scholars argue that the people hesitate to rebuild because they are unsure if the theological time is right. Has God's anger subsided enough for the people to restore the house destroyed by that anger? Has God ended God's rejection of the people?⁷ This argument, however, has

4. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation*, 188.

5. Willem S. Prinsloo, “The Cohesion of Haggai 1:4-11,” in “*Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden*”: *Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Jerusalem 1986*, ed. Matthias Augustin and Klaus-Dietrich Schunck (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 340; John Kessler, “Building the Second Temple: Questions of Time, Text, and History in Haggai 1.1-15,” *JOT* 27 (2002): 243–56.

6. Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 19.

7. Elie Assis, “Composition, Rhetoric and Theology in Haggai 1:1-11,” *JHebS* 7 (2007): 3, 13–14. Elie Assis, “To Build or Not to Build: A Dispute between Haggai and His People (Hag 1),” *ZAW* 119 (2007): 517–18; Hayim Tadmor, “‘The Appointed Time Has Not Yet Arrived’: The Historical Background of Haggai 1:2,” in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,

one problem: the rest of Haggai's prophecy does not support it. If the people's delay comes from uncertainty about their standing with God, then Haggai's words should be reassuring. Yet the reassurance ("I am with you" in Hag 1:13) comes only after the prophet criticizes the people twice about the ruined temple in comparison to the people's homes. Additionally, Haggai's emphasis upon the state of the economy suggests that the people's concerns about rebuilding, or at least Haggai's understanding of those concerns, are financial. If the prophet therefore can convince Zerubbabel and Joshua that everyone's economic woes stem from a failure to rebuild the temple, then his goal will be met. And that is exactly what eventually happens.

*The Call to Rebuild the
Church: Reading Haggai in
the Pontificate of Pope Francis,
Part 1*

Images of a church in a town in the province of Pampanga near my home in the Philippines kept coming to mind. This church was rebuilt or more accurately updated the year after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo when massive lahar flow and flooding affected a large segment of the province. Lahar would bury whole towns and take many lives over the course of years, changing the topography of the region. I had family members and friends lose homes and loved ones because of this disaster. And here was this church, which stood on the edge

of this calamity, rebuilt at the cost of millions of pesos while so many were forced into evacuation centers, wanting for the most basic of necessities. What was most stark is not that a church ought to be constructed during such times. After all, so many historic churches were lost. Many would have welcomed the building of such a place for prayer and worship. But, somehow, those who planned its construction decided that they would paint the entire sanctuary gold. And the sight of this left a sick feeling in my stomach.

As news continued to be broadcasted over radio and television about more homes being lost and people living in

1999), 405–6; Frank Y. Patrick, "Time and Tradition in the Book of Haggai," in *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 41, 47; Peter Ross Bedford, "Discerning the Time: Haggai, Zechariah, and the 'Delay' in the Rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple," in *The Pitcher Is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, ed. Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 74–75.

makeshift evacuation centers, this church was being built.

Now I must confess that I knew nothing of the circumstances of the construction of this building beyond what I saw. All I am sure of is what I felt when I walked in from the rain to pray for people living in the path of the lahar. I was shocked and astounded, sickened by this expression of faith in the midst of so much suffering at its doorstep.

Each time I read Haggai, this image would come to me. A god who would ask the people to build a church with a golden sanctuary would invade my thoughts and prayers and repulse me. Each time, all I could read from the book of the prophet was this story of a god who demanded that the people first rebuild the physical temple before attending to the needs of the people. I did not want to find this god in the sacred text of my faith. I did not want to find in the sacred text a prophet who would justify temple worship as taking precedence over the needs of the people, the cry of the poor.

There had to be a way out. The deity being described could not be the God of Haggai, the God of Israel. I must have misunderstood, and so I turned to scholarship. I looked for commentaries and introductions to the book of the prophet, and no introduction or commentary helped. I could not see beyond the interpretation that I had already constructed. I had no

way of seeing beyond the image of a god who wanted the rebuilding of the temple before rebuilding the homes of the homeless. And I could not write about this god, so I did not write. I stopped reading Haggai. I stopped trying to pray with Haggai.

Time passed. The Catholic world came on fire with the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the first Jesuit pope, the first pope from Latin America, from the two-thirds world. This was exciting enough in and of itself. That these elements of his social location actually meant something, that is, that they actually manifested themselves in the way he leads, is nothing less than a sign of the Spirit at work in the church.

The work began with a rather timid looking man making his way to the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to stand before the gathered crowd awaiting the presentation of the new pope. When his name was announced, there was simultaneous excitement and a bit of confusion as many did not know who this was. As he stepped out dressed in simple white, setting aside the appearance of a monarch greeting his people, many began to become aware that there was something different happening here. When people heard he had taken on the name Francis, many speculated that he was evoking one of the first Jesuits, St. Francis Xavier, an original companion of St. Ignatius of Loyola. But people

would soon learn that it was not the Jesuit saint but St. Francis of Assisi that was his namesake. This created even greater excitement. He dared take on the name Francis. No one had done that!

After a year of Pope Francis, this man who took on the name of Francis of Assisi to remind himself always of the poor and forgotten of the world, I reread Haggai. In that text, I now find an invitation to my church, to my community, to me.

I understood why God admonishes the people for tending to their houses before the house of God. Calling upon the people to tend first to the temple, to the place where they encounter God, to the place where they could properly give thanks and to cry out for their needs, made sense. It is to this invitation and this challenge of Haggai to the church that I will turn.

Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos

Whether the delay is self-interested or theological matters not to Haggai; the ruined temple stands as an insult to God, and God responds. According to Haggai, the people suffer lack—substandard harvests, hunger, thirst, and inadequate clothing. Wage earners “earn wages to put them into a bag with holes” (Hag 1:6); their money lacks value. After asking the people twice to “consider how you have fared” (Hag 1:5, 7), Haggai gives this order: “Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord” (1:8). Because God has been displeased and dishonored, God says, “You have looked for much and lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away” (Hag 1:9). The people’s dire economic situation, exacerbated by a lack of rain, comes from God’s word: “And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors” (Hag 1:11). Just as in Hosea, where people’s actions cause misery to animals (4:3), failure to rebuild the temple results in environmental degradation.

If the community desires an end to this trouble and the beginning of better days, then they must meet God’s desire and rebuild God’s dilapidated house.⁸ John Kessler persuasively argues that the call to rebuild should be understood in “the sense of simple succession, that is the expression of a promise of acceptance,” as opposed to building the

8. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 20.

temple “so that one [God] might accept it.”⁹ While the NRSV translates Hag 1:8b as “so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” the Hebrew וְ, translated as “so that” literally is “and,” supporting Kessler’s contention that the conjunction does not have to be translated consecutively. Kessler calls the verse “a promise of salvation,”¹⁰ but Paul Redditt is more reserved, suggesting only that the verse is eschatological; if the building project takes place, then the people will see better days.¹¹ Both suggestions, however, assume the principle of positive divine retribution. If the temple reconstruction will make God happy, then a happy God will make the people happy, or at least call off the drought.

At the conclusion of Haggai’s first word from the Lord, not only do Zerubbabel and Joshua respond with obedience to and respect for God, but “all the remnant of the people” do as well (1:12). While the message’s audience is the governor and the high priest, it affects everyone in the area. Therefore, “remnant” in this context means all people¹² as opposed to Ezra’s description of the remnant as only the returned exiles from Babylon (Ezra 9:15). The obedient people, however, do not respond to Haggai’s first prophecy.

In fact, further divine activity is required. The people accept “the words of the prophet Haggai, as the LORD their God had sent him” (Hag 1:12), but they do not start gathering wood. Janet Tollington suggests that Haggai’s argumentation about divine retribution gives his listeners space to make their own decision, concluding “this may have some bearing on why the people responded to Haggai’s preaching while the message of earlier prophets frequently went unheeded.”¹³ And the community responds deliberately. Not even Haggai’s claim that God wreaks havoc with the people’s livelihood on account of the ruined temple makes them move faster. The people’s own homes and lives are in fragile shape, and the temple simply has not been a priority. Haggai describes God as peeved about the temple, but God’s “What about my house?” does not lead to instant action. So, Haggai then receives a second message at some unspecified time after the first day of the month; this message is “to the people,” not just Zerubbabel and Joshua (1:13). The message is brief: “I am with you, says the LORD” (Hag 1:13). “The people

9. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 135.

10. *Ibid.*, 110.

11. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 20.

12. *Ibid.*, 22; Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 141–42; Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah* 1–8, 47.

13. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation*, 192.

feared the LORD," but that fear did not spur them to immediate action (Hag 1:12). Neither does Haggai's new message.

Before work on the temple finally begins, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people" (Hag 1:14). W. Sibley Towner thinks that Haggai's "I am with you" (1:13) "results in stirred up spirits,"¹⁴ but no textual reason exists for Hag 1:14 to be the result of the previous verse, as Towner suggests, or to be a summary/conclusion of the preceding verses.¹⁵ Instead, Haggai speaks, and then God works.¹⁶ David L. Petersen notes, "Despite the presumed effectiveness of Haggai's words, Yahweh intervened to force the people to action."¹⁷ Force, however, may be too strong a verb. In Hebrew, the verb עור , translated in the NRSV as "to stir up," literally means "to awake."¹⁸ After years of neglecting the temple, or being asleep, the people are awakened by God, and they begin to work.

A Feminist Review of Haggai and the Building of the Second Temple

From the standpoint of a sociologist and a feminist scholar of Africana studies, Haggai is striking in three important ways: (1) the sociopolitical context in which the book is written and the exilic experience of dislocated people; (2) the explicit and latent patriarchy, as demonstrated in the omission of women and in the presentation of men; and (3) the verse itself, specifically Haggai's appeal to the people of Judah to rebuild the destroyed temple and the

threat of holy retribution if they do not.

Haggai, named for the prophet who composed it, is situated in a fascinating era and geographical place. The book is dated in the opening line of the first verse by its reference to King Darius I, who was the ruling monarch over the Persian Empire. The Persian Kingdom, at the time, expanded across three continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe—and by today's standards such a kingdom would be considered a geopolitical superpower. To understand the significance of

14. W. Sibley Towner, "Haggai," in *The Harper Collins Study Bible, Fully Revised and Updated*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 1265.

15. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 150–51.

16. Assis, "To Build or Not to Build," 525–26.

17. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 58.

18. BDB 734.

Haggai's reference to King Darius I, it is important to discuss, in brief, how Darius ascended to power.

The Persian Empire that Darius I eventually inherits is more or less built on the legacy of King Cyrus, also known as Cyrus the Great, who is sometimes referred to as the "founder" of the Persian Empire.¹⁹ Cyrus the Great's reign over Persia began in 558 BCE and lasted until his death in 530 BCE. As the king of Persia, one of Cyrus's most notorious achievements was the military capture of Babylon and the subsequent liberation of Jewish exiles in 538 BCE. The people of Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon between 597 and 582 BCE. In the process of conquering the Judeans, Nebuchadnezzar II, the ruling king of Babylon, destroyed their land and holy temple. At King Cyrus's death, his son Cambyses II rose to power in 530 BCE and ruled the Persian Empire until his death in 522 BCE. For one year, between 522 and 521 BCE, an imposter named King Gaumata ruled Persia. Impersonating King Cyrus's other son, Smerdis, who incidentally had been beheaded at the orders of his brother King Cambyses, Gaumata appointed himself king. Darius I and six other noblemen removed him

from power and killed him at once. Darius I then succeeded as the next ruler of Persia and presided as such from 521 to 486 BCE. It is here that the book of Haggai begins.

In the first line of the first verse, following the reference to King Darius I, Haggai continues: "The word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest" (1:1). The reference to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, reflects King Darius's decentralizing political approach. King Darius organized his vast empire into centralized provinces that were locally administered by *Khshathrapavans* or *satraps*.²⁰ These "satraps" or governors basically served as liaisons between the king and the local populace under his rule. King Darius had selected the governor Zerubbabel to oversee the reestablishment of Judah and, along with Joshua the high priest, the rebuilding of the holy temple.

The prophet Haggai makes an appeal to the overseers of two of the most influential and powerful social institutions in Judah: the government and the religious authorities. Frustrated by the stalled progress in efforts to rebuild the temple, Haggai

19. Samuel G. Benjamin, *Persia* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1920), 86.

20. *Ibid.*, 104.

tells the governor, Zerubbabel, and the high priest, Joshua, that the Lord is dissatisfied. Haggai, who is clearly frustrated with the contradictions and inaction of the returnees, rebukes them for having yielded too little in return for their efforts. As such, he calls on them to give cautionary thought to their displeasing ways.

The power dynamics among the prophet, the governor, and the high priest are striking. Perhaps sociologist C. Wright Mills would have characterized this collection of men, the highest authorities in the most prominent social institutions of Judah, as an emerging or emergent Power Elite who convened with a common purpose to ensure that the temple would be reconstructed. In addition, it is important to note that God chose to communicate through Haggai: not a woman, not a commoner, but a male prophet who, presumably, had unfettered access to the city's highest authorities.

The presentation of men not only in the biblical book of Haggai but also in scholarly texts that address the history of the Persian Empire reflects the deep-rooted patriarchal social arrangement that was staunchly present in this era. Women, when noted, are mentioned in

reference to their relationship to men as either mothers of sons or wives of husbands;²¹ usually, however, they are simply omitted from reference all together. When men are presented, they too are customarily introduced in relationship to other men, usually their fathers, such as Zerubbabel "son of Shealtiel" and Joshua "son of Jehozadak," mentioned in three places in this very short book of Haggai.

The prophet tells the people to go into the mountains to retrieve materials to build the Lord's house, so that he could be honored. Haggai's message is fiercely angry and effectively evokes a warning of holy retribution. According to the prophet, the Lord communicates through him to the people of Judah. Because the people feared God, they obeyed the prophet's message, but the reconstruction of the temple did not commence immediately. So, the prophet was given a second message to deliver. Accordingly, the Lord declares "I am with you." This message inspires Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the "remnant of the people" into action, and on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius's rule of Persia, the second holy temple is begun.

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21. Jacob Abbott, *History of Cyrus The Great* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850); Benjamin, *Persia*.

Certain scholars describe the people's response to Haggai's words as speedy. According to Kessler, "the dating formula in 15a serves to indicate the rapidity with which the resumption of the work was undertaken."²² Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers claim that "the response of all sectors of the community to Haggai's plea is immediate and unanimous,"²³ but an instantaneous reaction to the rebuilding call does not appear to be the case. Haggai prophesies on the first day of the month. Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant "came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month" (Hag 1:14-15). Three and a half weeks pass between the prophetic word and the called-for action, so this response by definition is not immediate, or "following or preceding without a lapse of time."²⁴ Redditt notes the time lag without comment. Meyers and Meyers, after suggesting that the people may have needed time to think, still conclude that "the preliminary work on the temple site began immediately."²⁵

The biblical text, however, suggests that the people wake up slowly. Haggai's initial insistence upon taking care of God's house takes an entire chapter to come to fruition, but the delay need not be interpreted negatively or ignored entirely. Instead, the delay shows that the people can and do think for themselves. Just because a prophet says God is unhappy does not mean it is so. Plus, the people apparently do not make the connection between farming trouble and the neglected temple as quickly as Haggai does. In spite of the twenty-three-day gap between Haggai's first message and the commencement of the people's work, though, God sends no more sharp messages through the prophet. The people may have houses, and God does not have one; but God has told them that twice already, without success.

While the people are slow, God is patient. Another prophetic message and a metaphorical tap on the shoulder get them moving. Haggai 1 shows a relationship between God and the community in which the

22. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 153.

23. Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25B (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 43.

24. Dictionary.com Unabridged, s.v. "immediate," Random House, Inc., last modified February 2015, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/immediate>; David L. Petersen concludes that the people did *not* spring immediately to action (*Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, 58, 60).

25. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 46.

divine being has to work diligently to get human attention. “What about me?” God seems to say. “What about my house? I have sent drought and deprivation your way because of the temple. Didn’t you see the connection?” No, they did not. The climate is naturally prone to dry spells that can lead to the food shortages Haggai describes, without any divine intervention.²⁶ Also, while other prophets argue that the exile itself happened because the people disobeyed God (Isa 40:1-2, Jer 2–4, Ezek 5–6, Zech 1), this generation does not assume that their troubles are inevitably their own fault. So God uses multiple arguments and different tactics in order to get the desired building project underway, a trend that continues in Hag 2.

***The Call to Rebuild the Church:
Reading Haggai in the
Pontificate of Pope Francis,
Part 2***

“This people says that the time has not come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” (Hag 1:2)

Then what are the people of God busy doing? What is occupying the shepherds whom God has called to tend God’s sheep? So many in the church have, for some time now, felt the weight of a church that seems to be coming apart at the seams. Many have felt alienated in increasingly large numbers, leaving because they no longer feel sheltered by the community and the institution. Yet others continue to turn to the church for shelter only to find they are not welcomed or they are not seen.

Using a different metaphor, Pope Francis describes the church as a “field hospital after battle” and speaks of the need for the church “to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful” and laments the distractions that prevent this from happening. In his words, “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds.”²⁷ Should we wonder why someone so deeply wounded would go elsewhere?

If the house of the Lord is not rebuilt to provide shelter for the lost, then for what is the house? If the field hospital does not tend to the serious wounds of the people, can it claim to be a field hospital? People live and die on the streets of cities or in shacks and shanties. So many go

26. *Ibid.*, 41–42.

27. Antonio Spadaro, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America*, 30 September 2013, <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview>.

without jobs, unable to provide for themselves and their families. Others are left alone in their later years, broken because they have been forgotten. Women and children flee from their homes because of war or poverty. Many more are torn from their families because they must go to distant lands to provide for them. And in the midst of this, the church is called to proclaim the good news of a loving God who hears the cry of the poor? If it fails in its mission to proclaim the good news in a manner that can be heard, then is it being church?

“Is it for you yourselves to dwell in the paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” (Hag 1:4)

Who has gone about the world living in luxury, tending to their personal needs while the house of the Lord lies in ruin? It is not the structure, the building, that is collapsing but the community. If we, the privileged of the developed north, have not been weighed down by the burdens of the poor and have not found our faith challenged by the persistence of death dealing social injustice in so many corners of the world where many call themselves Christian, maybe we have been challenged by other realities.

Young people are leaving the church because they perceive it as rejecting the very people who need care and protection, whether these are LGBT, unwed mothers, or those left wounded by a failed marriage. They struggle to see the relevance of the institution to the world today. The great irony is that they would be drawn to the church if only it could be restored to what it was intended to be: an institution and a community whose goal is “to listen to needs, desires and disappointments, despair, hope” and respond to these. As Pope Francis has stated in various ways, “We must restore hope to the young, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace.”²⁸

Instead, there are those in the church who wish to construct their own “paneled houses,” where only a few are permitted to enter. Rather than rebuilding the house of the Lord where all are welcomed and can find shelter, they are constructing narrowly conceived communities where those who fail to adhere to a particular narrowly chosen set of rules are not welcomed. So much energy is expended condemning and excluding in order to build a

28. Eugenio Scalfari, “The Pope: How the Church Will Change,” *La Repubblica*, 1 October 2013, http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2013/10/01/news/pope_s_conversation_with_scalfari_english-67643118/.

pristine house in which only a few can dwell.

“Now thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways! You have sown much, but brought in little; you have eaten but have not been satisfied.” (Hag 1:5-6)

Rather:

“Consider your ways! Go up into the hill country; bring timber, and build the house that I may take pleasure in it and receive my glory, says the Lord.” (Hag 1:7-8)

The image of “going up” reminds me of Pope Francis’s invitation. He calls upon the church not only to open its doors so that people may enter. Rather, he challenges the people in the church to pass through those doors and go out into the world. There they can tend to the needs of people and in so doing bring the gospel to life. This is the rebuilding of the temple that is needed in our times. So many among us and around us are lost and feel alone, abandoned and forgotten.

St. Francis of Assisi rebuilt the church of St. Damian by carrying one stone at a time piece by piece,

but he helped rebuild the larger church by choosing to live a life of voluntary poverty devoted to caring for the poor. His example of a life of voluntary poverty restored the church and served as a reminder of the good news of divine love for humanity preached by Jesus, a love that was incarnate in the manger. Pope Francis, like this saint, calls on us to rebuild the church by going out into the world. He challenges shepherds of the church to have the “smell of the sheep.” He calls on the whole church to become “a poor church for the poor.”

In rereading the prophet Haggai in the pontificate of Pope Francis, I heard Haggai’s accusation that the people were tending to their own houses and neglecting the temple spoken against the backdrop of a church that has become self-referential and has forgotten to listen to the cry of God’s people. In this context, I now hear God’s command to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the church so that it may once again be a place where people may worship and encounter God.

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