

COULD EVE HAVE BEEN FRAMED?

By Richard Damashek, Ph.D.

"And God built [out of] the rib" - Rabbi Eliezer said in the name of Rabbi Yossi the son of Zimra (Bereshit Rabbah 18:2): "woman was endowed with more understanding than man."

For the last 2,000 years in its history of interpretation, the Bible has often been used as tool to justify political domination of women from the level of the nation state to the realities of marriage and home. The idea of women's second-class status has allowed men to dominate their lives socially, politically, economically, religiously, and culturally. Until modern times and in the last half-century, the only place where women have dominated is in the home, and not always there. For more than

2,000 years, religious leaders have used the Hebrew Bible as the “proof text” of this sociological paradigm. The first creation story, Gen. 1:1-2:3, in which God (ELOHIM) creates the solar system in six days and male and female humans in the image of God, does not get the same attention. Theologians, lay people, and scholars have understood the second creation story in the Book of Genesis (2:4-3:24) as the paradigm of male/female relationships and the basic story of the arrival of evil in the world (more about this later). It is at once the cosmological and the foundational human story. In the view of these interpreters, Eve is the tool of the evil snake and, because she follows his advice, she sins against God and brings evil and death into the world.¹

Thanks to the work of modern feminist biblical scholars, this second creation story has been understood in a new and unique perspective reflecting the changes in contemporary society.² Carol Meyers asks: “What would Eve look like without the overlay of later perspectives? How different would she be?”³ As modern people, we know the answer. She can be a wife, mother, synagogue president, corporate executive, physician, scientist, engineer, and even rabbi. Soon, even a United States president.⁴ Today, Judaism needs a modern midrash that replaces the old idea of woman’s inferiority to men and that reinstates her as, at least, his equal.

I will maintain that this “new” woman can be seen in the existing text, but that male commentators and exegetes did not, could not see her. If we clear away the more than 2,000 years

¹ Julie Faith Parker, “Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of [“with her”] in Genesis 3:6b,” *JBL* 132, no. 4 (2013): pp. 729-747.

² Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women’s Perspective*, trans. Martin Rumscheidt and Barbara Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 149.

³ Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

⁴ Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?* (Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish

Civilization, 2007), p. 76. In tracing the course of Judaism’s liberalization of the nature and status of women, Rosman writes, “This process of increasing women’s Jewish cultural and social capital has continued at a much more rapid pace in the postmodern period.” It “has become more consciously aimed at blurring gender distinctions in the name of equality; it has revolutionized Jewish education; it has been embraced, albeit hesitatingly, by certain Orthodox elements. Emblematic of the change that has occurred is that women rabbis, who were barely even a curiosity in the modern period, are now commonplace (even showing signs of appearing among the Orthodox).”

of patriarchal overlay and look at the text with fresh eyes, we might notice that much of the reading of the text was *reading into the text* ideas and attitudes that were cultural paradigms and individual biases. Scholars call this way of understanding texts hermeneutics. No matter how hard they strive to be objective and to interpret a text, they are stuck with the lens they inherit or experience as members of a particular culture. Scholars of the Bible have read the texts through the lens of their own time and experience.⁵ In the history of bible scholarship, all the interpreters were men. Neusner, writing exclusively about the Oral and written Torah, wrote, “the Judaism set forth by rabbinic literature and normative from antiquity to our own time derives entirely from men.”⁶ Scholars looking at a broader picture of the New Testament looked at the text and saw what their cultural disposition told them was there.⁷ For example, within the culture of late antiquity--not only Israelite, but also the cultures of Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria, not to mention the cultures that followed such as Persia, Greece, and Rome--males dominated and considered themselves the superior sex. Women were their inferiors: homemakers, wives, and mothers. Their province was the home. Men ruled, men went to war, men made laws, men were scientists, doctors, philosophers. As such, they saw women as the inferior sex that benefited from male domination, protection, and leadership.⁸

⁵ Rosman, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* “Reviewing what I have written, I am struck by how clearly I am an example of Jerome Bruner’s cultural psychological Self which I discuss in Chapter 5: that is a Self that is a product of history, ‘Self from the past to the present (p. ix).”

⁶ Jacob Neusner, *Androgynous Judaism: Masculine and Feminine in the Dual Torah*

(Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), p. viii. Having taken this position, Neusner makes clear that the rabbinic writers do not allow for a feminine viewpoint on matters. “Men take priority, men are normal, women are subordinate, woman are abnormal (p.8).”

⁷ Like Rosman, I wish to make clear that I am under no illusion that I am not doing the same. I’m a liberal Jew with a conviction of gender equality. I’m also the father of a daughter whom I discovered when she was in high school was smarter and more radical. For example, when I accompanied her down the aisle in her wedding ceremony with the intention of “giving her away,” she said, “What makes you think you can ‘give me away’?”

⁸ Rosman (*How Jewish Is Jewish History?*) points to the writings of Jacob Katz on the “differences between the behavior and roles of the sexes as being the outcome of social organization, not biology.” Although Katz’s subject was Jewish women, his arguments are cross cultural: “matchmaking customs, family responsibilities, sex life, economic

In this patriarchal view, men couldn't help but see Eve as the archetype, the embodiment of the weak and easily seduced woman. By casting her in this role, they set the stage for the subordination of women in subsequent western societies as well as their role in religion, culture, politics, and economics; then and, to a significant extent, even now. In modern times, we have men challenging this view.⁹ The view that Eve is the originator of "Original Sin," writes Whitcombe, "is a pernicious view [that] continues to subtly influence in negative ways our perception of women...."¹⁰ The words "sin" or "original sin" do not appear in connection with Eve in Rabbinic writings, or anywhere else in the Pentateuch. Nor does the Bible text suggest that humanity is doomed to make bad choices. Moreover, there is no mention of the "Fall of Man," or a curse for humankind.¹¹ The story is about transgression or disobedience for which there are consequences.¹² Yet, remarkably, the Eden narrative ends with God fashioning protective garments for Adam and Eve so they can survive in the post-Eden environment (Gen. 3:21).

tasks, and divorce calculations—all of these were different for women and men, not because of the laws of nature but because of social arrangements in this particular society" (p. 175). Katz observed "that the normative male perspective regarded women's social role to be primarily facilitative, to make it possible for men to live in sexual purity, to provide an economic foundation for their families with the dowries they brought into their marriages, and to have children." Historically, women were facilitators of the realization of men's cultural, religious, and economic goals. He also noted that the lack of formal Jewish education [or for that matter higher education] of women in general—limited their social standing and their ability to acquire skills and training that was more generally reserved for men (p. 175).

⁹ Rosman (*How Jewish Is Jewish History?*) is critical of postmodern thinking about history. He writes that Michel Foucault (one of the most important postmodern theorists) was the advocate for the idea that "knowledge—like much social and cultural activity—is always a tool for gaining power. The text is designed to assert its author's authority." Actually, in Foucault's estimation, "the author-function is not the writing of the text but the imposition of authority through it. One of the most important steps in deconstructing a text is to identify this authority and who stands behind it (p. 6)." Although I don't see myself as a "postmodernist" thinker, Foucault is correct, even though the writer(s) may not have power or control in mind. Scholars write to explore, explain, or interpret a subject that interests them, which many do with the best of intentions of avoiding the trap of historical and cultural pre-dispositions.

¹⁰ Christopher I. E. C. Witcombe, "Eve and the Identity of Women," accessed October 16, 2020, from <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/eve-women/3eveidentity.html>

¹¹ Luise Schottroff, et al., *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 149.

¹² *Ibid.*

Sawyer credits Second Temple Judaism and the Judean writer, Ben Sirach, for initiating this pre-Christian view (200 to 175 BCE) of Eve as the evil one.¹³ In *The Book of Sirach*, he wrote: “Worst of all wounds is that of the heart, worst of all evils is that of a woman.”¹⁴ In “A Father’s Care for His Daughter,” he advises fathers: “12 Do not let [your daughter] reveal her beauty to any male or spend her time with married women; for just as moths come from garments, so a woman’s wickedness comes from a woman.”¹⁵ And the most damning line of all: “With a woman sin had a beginning, and because of her we all die (25:24).”¹⁶

Carol Meyers credits Ben Sirach’s views as the base for New Testament and Rabbinic views of women: “So compelling are [these] views of [women] portrayed in the New Testament, in rabbinic lore, and in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal books that it is difficult to examine the Eve story without being influenced by the dominant Jewish and Christian interpretations of that story.”¹⁷ Their contexts were quite different from the Iron Age society of the Israelites, and “they convey ideas that resonate with their own [later] cultures.”¹⁸

¹³ Deborah F. Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, ed. Paul Morris and Deborah F. Sawyer, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1992), accessed Oct. 16, 2020, from ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/eckerd/detail.action?docID=436140>.

¹⁴ The Book of Sirach, accessed November 2, 2020, from <https://biblescripture.net/Sirach.html#:~:text=The%20Book%20of%20Sirach%2C%20also%20known%20as%20Ecclesiasticus%2C,of%20the%20Hebrew%20Canon%20of%20the%20Old%20Testament>.

¹⁵ Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira’s View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020). In his conclusion, Trenchard observes that Ben Sirach “seems to reach the climax of his negative bias against women when he discusses daughters [about whom] he has virtually nothing good to say.... He views a daughter as a burden to be unloaded: “Give a daughter in marriage and trouble will depart (p. 272).”

¹⁶ “Sirach,” United States Catholic Bishops (2021), accessed Oct. 31, 2021, from <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/sirach/25>

¹⁷ Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ibid. Sforno, the renowned late 16th century Bible exegete, wrote that when God created the woman in Genesis 2:22, “She would possess the same ability to perfect her personality as did man [my emphasis]... .” Further he wrote, “They are to work together in such close union as if there were in fact only one of them.” Why did Eve break the one prohibition God had placed on them: “her power of imagination kept nagging at her weighing the possibility that G’d might indeed be jealous of competition from his creature.... Eve eats the fruit because it is delectable and because God had described it as the “Tree of Knowledge.” Adam followed suit because “his heart was open to her

In the last half century, biblical scholars have come to see this story in other terms, terms more fitting for the 20th and 21st centuries. Women Bible scholars have formed a new lens through which to read the Bible. It has allowed them to see a male bias in previous interpretations of the Bible and to address it in the perspective of another powerful perspective that is part of the feminist revolution in our time. Thus, we have new readings of the ancient text. Bible interpreters now see words that were almost carved in stone with new meanings. For example, the woman (‘îshah’) is not someone who was created inferior because she was second. God (YHWH ELOHIM) created Eve before there was gender and only after ‘îsh’ (“man”) receives his sexual orientation.¹⁹ Before, there was only ‘adâm,’ “earth creature,” without gender.²⁰ God presents the woman to the man as his counterpart, as someone who helps him as his equal, and who in her being is most closely related to him.²¹

According to Malka Zeiger Simkovich, “the Bible’s account [of “Adam”] is, in fact, ambiguous. Some Midrashic passages indicate that the first human actually was comprised of both traditional genders.²² “Leviticus Rabbah” (4th century CE) quotes Rabbi Samuel b. Nahman as saying: “At the time that the Holy One, Blessed Be He[,] created Man, He created him as an Androgynous.” Rebbe Lakish added: “at the time that [Adam] was created, he was made with two faces, and [God]

words because he was her husband, and because he was by her side.” “Sforno, Obadiah Ben Jacob,” Jewish Virtual Library, accessed November 9, 2020, from https://www.sefaria.org/Sforno_on_Genesis.2.24.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

¹⁹ Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden*, p. 147.

²⁰ Alter writes: “The term ‘adam,’ afterward consistently with a definite article, which is used both here and in the second account of the origins of humankind, is a generic term for human beings, not a proper noun. It also does not

automatically suggest maleness, especially not without the prefix ben, “son of,” and so the traditional rendering “man” is misleading, and an exclusively male ‘adam’ would make nonsense of the last clause of verse twenty-seven.

²¹ Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden*, p. 147.

²² Malka Zeiger Simkovich, *The Making of Adam: Understanding the Midrash in Light of Plato and the Pseudepigrapha*, accessed April 25, 2021, from <https://www.theBible.com/article/the-making-of-adam>

sliced him and gave him two backs, a female one and a male one, as it says, ‘And He took from his sides, as it says, And to the side of the Tabernacle.’ Rabbi Akiva added: “Adam was created from the adamah and Chavah was created from the אָדָם. From here and onward, “in our image as our likeness” not man without woman and not woman without man, and not both of them without Shekhinah [God’s presence].”²³

Other Rabbinic opinions were not so flattering and fell into the same misanthropic view as the Church Fathers. These Rabbis observed that the letter ‘*samekh*’ [the fifteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet which normally means “support”] does not appear from the beginning of Genesis until the creation of Eve (Gen. 2:21). In a convoluted argument, the Rabbis associate the use of the letter *samekh* with Eve’s evil impulse. She represents man’s evil urge, and she will cause him to sin.

²⁴

Women Bible scholars are not alone in attempting to rescue Eve from the defamation of paternalistic interpretation. Male Bible scholars have come to her rescue, offering new translations of key words in the story or an entirely new theological framework. In 1993, Jacob Neusner introduced a new idea into the study of Judaism, one that was not followed up by other scholars’ subsequent books or articles about the creation stories.²⁵ He argues that the theological basis of Judaism is to be found in androgyny, the co-equal parts of masculine and feminine. He understands Gen. 1:27 (“And God created the human in his image, in the image of God He created him, male and

²³ Other Rabbis had similar opinions. According to Rabbi Jeremiah ben Elazar, “When the Holy One, blessed be the One, created the first adam, [God] created him [an] ‘androgynos’ (Aggadah, Bereshit Rabbah 8:1). As there it is written: ‘When God created the adam, He made him in the likeness of God; male and female [God] created them’ (Aggadah, Bereshit Rabbah 8:1). Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar agreed with him: “In the hour when the Holy One created the first human, He created him [as] an androgyne/androgynos, as it is said, “male and female He created them.”

²⁴ Tamar Kadari, “Eve: Midrash and Aggadah,” Jewish Women’s Archive, accessed June 14, 2021, from <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/eve-midrash-and-aggadah>.

²⁵ Jacob Neusner, *Androgynous Judaism: Masculine and Feminine in the Dual Torah* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

female He created them.”²⁶) as the base for “the dual Torah [the oral and the written],” which he argues is “a masculine formulation.”²⁷ What Gen. 1:27 shows is that God intended Israel [the nation and the people] to have a foundation in two equal parts, masculine and feminine. He sees that this account of creation in the Torah represents a “profound unity” of male and female, and that the “oral part of the Torah also defines an androgynous Judaism.”²⁸ Even more striking, Neusner claims, “The unity of the Torah came to expression in its portrayal of the profound complementarity and mutual dependency of the two sexes.”²⁹

Professor David Freedman makes a similar case. He argues that “forms of ‘ezer ke-negdo’ as used in the Bible can mean ‘to save’ or ‘to be strong.’”³⁰ But not Genesis 2:18b “when God speaks of the being He is to create to relieve the man’s loneliness.” Freedman argues that God “is surely not creating this creature to be the man’s savior. This makes no sense. God creates this new creature to be, like the man, a power (or strength) superior to the animals. This is the true meaning of ‘ezer’ as used in this passage.”³¹ The second word in this pair, “ke-negdo,” appears only once in the Bible.

In later Mishnaic Hebrew, the root *ke-negdo* means ‘equal,’ as in the famous saying that ‘The study of Torah is equal (*ke-negdo*) to all the other commandments.’ In my view there is no basis for translating *ke-negdo*’ as ‘fit’ or ‘appropriate,’ as the traditional translators do when they describe the

²⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), Kindle ed., p. 31.

²⁷ Torah.org, “Oral vs Written Torah,” accessed Nov. 8, 2021, from <https://torah.org/learning/basics-primer-torah-oraltorah/>. “In Jewish tradition, both the oral and the written Torah, “were given to Moses at Mt. Sinai and during the forty years in the desert and taught to the whole nation. Both have been with us, according to Jewish sources, for all of the past 3300 years. And without both, it is impossible to fully understand traditional Jewish teaching or thought. The Written Torah, mentions each of the Commandments, or Mitzvot, only in passing or by allusion. The Oral Law fills in the gaps.”

²⁸ Neusner, *ibid.*, p. vii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ R. David Freedman, “Woman, a Power Equal to Man,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9:1 (January/February 1983) accessed Aug. 6, 2021, from <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/9/1/6>

³¹ *Ibid.*

woman as a ‘fit helper.’ When God creates Eve from אָדָם’s rib, His intent is that she will be unlike the animals – a ‘power (or strength) equal to him.’ There is no other way of understanding the phrase *ezer ke-negdo* that can be defended philologically. The traditional translation is based on a late nuance of *ezer* (help) which is not justified by the context.”³²

Richard Elliott Friedman in his *Commentary on the Bible* translates אָדָם in Genesis 1:26 as “human”: “Let us make a human, in our image.”³³ And again in 1:27, “And God created the human in His image.”³⁴ In chapter 2 of the Genesis story, אָדָם becomes אָדָמָה, which Friedman translates as “a human” or “the human.”³⁵ Friedman then uses the gender-based term “ish” (“man”) as the counterpart of “ishah.”³⁶ Instead of translating ‘*ezer ke-negdo*’ as a secondary, weaker partner, Friedman translates the phrase as “strength,” corresponding to ish.³⁷

Standard translations, whether Jewish or Christian, translate these terms as “a man,” thus introducing the at least 2,000-year bias of God’s creation of a male being, the result of which is that this figure, by virtue of being created first, has dominance.³⁸ According to Berlin and Brettler, “The creation of the woman after the man and from a part of his body need not imply the subordination

³² Ibid.

³³ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Bible* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), p. 12. Friedman goes only halfway in his attempt to remove gender from the first human creation. He still uses the male pronoun for God, referring to God’s image as “His image”: “And God created the human in His image.”

³⁴ Is it noteworthy to point out that the text changes from “Let us make a human, in our image” to “His image”? Could we see in this change that God is seeking approval or acquiescence from the others in His court, who understood all the time that God meant “His image”?

³⁵ Friedman, *Commentary on the Bible*, pp. 16-17.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford U. P., 2014), p. 14.

of women to men.”³⁹ They cite Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, 1194-1270) who wrote that “the point of v24 is that men are to be different from the males of the animal world who mate and move on to the next partner. A man ‘wishes’ [his wife] to be with him always.”⁴⁰ Only after the birth of “ishah,” the woman, does it make sense to refer to אִשָּׁה as sexually differentiated.⁴¹ Alter translates ‘ezer ke-negdo’ as “sustainer beside him.” He points out that “ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone.”⁴²

Ziony Zevit translates אִדָּם as the “human.”⁴³ The origin of this first human “was formed from a clod or clump of soil, not from dust and not from ash. Nor was he formed from clay, ḥōmer or ḥēmār, that bakes in the sun or in a kiln and assumes a permanent form as it dries (Gen 11:3; Exod 1:14; 2:3; Isa 45:9; Jer 18:4-6; Job 4:19; 10:9)... .In the Garden story, the breathing creature is not named Adam but is described as the ‘ādām,’ ‘human’ or ‘person,’ a common noun in Hebrew that occurs also in legal and ritual parts of the Bible (cf. Exod 4:11; 9:10; Lev 1:2; 18:5).”⁴⁴

Like Zevit and Freedman before him, in a recent article in *Torah.com*, Gary A. Rendsburg, understands ‘ezer ke-negdo’ in Genesis 2:18 to be the crux of the translation problem and the source

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread,” Andover Newton Theological School (1973), accessed Oct. 1, 2021, from https://www.law.csuohio.edu/sites/default/files/shared/eve_and_adam-text_analysis-2.pdf

⁴² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 31.

⁴³ Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 213), 123. See also his “Gender Equality at Creation,” *Torah.com*, accessed Oct. 20, 2021, from https://www.academia.edu/16600335/Gender_Equality_at_Creation.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

of the misunderstandings that have been part of most English translations of the Bible. Rendsburg understands the words *'ezer ke-negdo'* “as his [אָדָם’s] opposite” in the sense of equal partner.⁴⁵

In the history of the English translations of the biblical account of the creation, the first human, אָדָם, was male. My review of twelve translations of the “Old Testament” story of Genesis in the Christian Bible reveals that they translate “אָדָם” or “ha adam” as “Man,” “man” “mankind” or “him.”⁴⁶ Since the time of the King James translation of the Hebrew Bible, most Christian translations of the Bible translated “אָדָם,” the first human, as indisputably male and dominant over the female. The history of Judaism’s translation of the Hebrew Bible presents a similar picture but

⁴⁵ Gary A. Rendsburg, “Woman: Helpmate No Longer,” Torah.com, accessed October 20, 2021, from <https://www.thetorah.com/article/woman-helpmate-no-longer>.

⁴⁶ 1611	The King James Version	KJV	uses “man”
1885	The Revised Version	RV	“MAN”
1901	American Standard Version	ASV	A substantial revision of the RV. “MAN”
1952	Revised Standard Version	RSV	“MAN”
1971	New American Standard Bible	NASB	“man”
1978	New International Version	NIV	man
1982	New King James Version	NKJV	man
1989	New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	A significant update of the RSV. Uses “humankind” in Genesis Chapter 1, then “man” throughout Chapter 2, but then “humankind” in Chapter 5.
2001	English Standard Version	ESV	man
2004	Holman Christian Standard	HCSB	man
2006	New English Translation	NET	man
2014	Modern English Version	MEV	man
2017	Christian Standard Bible	CSB	man
	Orthodox Jewish Bible	OJB	mostly “adam”

has not been as harsh as Ben Sirach's on women. Nonetheless, Judaism has perpetuated the view of women as the lesser of the two sexes. Consider the use of "man" in the JPS 1917 and the 1988 edition, which translate אָדָם as "man" (cf. Genesis 1:26 "And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness') as do the Christian translations. (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible* first translates "אָדָם" as "humankind" in vs. 1:26 and 1:27 and then as "man" throughout the rest of the verses.)

A New Look at Genesis

From the foregoing discussion, it should be apparent that the traditional patriarchal views of Eve have received a major challenge from contemporary biblical scholars, both male and female. As I indicated at the beginning of this essay, these writers admittedly have influenced my views, but some of them are original in some notable ways. To get to these views, we need to review the story of creation and begin to see it with fresh eyes.

In the history of biblical study, scholars more or less agree that the creation stories have different authors or come from different sources and that redactors pasted together because both stories had fundamental validity. Alter and Friedman claim that the first creation account (Genesis 1.1-2.3) comes from the commonly identified "P" source (Priestly writing and sources), and that "J" comes from Jahwist writing and sources.⁴⁷ In the Priestly source, God (ELOHIM) is majestic, transcendent, creator of the cosmos, the earth and everything on it, including humans. ELOHIM has ultimate power, and everything that happens in this first creation account happens through ELOHIM's power and will.⁴⁸ J, written earlier in the writings of the Bible, has a different emphasis

⁴⁷ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 31. As Alter points out the Documentary Hypothesis has been under attack, even by its own adherents. But for the purposes of this paper, it provides a handy and simple architecture for my thesis. Richard Elliott Friedman in *The Bible with sources revealed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003) has his own version of the Documentary Hypothesis. He makes a compelling case for sources that he identifies as P, J, JE, RJE, D, Dtr1, and Dtr2.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Alter and Friedman both share elements of the Documentary Hypothesis. "Elohim" (a Hebrew word meaning "god", has been traced to an earlier Canaanite word meaning "the gods") is revealed in stages: Elohim, then to Abraham as El Shaddai (usually translated as "God Almighty"), and finally to Moses by his unique name, "Yahweh."

and focus and little in common with P.⁴⁹ The God of Gen. 2.4 is “YHWH ELOHIM,” a combination of the form of transcendent God of the first creation story and the God of our ancestors, the God of history.⁵⁰ Gen. 2:5 links the two stories with these words: “On the day the LORD God made earth and heavens, 5no shrub of the field being yet on the earth and no plant of the field yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused rain to fall on the earth and there was no human to till the soil....”⁵¹ Like ELOHIM, YHWH ELOHIM creates everything on the planet, all life forms and humans. Unlike ELOHIM, YHWH ELOHIM has a different focus and function.⁵² ELOHIM speaks, and the world comes into being. Assuming ELOHIM’S work of creating the cosmos is done, YHWH ELOHIM focuses attention on the earth. This God is a master gardener, a super naturalist. YHWH ELOHIM brings rain so that vegetation can grow, rivers spring up, and YHWH ELOHIM plants a garden. Recognizing that the garden needs to be cared for, YHWH ELOHIM sculpts an אֵדֶן from the soil and plants it in the garden.⁵³ From the time YHWH ELOHIM creates the first and then the second human, the great creation story of the happy couple in the garden begins to unravel. In a very few

⁴⁹ Scholars have debated questions such as the origin of the creation stories and the period in which they were written. (cf. for example: Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), Jacob Neusner, *Androgynous Judaism: Masculine and Feminine in the Dual Torah* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), Mark Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). See also David M. Carr’s brilliant study of Mesopotamian sources for Genesis, *The Formation of Genesis 1-11* (Oxford U. P., 2020), and Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minn.: Fortress Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ According to Mark S. Smith, identifying god by a name in the Bible is a complicated exercise. “God is considerably broader and more complex than when people today recognize when they think of what a god is (p. 12).” He maintains that the singular form of “god” is also complex. It has “considerable variation (p. 13).” One could say that God has multiple names, each one appropriate to its context. Thus, to name a few of the major appellations denoting God, we find “ELOHIM” “YHWH,” “YHWH ELOHIM,” and “EL ELYON.”

⁵¹ Robert Alter, trans. *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), pp. 20-21.

⁵² In *The Formation of Genesis 1-11*, Carr argues, “the more one analyzes the details of Genesis 2-3, the less it appears to be a compositional expansion of Genesis 1. Instead, as argued in the previous chapter, Genesis 1 preserves several blind motifs from Genesis 2-3. This suggests that Genesis 2-3 was an originally separate precursor to Genesis 1 and not composed as a compositional extension of it” (p. 61).

⁵³ It is possible to see the antecedent of this creation story in the ancient Mesopotamian creation story in the *Enuma Elish*. In that myth, as a means of relieving the other gods of the unpleasant responsibility of taking care of the earth, Marduk creates humans to take their place. Yet, according to Smith (*The Memoirs of God*), ancient Israel’s scribes redefined the Mesopotamian god, Marduk, and made YHWH the singular god with positive qualities and superseding other gods that were known from surrounding cultures (p. 185).

chapters, life on earth has devolved into a nightmare world, one which YHWH ELOHIM is so unhappy with that YHWH ELOHIM decides to destroy almost all of it and start over.

Why the cosmological story takes such a negative turn may be the result of the anthropomorphizing of ELOHIM. The Bible depicts YHWH ELOHIM as having a body with hands, arms, feet, and a back.⁵⁴ YHWH ELOHIM walks in the garden, speaks to humans, punishes, and rewards them for their behavior in light of YHWH ELOHIM's commandments. Moreover, YHWH ELOHIM is integrally tied to human affairs. If events and actions accord with YHWH ELOHIM's sense of right, YHWH ELOHIM is pleased. If not, YHWH ELOHIM, self-identified as a "jealous" God, gets angry and inflicts minor and sometimes catastrophic punishments on humans.⁵⁵

The first creation story Gen. 1:1-2:3, as profound as it appears, seems to play little part in the rest of the Bible and in the more than 2,000-year history of biblical interpretation. The writer of Genesis, however, thought it was important enough (or was it the redactor?) that it had to be repeated. Thus, in Genesis 5:1 we find: "This is the book of the lineage of Adam: On the day God created the human, in the image of God He created him. 2Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name humankind on the day they were created."⁵⁶ This repetition of Genesis 1:26-1:28 may be understood to mean that this account of the process of creation is critical to understanding the rest of the Bible.⁵⁷ Phyllis Trible writes: "let us" strongly suggests that the

⁵⁴ Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge U. P., 2009). Sommer documents the all too frequent description of God in anthropomorphic terms and claims that, like the cultures around it, Israelites would have had no difficulty in recognizing a God with human characteristics.

⁵⁵ Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*: Alter notes that the Hebrew for "jealous God" is complicated. "The Hebrew 'qana' can mean either "jealous" (including the sexual sense) or "zealous," "ardent." The appearance of the term in connection with God's banning all cultic rivals suggests that the leading edge of the word here may in fact be jealousy. The revolutionary idea of a single God uniting all the realms of creation may be a noble and philosophically bold idea, but it is imagined in ancient Israel in powerfully anthropomorphic terms: God does not tolerate rivals to the hearts of His people. The word "god" here is not capitalized because the Hebrew employs the generic term 'el': this, the LORD is saying, is the kind of god I am, and you had better take that to heart." (p. 430)

⁵⁶ Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 20.

“other” as part of us is the male and female components of God. In my view, the Bible’s “Let us” make humankind in our image, means what the words seem to mean: God is hermaphroditic and so is the human God created.⁵⁸ Plaut in his “Gleanings,” quotes a Midrash that states, “Man and woman were originally undivided, i.e., Adam was at first created bisexual, a hermaphrodite.”⁵⁹

The second creation story (Genesis 2:4-3:24), as we have noted, is a different story. No cosmos, no earth and sky, no water, no firmament. In the first story, ELOHIM is supreme and creates with complete confidence and with a complete architectural framework. Everything is in its place and time. Day one to day seven. ELOHIM creates *time*. The seven days of the creation story is the signifier of time’s existence. Everything is just as God wants it. Even the creation of the humans, created equal, and in the image of God, ELOHIM declares “very good.” However, in the second creation story (Gen. 2:4-3:24), time doesn’t exist in the garden and doesn’t become a factor until YHWH ELOHIM⁶⁰ forces Adam and Eve out of the garden and into time. In the second creation story, ELOHIM becomes “YHWH ELOHIM” (יהוה אלהים), and from then on ELOHIM and YHWH ELOHIM appear to be used as two different names for the same God. The ELOHIM of the first creation story appears to have total control but once ELOHIM becomes יהוה אלהים, the character of God changes, apparently because the P version of the story has been integrated into the J version.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), p. 32.

⁶⁰ Friedman in *The Bible with Sources Revealed* argues that in the second creation story, a new name for God appears, “YHWH ELOHIM,” “YHWH God,” both cosmic and “God of your father (p. 35).”

⁶¹ Plaut (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, 32) points out, early in the history of the Torah, two stories of the creation of Adam developed that presented the view that there was an “original” ideal Adam in the first creation story, and a real-world Adam in the second story. This second Adam was fashioned out of material substance and became the progenitor of the human race. Friedman (*The Bible with Sources Revealed*) notes that the second creation story opens with nearly the same formulation of Gen. 1:1: Gen. 2:4, “These are the records of the skies and the earth when they were created (35).” Then Gen. 2:4 reverses the order of creation, “In the day that YHWH God made earth and skies.” The reversal suggests two different sources. “P is more heaven-centered, almost a picture from the sky looking down, while J is more human-centered (and certainly more anthropomorphic), more like a picture from the earth looking up (p. 35).”

This formulation is used from 2:4-3:1. In verse 3:1, in the second half of the sentence, ELOHIM returns, but only until 3:8. Then, we find in 4:1-4:15 YHWH ELOHIM. From that point forward, we get ELOHIM and YHWH ELOHIM through the story of Noah, Gen. 6:9-9:29. Unlike ELOHIM, YHWH ELOHIM tries things out, experiments. Compared to ELOHIM, YHWH ELOHIM is a transitional figure, concerned mostly with the creation of the earth and everything living on it. In this J version of creation, the cosmos is a given, day and night are givens, the separation of earth and sky are givens.

Is there reason to believe that this identification of two different names for God has a cultural context? The idea of a deity whose focus is different, or whose focus changes--because of different sources--is not as strange as it sounds. No less than Philo makes that distinction. He affirms a transcendent God without physical features or emotional qualities resembling those of human beings. In Philo, God exists beyond time and space and does not make special interventions into the world because God already encompasses the entire cosmos.⁶² Only God's existence is certain. This God has nothing to do with the world or with human beings. This God is unchangeable, needs nothing and no one, is self-sufficient, infinite, and eternal. Philo's God has no human attributes or emotions, indeed no attributes whatever, and consequently no name and is imperceptible by humans.⁶³ Obviously, this is not the God of the Bible.

Philo's concept of God in the Bible is a paradox of positive and negative assertions about God. In negative statements, Philo defines the nature of God in contrast to the material world.⁶⁴ Thus, when he discusses the God of Torah, he sees a God active in the world, filled with zeal, and

⁶² Crawford Howell Toy, Carl Siegfried, and Jacob Zallel Lauterbach, "Philo Judaeus," *TheJewishEncyclopedia.com* (2002-2021), accessed Oct. 27, 2021, from <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12116-philu-judaeus>

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

moved by acts of repentance. This is an active God who comes to the aid of Israel and is entirely different from Philo's positive God.⁶⁵

Philo's view of God is in some important ways similar to that of the Gnostics and the Zoroastrians. According to Cohen and Mendes-Flohr, "various trends in Jewish thought and literature of the Second Commonwealth appear to have been potential factors in Gnostic origins."⁶⁶ They trace the roots of Gnosticism to Plato and Philo and see the demiurge, the evil twin of the universal "good" in the form of God, as engaged in an ongoing battle for supremacy. They even find signs of Gnosticism in the Jewish Wisdom Literature in the form of Sophia, a quasi-mystical concept that morphed in the Gospel of John into Jesus.⁶⁷

The demiurge is sometimes ignorant of the superior god. Sometimes the demiurge is opposed to it and is malevolent. The demiurge creates the physical universe and the physical aspect of humanity.⁶⁸ The demiurge has an entourage "of co-actors named archons who preside over the material realm and, in some cases, present obstacles to the soul seeking ascent from it."⁶⁹ The inferiority of the demiurge's creation may be compared to the technical inferiority of a work of art, painting, sculpture, etc. to the thing the art represents.⁷⁰ More interesting, I think, is that this figure has been identified with El, Satan, and Yahweh.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.), *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought* (New York: Jewish Publication, 2010), p.286.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 287-289.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bentley Layton, "Introduction to 'Against Heresies' by St. Irenaeus," *The Gnostic Scriptures* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism have bipolar forces ruling the universe. Zoroastrianism posits two gods, the good god, Ahura Mazda, and the bad one, Angra Mainyu. They are antipodes, constantly in a battle with each other for dominance. Gnosticism has its own antipodes as universal forces. One of them resembles figures in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Republic* where the demiourgos is a central figure, a benevolent creator of the universe who works to make the universe as benevolent as the limitations of matter will allow.⁷² In Plato's *Republic*, the description of the leontomorphic "desire" in Socrates' model of the psyche bears a resemblance to descriptions of the demiurge as being in the shape of the lion.⁷³

These subordinate gods, I maintain, shed light on the second creation story in Genesis. It begins with YHWH ELOHIM creating a garden and soon a human (אָדָם) to take care of it. What YHWH ELOHIM doesn't know is that this creation is flawed and doomed to disaster. However, the story is presented as a learning experience for this YHWH ELOHIM. Unlike ELOHIM, supreme and secure in creative powers and whose creation is perfect, YHWH ELOHIM *discovers* that the first human needs a "helpmate," that it is not complete by itself. This is the first sign of YHWH ELOHIM's miscalculation. YHWH ELOHIM's next "error" in judgment is to look for the helpmate among all of the rest of creation.⁷⁴ YHWH ELOHIM parades all the animals and insects before אָדָם and tells him to pick one for a mate. Imagine how flustered אָדָם must have felt to have to choose between an elephant and a mosquito! This scene is almost comedic. Then, YHWH ELOHIM makes

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The evidence of YHWH's mistakes is everywhere in the Bible, but no more revealing than in this early admission. In only a few chapters after the creation stories, YHWH is ready to destroy creation and start over again. YHWH is disgusted with the behavior of the b'nei Elohim and with that of the humans: "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them (Genesis 6-7).'"

another mistake, or poor judgement, and creates a woman (הַשָּׂה) out of אָדָם's side or rib.⁷⁵ The mistake is that, unlike ELOHIM who created male and female out of the same “substance” and declared them equal, YHWH ELOHIM creates Eve out of אָדָם, which biblical exegetes have understood as inferior to the creation of the first human. Genesis 2:23 adds: “And the man said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (אָדָם).’” This description of the woman reads very much like the human that ELOHIM created in the first creation story, the “androgynous,” male and female as one flesh. In my view, there is a direct connection to the next verse (Genesis 2:24): “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” This idea of the “one flesh” suggests to me that in both creation stories, the humans come from one flesh, that they are co-equal parts of one whole, created in the image of God, and endowed with the same attributes.⁷⁶ Tribble’s view of this passage takes a different direction: “The creation of Eve implied no inferiority; the word *ezer* (helpmate), used to describe Eve, connotes a mentor-superior in the Bible rather than an assistant and is used frequently for the relation of God to Israel (and not for the relation of Israel to God).”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “Woman,” Heb. 'ishshah.' More precisely in context, “a (female) member of the human species.” The Contemporary Bible, p. 351.

⁷⁶ The tradition of Adam and Eve’s androgynous nature dates from the first centuries CE, as it is also found in ancient pseudepigrapha such as The Apocalypse of Adam (1st-4th century CE) of the Nag Hammadi library. In the story, Adam tells Seth how humans came into existence:

When God had created me out of the earth, along with Eve, your mother, I went about with her in a glory which she had seen in the aeon from which we had come forth. She taught me a word of knowledge of the eternal God. And we resembled the great eternal angels, for we were higher than the god who had created us and the powers with him, whom we did not know. Then God, the ruler of the aeons and the powers, divided us in wrath. Then we became two aeons. And the glory in our heart(s) left us, me and your mother Eve, along with the first knowledge that breathed within us. (Bible Brisket, accessed November 8, 2020, from <https://biblebrisket.com/2014/03/17/androgynousadam/>).

⁷⁷ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread,” Andover Newton Theological School, 1973, accessed 11/22/2020, from https://www.law.csuohio.edu/sites/default/files/shared/eve_and_adam-text_analysis-2.pdf.

Christopher Witcombe adds to this positive view of Eve: she is “an active, interesting, clever character, who instigates civilization by her eating of the forbidden fruit.”⁷⁸ Most recently, Raanan Eichler has moved this argument further with his philological analysis. He rejects the traditional translation “עֲזָרָה” as “a helper” of subordinate status.⁷⁹ He argues instead that the Hebrew word, “עֲזָרָה” (helper), which occurs nineteen times in the Bible, always refers to “an entity that is more powerful than the person being helped.” Eichler understands the Bible’s writer to mean that עֲזָרָה “means ‘helper’ in the sense of ‘savior,’ ‘deliverer,’ or ‘rescuer.’ It almost always refers to God..., and almost always when God is saving the person from serious, even life-threatening, danger.”⁸⁰ This interpretation gathers more weight as the narrative progresses. Eichler claims that “the Woman is active and the Man passive throughout the process of eating from the Tree of Knowledge (3:1-7), and in which she is also the only one to do anything “with” God, sharing no less than his capacity to create a new human (4:1).”⁸¹ In my analysis, then, these two humans are not the same, and not equal, at least in character and faculties. “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” does not make them alike. They are no more equal than identical twins; they have different human characteristics, emotions, genders, and faculties.

Another mistake YHWH ELOHIM makes is giving humans the power of thought and a rebellious spirit. It’s not a surprise, then, that one of them would want to test the limits of their

⁷⁸ Christopher I. E. C. Witcombe, “Eve and the Identity of Women.”

Ziony Zevit agrees with her: “The genius underlying Tribble’s interpretation of Hawwa is her insight that Hawwa’s action was prompted by curiosity, not cupidity. Tribble’s rereading provides an antidote to, if not a serum against, ideologically motivated misogynistic eisegesis—interpretation based on reading one’s own ideas and biases into a text. It returns us to the problem of obedience and to the question of the story as a paradigm in a historical context.” Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2013), pp. 23-24.

⁷⁹ Raanan Eichler, “Gender Equality at Creation,” *Bible.com* (2015, updated Nov. 18, 2020), accessed Nov. 22, 2020, from <https://www.theBible.com/article/gender-equality-at-creation>. David M. Carr also writes of the woman as “a helper corresponding to” the first human (*The Formation of Genesis 1-11*, 31).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

gilded cage. Imagine being locked away in “paradise” where nothing changes, where there is no work, nothing to explore, no children to raise, nothing to look forward to.

In human terms, isn't this a kind of imprisonment or death? Human history tells us that change and growth are fundamental characteristics of being human. It is the challenge that gives meaning to our lives. Eve's world is perfect, an eternity of nothing happening, nothing to which to look forward, nothing to aspire to. By eating from the Tree of Knowledge, she violates the one prohibition YHWH ELOHIM has placed on them. In contrast, Adam is content with the status quo.

But what of the “apple?” It becomes the symbol of her aspiration. Despite all the evil that commentators have attached to the apple, it represents and is the key to her liberation. The way the writer of these verses presents this issue is that Eve makes a bad choice. She should not have eaten the forbidden fruit. She should have left things as they were. That is how God wanted it.

The snake also takes on special importance. Another mistake YHWH ELOHIM makes is to create a talking and seductive snake. The first voice we hear in this second creation story is that of a snake talking to the woman (3:1). Why is that? Tradition tells us that Eve is easily seduced because she is female, thereby implying she's not smart enough to understand the evil intent of the Snake. Should we assume then that Adam is smarter and less likely to fall victim to the Snake's sophistry? I propose that Adam is impervious to logic, to reasoning. The Snake recognizes that it can't change Adam's mind because it is fixed. He does what he's told. A reasoning mind, on the other hand, is open to latest information and ideas and will follow an argument to its logical conclusion. That's why the Snake approaches Eve. It knows her mind is flexible. It follows logic, not fixity. For proof, we should notice that when she hands Adam the fruit, he takes it without question. What kind of brain does that? When Adam hears God walking in the garden, he hides because either he is

ashamed of what he has done, or in fear for his life, or both. When God accosts him for eating the forbidden fruit, he responds meekly: My wife made me do it. When he realizes that this approach is not going anywhere, he shifts the blame to God: “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat!” (Genesis 3:12).⁸² How smart is that?

When Eve talks with the Snake, she says that God has declared that the humans should not eat from this tree, or they will “surely die.” The snake counters, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:2-5). The woman appears to understand that these words mean that she will become wise. For her, that is an irresistible argument. She wants (craves, desires?) wisdom. How else explain her willingness to defy God?⁸³

I have already noted that Eve is the first human to question authority and to challenge the limits that have been imposed on her. In my view, she liberates humanity from the prison-like garden of Eden and, in so doing, ushers in human history. This understanding of the allegory of human creation brings into question the notion that Eve is the author of “original sin.” It also raises the question of Adam’s role, the presumed role of the male leader. Instead of leading, Adam follows. He does what his female partner (“wife”) tells him to do. He eats because he follows her lead. As noted above, the Bible never calls this act “sinful.” The Bible presents it as a misdeed, a disobedience. Nor does Eve seduce or tempt Adam, she hands him a piece of fruit. By eating the fruit of the Tree of Good and Bad,⁸⁴ she takes a leap of faith to challenge her limits, to explore

⁸² Are these words meant as humor? Our contemporary culture views askance the behavior of blaming a wife or secretary for something you did of your own free will.

⁸³ Yes, scholars have offered other explanations. Among them: she’s evil to the core; the snake deceived her, she acted impetuously.

⁸⁴ Cf. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, p. 17.

forbidden knowledge that transcends mere survival. She wants to know the relationship of wisdom (represented by the tree) to immortality.⁸⁵

If Adam has awareness, we do not know it. There is no thought associated with him. Does he think about his surroundings? Is he content with his life? Does he have any desire like his wife to gain knowledge? Does he abrogate moral responsibility to her? Adam says nothing, not to God, not to Eve. His failure to speak is a sign of his passivity. He speaks only when God speaks to him. Eve, on the other hand, is the first human to speak of God and to engage in dialogue. She invokes God in almost every one of her speeches (also 4:1, 25).⁸⁶ Once outside the garden, she is the first to speak God's personal name: "Both I and יהוה made a man..." she tells her husband (Genesis 4:1). We can also hear her pride and condescension toward Adam. Eskenazi suggests that with these words, "Eve acknowledges... that giving birth involves God and celebrates the mystery of female creativity."⁸⁷ In contrast, the man has not uttered a word since leaving the garden. Note, there is no resistance or recrimination on his part. He just eats. His act is child-like. Ironically, eating the fruit does not seem to have any effect on him. He is no wiser than before. Is it farfetched to see Eve (The Mother) as the dominant one in the partnership?

In my analysis, the desire to know is a sign of intelligence and human aspiration, a need to "think outside the box," in this case, outside the garden. What more to life might there be outside of these "walls"? That is the voice I hear inside of the woman's head. Once outside the garden,

⁸⁵ Meyers, "Eve," *Bible Odyssey*, accessed November 16, 2020, from <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/main-articles/eve>. "Eve is a dynamic figure—more so than the rather passive man."

⁸⁶ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Andrea L. Weiss (eds.), (URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* Eskenazi also says, "Eve could also be referring to her husband as one who became hers with God's help. The verb k-n-h elsewhere often means 'acquired' and typically refers to a man acquiring a wife (see Ruth 4: 10). In a surprising reversal here, the woman is acquiring "a man." p. 152.

“[nothing] suggests that the woman was subservient to the man. To the contrary: she is the one who speaks; she is the one who names; and she has the power to interpret and preserve the family’s history.”⁸⁸ Through these actions, “the woman takes the first step toward what modern interpreters call consciousness-raising. If the tree entails ‘knowing all things,’ then woman is bringer of civilization, not death.”⁸⁹

One more factor we need to consider. I stated earlier that the cosmic God of the first creation story is perfect. ELOHIM makes no mistakes and creates a perfectly balanced world. Clines, however, points out that ELOHIM fails to fulfill promises. ELOHIM tells the humans, “Be fruitful, subdue the earth, and have dominion over the animals.”⁹⁰ Yet, none of this happens. It is not ELOHIM’s fault. YHWH ELOHIM makes childbearing painful, then wipes out almost the entire human race, and makes getting food out of the ground difficult. As for dominating the earth, we learn from the Flood story that YHWH ELOHIM’s actions make clear how preposterous is cosmic God’s [ELOHIM’s] vision for humanity.

Was Eve framed? Yes, she was. My argument is similar to Eichler’s and to the other scholars I’ve cited but goes one step further. I see Eden as a metaphoric “prison,” or an early gestation stage of human development.⁹¹ Eve is the one with the inquiring mind, the one who wants to know what’s outside. I see her actions as analogous to the action of the first people to leave Africa whom we can imagine saying: “Let’s go see what’s out there.” Since that remote time, human beings have been on

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 154. In Genesis 4:25, it is clear that Eve is the partner who names: “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, ‘God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel,’ for Cain had killed him.”

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁹⁰ David Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help? : And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990). ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/eckerd/detail.action?docID=436322>. Created from Eckerd on 2021-10-22 16:10:08.

⁹¹ In *The Bible: A Women’s Commentary*, Eskenazi describes Eve as “daring,” “resourceful,” “discerning,” and “responsible,” p. 139.

a relentless course to test the boundaries of knowledge. Today, we say, “let's get off this planet and see what's out there.” In my reading, the Bible is a metaphor for human aspiration and our ongoing need to challenge and expand the frontiers of our existence.

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