Introduction

Women of the Torah and the Throne

PROLOGUE: YOU'RE INVITED TO SUPPER (OR, IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?)

I'd like to invite you to supper. My family is from the South, and I mean supper and not dinner. Supper is the larger (and earlier) of the two meals. You are most welcome to this table. Don't worry, it's no trouble, there's plenty to eat, and there are extra places at the table. Help yourself.

The supper table for many black women (women of African descent, primarily but not exclusively in the Americas, Caribbean, Europe, and on the continent of Africa) is often mother's or grandmother's table; it may have now become our table. The table (and everything on it) is womanist biblical interpretation, the content of this book, to which you are invited. That your host is a black woman who cooks and serves the way she does in no way makes you less welcome or even unwelcome because you may not be a black woman and/or set and serve your table differently. This book is an invitation, and its contents are meal (and recipes) and table talk.

In my house the dishes are not limited to those my mother and grandmother knew and loved. The dishes I love come from all over the world: India, Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco in addition to my ancestral North Carolina and Texas. All are welcome at this table, and as a sign of that welcome I offer not only dishes I like; I try to meet the dietary needs of my guests—which is not the same as cooking exactly what they want exactly the way they want. I am no short-order cook, yet some of the dishes on my table are kosher vegetarian; others are vegan. When there is meat, it may be halal. And, as the daughter of a southern woman who brought macaroni salad to family

reunions, I can't pass myself off as a southern-style soul food cook, not even in this opening parable. So there is an explicit invitation for you to bring your own dish to share.

All are welcome to this table. The tables of our mothers and grandmothers (and sometimes fathers and grandfathers) in the African diaspora include multicultural marriages (Korean on my mother's side, Mexican on my father's side) and bi- and multiracial children in addition to our own multiple heritages (Native American, Irish, and African American on my mother's side; German and African American on my father's side). To be black in America is no singular thing; accordingly there is no singular black biblical interpretation. To be a black woman in the Americas is to navigate and negotiate multiple identities and perspectives, as so many womanist thinkers, writers, scholars, readers, preachers, teachers, and interpreters illustrate.

The supper invitation is the guiding metaphor for this book. Schoolmates, family friends, and some folk who we never figured out just how they arrived at our tables were all welcome. And so you are welcome, whether womanism and feminism[1] are familiar, beloved, or altogether new and strange dishes. You are most welcome.

If you are trying to figure out whether a womanist and feminist book about the Bible is for you, pull up a seat; dig in. Accepting this invitation to this table doesn't mean you can't go home and cook (or order in) the way you used to. It just may mean you won't want to. This text is an invitation for readers, hearers, and interpreters of the Scriptures to read and interpret with me. This text is written for those who read the Bible as a religious text, who look to it for teaching and preaching, inspiration and illumination; to offer religious readers an exegetical and hermeneutical resource that delves deeply into the canon(s) and draws on marginal and marginalized women as scriptural exemplars.

WOMANIST MIDRASH

My exegetical approach in this project is *womanist midrash* inspired by rabbinic midrashic approaches to the literal texts of the Scriptures, their translations, and interpretations for religious readers. My approach combines

1. Womanism is often simply defined as black feminism. It is that, and it is much more. It is a richer, deeper, liberative paradigm; a social, cultural, and political space and theological matrix with the experiences and multiple identities of black women at the center. Womanism shares the radical egalitarianism that characterizes feminism at its basic level, but without its default referent, white women functioning as the exemplar for all women. Feminism here is both the justice work of women on behalf of women in public and private spaces that seeks to transcend boundaries, and feminism

translation-based exegesis with literary and contextual, ancient and contemporary readings of the biblical text as Scripture. I offer "A Note on Translating" as an appendix. As religious readings, rabbinic readings discern value in texts, words, and letters, as potential revelatory spaces; they reimagine dominant narratival readings while crafting new ones to stand alongside—not replace—former readings. Midrash also asks questions of the text; sometimes it provides answers, sometimes it leaves the reader to answer the questions.

My friend and Hebrew biblical studies colleague Mark Brummitt coined the term "womanist midrash" for my work, and I am indebted to him for it. The expression captures my articulation of a womanist hermeneutic influenced by classical rabbinic and continuing contemporary midrash. Specifically, womanist midrash is a set of interpretive practices, including translation, exegesis, and biblical interpretation, that attends to marginalized characters in biblical narratives, especially women and girls, intentionally including and centering on non-Israelite peoples and enslaved persons. Womanist midrash listens to and for their voices in and through the Hebrew Bible, while acknowledging that often the text does not speak, or even intend to speak, to or for them, let alone hear them. In the tradition of rabbinic midrash and contemporary feminist biblical scholarship, womanist midrash offers names for anonymized characters and crafts/listens for/gives voice to those characters. This particular hermeneutic, womanist midrash, is an outgrowth of my experience from pulpit and pew with the *sanctified imagination* in black preaching; I have come to recognize the sanctified imagination as a type of African American indigenous midrash.

The exercise of the sanctified imagination may be unfamiliar for some readers. The concept of the sanctified imagination is deeply rooted in a biblical piety that respects the Scriptures as the word of God and takes them seriously and authoritatively. This piety can be characterized by a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and a profound concern never to misrepresent the biblical texts. In this context the preacher would be very careful to signify that what he or she is preaching is not in the text but is also divinely inspired. In this practice a preacher may introduce a part of the sermon with words like "In my *sanctified imagination* . . . ," in order to disclose that the preacher is going beyond the text in a manner not likely to be challenged, even in the most literal interpretive communities. The sanctified imagination is the fertile creative space where the preacher-interpreter enters the text, particularly the spaces in the text, and fills them out with missing details: names, back stories, detailed descriptions of the scene and characters, and so on.

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as it is in the Western world with historical and contemporary racism, classism, and transphobia characterizing it to differing degrees.

Like classical and contemporary Jewish midrash, the sacred imagination tells the story behind the story, the story between the lines on the page. For example, the sanctified imagination reveals that Rachel was athletic and long-legged. The sanctified imagination declares that Samson's locks of hair were dreadlocks. The sanctified imagination explains that Bathsheba always walked with her head held high, never refused to make eye contact with anyone, but David could not meet her eyes and hung his head in her presence until the day he died. Exercise of the sanctified imagination is also a form of what biblical scholars call reader-response criticism.[2]

A preacher may also engage in the practice without a formal disclosure, signaling with extreme and/or asynchronous descriptions, for example, Joseph's chariot wheels as "dubs" or "22s."[3] The invocation of the sanctified imagination also gives the community permission to resist the exegetical license taken by the preacher without rejecting or critiquing the sermon as a whole.

As sanctified imagination in this womanist midrash is rooted in the Afro-diaspora, specifically in the black church (a dynamic, diverse collection of peoples and practices with elusive boundaries), a womanist engagement looks to the experiences and articulations of black women throughout the diaspora (but in this work focusing on the Americas) as an authoritative source and norm for biblical interpretation. My practice of womanist midrash draws heavily on my knowledge of and experience with classical Jewish midrash as a scholar and with classical and contemporary midrash in congregational teaching (including my own) in Jewish spaces. As neither Christianity nor Judaism (nor even religious identity) is constitutive for womanist work, I include perspectives from the *hadith*[4] for characters with a legacy in Islam. And I try to articulate ethical observations in ways that transcend religious identity.

In Jewish sacred literature, *midrash* is the primary rabbinic term for exegesis. In Biblical Hebrew the verb *d-r-sh* means, "to seek"; later it would become specifically "to exegete"; *midrash* is its derived noun. Rabbinic exegesis is characterized by close reading of the biblical text, particularly the Masoretic Text (MT) and occasionally a targumic (Aramaic) text. Traditional midrash is also mystical, imaginative, revelatory, and, above all, religious. Midrash interprets not only the text before the reader, but also the text behind and beyond the

2. Reader-response criticism recognizes that the meaning of a text is not solely located in the text, but that the reader brings an authoritative interpretive framework to the text with her.

3. Custom twenty- or twenty-two-inch automobile wheel rims.

4. *Hadith* is the Arabic word for traditional sayings of and traditions about the Prophet Muhammad attributed to his companions. These teachings are not found in the Qur'an. They are authoritative to differing degrees.

text and the text between the lines of the text. In rabbinic thinking, each letter and the spaces between the letters are available for interpretive work. Midrash is rarely comprehensive and occasionally contradictory, raising as many questions as it answers. Midrashic exegesis can and does intersect with Western historical critical and philological approaches to the text.

There are formal, carefully delineated rules for midrash that rabbis Akiva and Ishmael promulgated between 100 and 135 CE, which can be found dispersed throughout rabbinic literature.[5] Midrashic exegesis is not limited to rabbis or the authoritative classic literature of rabbinic Judaism.[6] It continues whenever and wherever people study and teach the Scriptures.

Christian biblical exegesis from the patristic fathers to contemporary lay and specialized biblical interpretation holds much in common with traditional rabbinic midrash. Indeed, the writings of Christian mystics from the desert mothers and fathers to contemporary poets and preachers are as creative, insightful, and revelatory as classic midrash. Christian and rabbinic fathers share allegorical and metaphorical readings of the text, in many cases coming to surprisingly similar conclusions—for example, the tendency to read the Song of Songs as an allegory about the relationship between God (or Christ) and people (Israel or church-as-new-Israel). In some cases, biblical interpreters from different traditions come to the same conclusion about a text; in others, interpreters from the same tradition come to wildly differing conclusions about the same text.

As a product of African American Christianity, I emerge from an ancient tradition of biblical piety and reverence for the Scriptures as the Word of God. As an Anglican (Episcopalian) priest and preacher, I have learned to look and listen for the Word of God in, between, over, under, behind, and beyond the words in the Word. As a (now former) member of a *minyan* and occasional Torah teacher in Jewish congregations, I experienced midrash as *God-wrestling*. The bruising/blessing, God-grappling encounter between the man who is Ya'aqov (Jacob), the Heel-Grabbing-Sneak who becomes Yisra'el (Israel), the God-Wrestler, and a mysterious divine combatant in Genesis 32:25–32 is one of many biblical images that can be read as a metaphor for *drashing* (interpreting) Scripture. In this womanist midrash I will struggle with God and the text and God-in-the-text explicitly as a religious reader.

5. There is a tradition ascribing some of that work to the first-century rabbi Hillel.

6. I.e., the Mishnah, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the Zohar, and the *Midrash Rabbah* (exegetical treatises on each book of the Torah and the Megilloth—five small scrolls read for festivals: Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes), the halakhic *midrashim* (*sifras*, *sifreis*, *mekiltas*, etc.).

WOMANIST FRAMEWORK

Womanism takes its name and draws its guiding and interpretive practices from Alice Walker's definition (here in full):

> 1. From "womanish." (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.
> 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counter-balance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mamma, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mamma, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
> 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.
> 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.[7]

Most simply, womanism is black women's feminism. It distinguishes itself from the dominant-culture feminism, which is all too often distorted by racism and classism and marginalizes womanism, womanists, and women of color. Womanism emerged as black women's intellectual and interpretive response to racism and classism in feminism and its articulation and in response to sexism in black liberationist thought. Womanism includes the radical egalitarianism of feminism, the emancipatory ethic and reverence for black physical and cultural aesthetics of the black liberation movement, and the transformational trajectories of both movements; it is operative in religious and nonreligious literary disciplines. Yet womanism is also more complex, now in its third (and perhaps fourth) wave, troubling its ancestral gender, ethnic, and religious categories.[8]

7. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), xi.
8. Monica A. Coleman, ed., *Ain't I a Womanist, Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

Womanists and feminists ask different questions of a text than do other readers and different questions from each other. And we also ask some of the same questions, and we arrive at similar and dissonant conclusions. Privileging the crossroads between our Afro-diasporic identity (embodiment and experience) and our gender (performance and identity), we ask questions about power, authority, voice, agency, hierarchy, inclusion, and exclusion. The readings enrich all readers from any perspective. The questions we ask enrich our own understanding and the understandings of those with whom we are in conversation.

The overlapping[9] categories of womanism and black feminism create an inclusive interpretive framework that transcends the interests and questions of those who most easily identify with black- and woman-centered approaches to biblical interpretation. In womanist practice, the voice and perspective of the whole community is sought and valued. Womanist interpretation does not privilege the embodiment and experiences of black women at the expense of other members of the interpretive community. Rather, while affirming the interpretive practices of black women as normative and as holding didactic value for other readers, womanist interpretation makes room at the table of discourse for the perspectives of the least privileged among the community and the honored guest of any background: the child who is invited into "adult" conversation around the table with "Baby, what do you think?" and the extra place at the table for whoever may come by. In addition, as black women who reside in communities and families whose constituent members include black men and children and biracial and multicultural bodies and families, womanism courts the voices of those around the table without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, orientation, or trans/cis embodiment. Womanism is committed to the wholeness and flourishing of the entire community.

Given that womanism is as much perspectival as ideological, and phenomenological as much as analytical, it resists methodology as the category is articulated and wielded in male-stream and other traditions of biblical interpretation, including feminist interpretations. I have great difficulty with the notion that methodology functions as a recipe that when followed will yield a womanist product, as much difficulty as I have reproducing my grandmother's sweet potato pudding. Perhaps the theological equivalent of reverse engineering a recipe is praxis. Praxis is the practice of an art or skill, best supplemented with reflection that leads to more praxis in an action-reflection cycle. Questions that emerge from womanist praxis are questions that anyone can ask, and commitments that womanists bring to the text that many share. Some of those questions and commitments are:

9. That womanism and black feminism are not entirely synonymous may be best demonstrated by the varied ways in which individuals self-identify.

1. Who is speaking and/or active?
2. Where are the women and girls, what are they doing, and what are their names?
3. When women or other marginalized characters speak and act, whose interests are they serving?
4. Who (and where) are the characters without which the story could not have unfolded as articulated?
5. What are the power dynamics in the narrative?
6. What are the ethical implications of the text when read from the perspective of the dominant character(s)?
7. What are the ethical implications of previous (especially traditional) readings of the text for black women?
8. How have black women historically related to the text?
9. In what ways do the contemporary circumstances of black women readers shape new and renewed interpretations?
10. How do the values articulated in the text and its interpretation affect the well-being of the communities that black women inhabit?
11. How does (can) this text function as Scripture for black women?
12. Who is (what is the construction of) God in the text? Is s/he/it invested in the flourishing of black women, our families, and our worlds?

The primary womanist principles that shape this text are (1) the *legitimacy of black women's biblical interpretation* as normative and authoritative, (2) the *inherent value of each member of a community* in the text and interpreting the text, (3) *talking back* to the text, and (4) *making it plain*, the work of exegesis from translation to interpretation.

In this work those principles mean that I wrestle with the biblical canon, its contents and contours, seeking to empower others to assert a claim on the Scriptures and to interpret them for themselves, pursuing the well-being of the whole community, land, nation, and earth. I do so as a classically trained biblical scholar, using tools that have traditionally figured in male-stream approaches to the biblical text: textual criticism, linguistic and literary analysis, even historical-critical approaches, employing them as a feminist, as a womanist.

Womanists at the intersection of biblical scholarship and religious faith and practice engage the Scriptures of our communities as members of those communities. No matter how misogynistic, how heavily redacted, how death-dealing, how troubled, troubling, or troublesome the text, womanists who teach and preach in the black church do not throw the whole androcentric text with its patriarchal and kyriarchal lowlights out of our stained-glass windows because of its Iron Age theology. We wrestle with it because it has been received as Scripture. Our wrestling should not be taken to mean that we affirm texts that do not affirm us.

Simply teaching women's narratives is important work. All too often the texts chosen for preaching and teaching in and out of organized lectionaries exclude or minimize women's biblical narratives. One of my aims in preparing this work is to introduce readers to biblical women and their stories, with which they may not be familiar, and to reintroduce them to familiar stories through new lenses. Some feminists are hostile to the notion that simply teaching women's biblical narratives is a feminist project. Such a posture takes the ability to know the contents of the Bible for granted. Because of legal prohibitions against African literacy in the Americas and normalization of androcentric interpretations intended to disempower nonmale and nonheterosexual readers, direct access to the text in the company of a learned sister is an empowering and transformational experience for many black Christian women and men.

Above all, this work is womanist because it is *womanish*. That is, I am talking back to the text, challenging it, questioning it, interrogating it, unafraid of the power and authority of the text, just as a girl-growing-into-a-woman talks back to her elders, questioning the world around her in order to learn how to understand and navigate it.

TEXT SELECTION

There are, depending on how one counts, 111 or so named female characters in the Hebrew Bible. There are hundreds more who are unnamed. Then there are the largely unacknowledged women who make up the peoples of Israel and the nations with whom they are in contact. The number of women and girls submerged under the story lines of the text are beyond counting. Those were the women who interested me: The daughters of the ancestral stories whose fathers were said to live hundreds of years. Were they nearly immortal as well? The women of Israel behind the scenes of each text and story. The women of Canaan targeted for extermination in Joshua's campaign. The royal women of Israel and Judah, many of whose names are preserved in the text. The women of the empires that dominated Israel at one point or another: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia. Who were these women? What were their names? What stories would they tell? What do they have to teach us, we who read Israel's Scriptures as our own?

I found myself with more material that I could publish in a single volume. I have decided to present the archetypal and ancestral women of the Torah and the women associated with the thrones archived in the annals of the two monarchies. The texts, narratives, and characters that I have selected for this work are necessarily idiosyncratic, but I hope they are of interest to the reader.

OVERVIEW AND FORMAT

In each of the two parts, which focus on Torah stories and throne stories, I address women and their stories and offer some contemporary contextual and exegetical (application) questions. Some of these discussions will be quite brief, no more than a paragraph; others will provoke more questions than discussion based on their limited presentation in the text. When appropriate, I will make connections to other texts (and testaments) in a sidebar.

This volume is a collection of shorter exegeses, from a few paragraphs to a few pages, written with teaching in both classroom and congregation in mind, prefaced by brief introductions, and accompanied by the occasional sidebar. Each proper unit begins with my translation of a primary text. The exegesis takes a variety of shapes, suggested by the text itself. My treatments are not uniform, nor should they be, given the diversity of the biblical texts themselves. In general I craft names for women and girls who command my attention, drawing them from the languages of the text and its context. I read the text in light of its ancient context and my own womanist one. Some tellings follow the contours of the canonical texts, some read against them, and some construct new paths from their paths. In some cases I give voice to characters known and unknown.

This womanist midrash seeks to reintroduce readers to the shared Jewish and Christian Scriptures through the stories of women in the text. These women may be obvious, named, active and speaking in the text, or they may be hidden in expressions like "all Israel" or "all flesh." They may even be obscured in the binary gender forms of Biblical Hebrew, including the form that has traditionally been treated as masculine plural. I will seek, *drash*, these women and their stories, telling them again and anew as a womanist, drawing on the wisdom of black women and our interpretive practices, starting with my own.

HEARING THE WORD: TOWARD PROCLAMATION

Finally, I have had two experiences as a hearer of the Scriptures, in Jewish and Christian congregations. In churches, I have listened to women and men read and preach a very few texts in which I could hear myself; but mostly I have heard women and men read and preach texts that assume a normative male subject. In synagogues, that pattern continued during Torah chanting and recitation of the *haftarah* (selection from the Prophets accompanying the Torah). However, on some occasions—many more than in Christian congregations—I found myself hearing Hebrew Scripture addressed to women and

female characters in a way that I never have heard in English, in Christian communities. I am also writing this book so that readers and hearers of Scripture who do not have access to Biblical Hebrew will be able to experience the Scriptures in a different voice, with a different inflection.

PART I

Womanist Midrash on the Torah

1

Genesis

BEFORE BEGINNING: GOD-WHOSE-NAME-IS-TOO-HOLY-TO-BE-PRONOUNCED

Four Hebrew letters, *yud-he-vav-he*, corresponding to YHWH (or YHVH) represent the Divine Name in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Divine Name is God's Most Holy Name. It is holy and cannot be pronounced. Unlike other words in the Hebrew Bible, the Four Letters are not accompanied by vowels enabling pronunciation; rather, they are accompanied by vowels from a different word, usually *adonai* (Lord), indicating an acceptable substitution that can be pronounced. Sometimes *elohim* (God) is called for; see Ezekiel 2:4. The combination of the sacred four letters, called the Tetragrammaton, and these vowels produce a word that simply cannot be articulated (try combining the consonants *q-r-s-t* with the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*; there is no such word). This rabbinic practice led to the substitution of "Lord," "God," and other titles (e.g., "the Name") when reading the text and to the contemporary practice of writing "the LORD" in mixed large and small capital letters to represent the Most Holy Name. A tradition of sacredness evolved around the Name so that it was recited only in specific liturgical contexts.

Some biblical scholars have disregarded the religious conventions around the Divine Name and have offered a hypothetical pronunciation and spelling. That practice has deep ties to the anti-Semitic and anti-Judaistic roots of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Western biblical studies, and I do not use it.[1] Lastly, since there are feminine and masculine names, titles, and

1. Johanna W. H. Wijk-Bos has written on this brilliantly and succinctly in "Writing on the Water: The Ineffable Name of God," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 45–59.

images for God in the Scriptures, I gender God variously in translation—sometimes feminine, sometimes without an articulated gender. Knowing that male constructions dominate in the biblical text, interpretive literature, and worshiping contexts of many if not most readers, I rarely use masculine constructions. As a womanist translator, I am committed to uncovering God-language that empowers black women and girls, locating their reflection of the divine image in the biblical text. Though calling someone out of (or outside of) their name is a serious violation in many black cultural contexts, the Divine Name is a name that cannot be named and can be substituted for only with inadequate language, calling for manifold options.

TORAH: SHE IS A TREE OF LIFE

The Torah is a transformational text. God transforms space, time, land, and peoples in the narrative that begins with a *beginning* (the first word of the Torah) and moves to *Israel* (the last word of the Torah in Hebrew). In one mystical tradition, the very letters of the Torah are agents of transformation. The Torah is so much more than the Law to which it is often reduced (and then thrust into a binary opposite "Gospel"), particularly in some Christian

She Is a Tree of Life . . .

Proverbs 3:18 speaks of wisdom and extols her virtues (see vv. 13–18) and rewards. One common rabbinic interpretation is that the "wisdom" extolled by Proverbs is the Torah, as in the midrash on Genesis in *Bereshit Rabbah* 17:5. A Torah scroll is an exquisitely sacred object. As a repository of divine Wisdom, and in some perspectives for the very Divine, a Torah scroll is treated reverentially: wrapped, dressed, and sometimes crowned, laid down, and rolled out with care, only a pointer (not human flesh) touching the sacred text, with dedicated space for repose (storage) and a place of honor for its reading. Special honors are given to those who approach and read and recite prayers in proximity to it, and there are special criteria for who can approach and when. There are also special criteria for who can write a Torah scroll and how, how the letters must be shaped, what color ink to use, what kind of ink to use, what kind of scroll to use, what prayers to pray before, during, and after the process. Some of this reverence extends to the Torah in book form: it is not appropriate in the Jewish contexts with which I am familiar to put a Torah (book) on the floor. The fall of a Torah scroll to the floor would be a communal calamity, requiring all who witness it to fast for forty days, according to some traditions.

interpretations. The Torah is instruction, revelation, and sometimes law. Torah (with a capital *T*) is the first five books of the Scriptures and all that is in them: story, song, genealogy, geography, legal material, and lessons from the ancestors. *Torah* (with a little *t*) is instruction and jurisprudence. So, while there is *torah* in Torah, not all Torah is *torah*, and there is *torah* outside of the five books of the Torah! *Toroth* (plural of *torah*) can be found in any of the many genres of Torah. Torah then is the first five books, their teaching, in whole or part, other teaching in other parts of the Bible, and religious *teaching* from beyond the Bible, in classical or contemporary midrash, for example.

The Torah is a locus of divine revelation (and divine self-revelation). The word *torah* comes from the verb *y-r-h*, "to throw" (e.g., "to cast lots") or "to shoot" (arrows). With regard to *torah*, *y-r-h* also means "to throw" rain or instruction from the heavens; see Leviticus 10:11, "You are *to teach* the daughters and sons of Israel all the statutes that the Holy One of Old has spoken to them through the authority of Moshe."[2]

In a mystical sense, Torah can be seen as an embodiment of divine Wisdom and for some as the Word of God (with a capital *W*). When the Torah is praised and celebrated in biblical and postbiblical prayers, psalms, and songs in Hebrew, the verbs and adjectives are feminine, because *torah* is grammatically feminine. This will be the case for other images, metaphors, concepts, and portrayals of God in the text. The feminine gender of *torah* stands in sharp distinction to the masculine Word or *logos* (from the Greek) with which many Christians are familiar. And it stands in concert with the wisdom traditions of both canons; *chokmah* (Hebrew) and *sophia* (Greek) are both feminine. In her all-encompassing embrace, Torah includes womanist wisdom. However grammatical gender may be understood, *torah*-language ensures that liturgical language preserves feminine and masculine sacred language and images.

As a text, the Torah emerges in layers from varied ancestral oral traditions to discrete revised written traditions brought together in a massive editorial project. In one sense it is useful to think of the Torah as being produced starting with Deuteronomy, which serves as its theological anchor—portions of which were written in the seventh century BCE—and concluding with Genesis, which was most certainly edited during (if not after) the Babylonian

2. Unless otherwise acknowledged all translations of Scripture in this volume are mine. I use the transliterated names of biblical characters to provide the reader with a sense of their phonetic equivalence in Hebrew in the translations and midrashes. In the commentary I use the more familiar forms of the names. "Israelites" includes daughters and sons; but I have found that unless the daughters are rendered visible in translation, they are often not seen. Here in Leviticus 10:11 I argue it would be ludicrous to translate *beney yisrael* as the "sons of Israel," as though Torah were not applicable to the whole community; at the same time I acknowledge the more restrictive reading is a possibility whose implications must be considered.

exile in the sixth century BCE, along with the rest of the Torah. This dating provides a sense of theological urgency; the collection and compilation of these sacred stories is a response to the trauma experienced by survivors of the Judean monarchy (including those remaindered from the remnants of the northern monarchy) in the face of the defeat of the nation, dismantling of the monarchy, burning of Jerusalem, and razing of the temple. These tragedies and their attendant horror provide the impulse for *scripting* theology. Yet there are ancient texts scattered throughout the Scriptures, including in the Torah, that are older than their surrounding texts, such as Miriam's Song[3] in Exodus 15, and the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 next to its much younger prose sibling in Judges 4. Perhaps one ought not think of the Torah or indeed the rest of Scripture in chronological terms; the books are not in chronological order in either Jewish or Christian configuration.

The story of the Torah is a story of relationships: relationships between God-Whose-Name-Is-Holy and creation, the Holy God and human beings, human beings and creation. The Bible privileges some of these relationships with text space; there are characters whose stories dominate the text: they speak and act, they speak to God, and God speaks to them. This volume explores the women and girls who are not prominent in the biblical text or interpretive traditions and seeks to reintroduce them. Arguably at one time some of these women were better known. There is presently, I believe, a significant body of female characters in the Hebrew Scriptures who are unknown even when they do speak and act in the text, even when they do speak to God, and even when God speaks to them.

The women in the Torah are distributed unevenly. Many are named or referred to in Genesis. Fewer individual women are named in the rest of the Torah; rather, there are collectives—frequently national groups, for example, Israelite women, Egyptian women, and Canaanite women. There are also hypothetical women in the jurisprudence sections, for example, a woman who makes a vow, a woman who is raped, a woman suspected of adultery. There are women whose names are called in the Torah with whom many, if not most, readers are unfamiliar. Meet them, listen to them, and learn from them. Among them are Adah, Zillah, Naamah, Reumah, Mahalat, Basemath, Oholibamah, Mehetabel, Matred, and Me-zahab. Then there are all of the women who are not named: the women in Canaan who are cursed by Noah, the women of Sodom and Gomorrah, over whom God and Abram haggle,

3. Miriam's Song, also known as the Song of the Sea, is placed first on the lips of Moses and the Israelites in Exod. 15, while Miriam appears to sing only one verse in Exod. 15:20. Rabbinic and contemporary scholars agree that Miriam and the women likely sang the whole song, in keeping with Israelite cultural practice; cf. Judg. 11:34 and 1 Sam. 18:6.

the women of Babel, and many, many more. And yes, there are women who may be more familiar: Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Keturah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Miriam.

IN BEGINNING, A BEGINNING

> Genesis 1:1 In beginning, He, God created the heavens and the earth.
> [2]The earth was formless and shapeless and darkness covered the face of the deep, while She, the Spirit of God pulsed over the face of the waters.

In Biblical Hebrew *b'reshiyt*, the first word of Genesis, is *a* beginning, not *the* beginning. It is most literally *in-beginning* or *in-a-beginning* or even *when-beginning*.[4] The translation "In-the-beginning" for this single word stems from the Greek version of the Israelite Scriptures, the Septuagint (LXX), and certainly represents one way the text has come to be understood. It is neither the literal meaning nor the only way of reading or hearing this word. *A beginning* gestures to spiraling creation and its stories and to multiple contextual ways of hearing, imagining, and retelling these stories, including womanist midrash.

The second word of the text, *bar'a*, is a simple (Qal), masculine, singular, active verb, *he-created*. One womanist or feminist translation might be *In beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. While *elohiym*, the singular Israelite "God" with a plural grammatical form (also "gods" in non-Israelite contexts), is gendered in Biblical Hebrew, it appears to be less so in English. Or at least that is a common claim. My experience in classrooms and congregations demonstrates that while some reader/hearers read and hear *God* as gender-neutral or gender-inclusive, many read and hear "God" as male, as the polar opposite of "goddess" (which in their construction does not merit the capital *G* of "God").

In the second verse, a second verb articulating divine action occurs, *merechepheth*, a Piel (not-so-simple, sometimes intensive form), feminine, singular active verb, *she-pulsed*. The verb, *r-ch-ph*, can mean "hover," "flutter," or "tremble." The verb occurs only twice in Hebrew Scripture, in Deuteronomy 32:11 to describe an eagle over its young and in Jeremiah 23:9 in which all the prophet's bones shake, rattle, and/or roll. Its subject in Genesis, *ruach*, "spirit" (and occasionally "wind"), is feminine.

4. I use hyphens to indicate when one Hebrew word is translated by more than one word in English.

Though the Divine is articulated with feminine and masculine gender in the Scriptures, in translation and tradition God became virtually exclusively male. The gendering of God's Spirit as feminine calls for the feminine pronoun, yet generations of sexist translations have gotten around this by religiously avoiding the pronoun altogether. So in each case the text will say, "The Spirit [verb]. . . ." No unacceptably feminine pronoun is needed. But she is still there.

She, the Spirit of God

Imagine hearing the Scriptures proclaimed with the gender of God's Spirit restored: the Spirit, She rested on them . . . (Num. 11:26); then the Spirit of God, She wore Gideon (like a garment) . . . (Judg. 6:34); the Spirit of God, She came upon David . . . (1 Sam. 16:13); the Spirit of God, She has made me . . . (Job 33:4). This occurs more than thirty times: Gen. 1:2; Num. 11:26; 24:2; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13–14; 19:20, 23; Isa. 11:2; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1, 5, 24; 43:5; Hag. 2:5; Ps. 143:10; Job 33:4; 1 Chr. 12:18; 2 Chr. 15:1; 20:14.

She, the Spirit of God, She-who-is-also-God, at the dawn of creation fluttered over the nest of her creation at the same time as He, the more familiar expression of divinity, created all. They, Two-in-One, are the first articulations, self-articulations, of God in (and the God of) the Scriptures. God is female and male, and when God gets around to creating creatures in the divine image, they will be female and male, as God is. Feminine language occurs in the text repeatedly of God; this means that feminists and womanists advocating for inclusive and explicitly feminine God-language are not changing but restoring the text and could be considered biblical literalists.

THE FIRST WOMAN

> Genesis 2:18 It is not good that the *adam* is alone; I will make a mighty-helper correlating to it.

The detailed account of the creation of a human woman is without parallel in the available ancient Near Eastern literature. It is curious; the animals are created with the ability to partner and mate; yet the *adam* is singular, pluripotent, but singular. I have translated the *adam* as "it" because the previous description, singular and plural, bearing male and female in a single body, transcends the masculine singular to which Biblical Hebrew is limited.

Genesis 2:18ff. offers a detailed account of the culmination of creation, the creation of woman from *ha'adam*, "the human" created from the *humus* or the "earthling" created from the *earth*. There is an intentional relationship between *adam* and the red-brown (*edom*) *adamah* missing from the traditional translations of "man" and "ground." With the definite article "the," the text is not using *adam* as a personal name; it will omit the article when the individual named Adam is meant. The *mem* at the end of the word is a common indicator of plurality; correspondingly *adam* often means all of humanity.

The "mighty-helper," the *ezer*, is difficult to translate into English without a modifier; in all other places in the Scriptures it refers to God and the divine help God renders. In English a helper is often of lower status than the one being helped; not so here. The physical source material for the creation of this mighty-helper is within the pluripotent earthling. God puts the creature to sleep and divides it in half. This idea stems from rabbinic exegesis; Rabbi Samuel ben Nachman taught that God split the earth-colored *adam* into two equal portions.[5] I think of the division as something like mitosis in cell division.

The *tzela'* that God removes is a "side" and not a "rib" as commonly mistranslated. Throughout Exodus the *tzela'* of the ark of the covenant on which its poles are alternately set are its sides.[6] There is no other place in Scripture in which *tzela'* is translated as a rib. The NRSV supports this translation by adjusting the text of Genesis 2:23 to "this is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman for *out of* Man this one was taken" (emphasis added). The words "out of" suggest removing a rib or other discrete part from the *adam*'s body. But the text actually says, "from a Human this one was taken," as in the GSJPS and Fox.[7] I find that there is more room in "from" than in "out of" for the traditional rabbinic understanding of a bifurcated being. From this point forward in Genesis, *adam* will refer to humanity (5:1), the two earthlings (3:22), and occasionally to the singular male earthling (3:12).

After the division the human persons are called "man" and "woman" for the first time. They are as brown as the earth from which they were created, an essential point in womanist exegesis. This is the point in the narrative at which gender as many understand it—social construction in response to biological indicators—arguably first occurs in the Scripture. In Genesis

5. *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1.

6. See Exod. 25:12, 14; other examples include the hillside in 2 Sam. 16:3 and the side of the temple in 1 Kgs. 6:5–34.

7. The IB provides a poetic gloss in the text, "because we are of one flesh," and a literal translation in a footnote: "God took one of its sides [or possible ribs]"), while the JPS has the masculinist "from Man. . . ."

2:24—"Therefore a man [*ish*, not *adam*] leaves his father and his mother and clings to his woman and they become one flesh"—the significance of this new term, "man," is overlooked if the *adam* has been mistranslated as "man" in the preceding passage. For the *adam*, there was no corresponding creation; for the *ish*, man, the corresponding creation is the *isshah*, woman. The corresponding or correlating nature of the creation points back to their origin, two halves of a whole. They are neither identical nor mirror images. Together and individually they reflect the divine image.

The man and his woman—in Genesis 3:6 it will be the woman and her man—are in a relationship that is not named in the text. The translators of the NRSV and JPS Bibles along with the GSJPS interpret this relationship by introducing the words "wife" and "husband," in spite of the fact that Biblical Hebrew does not have designated terms for "husband" or "wife." *Ish* means "man"; *ba'al* means "lord" and can refer to a feudal-type lord or a spouse.[8] *Isshah* means "woman." The mutuality of their belonging to each other is lost when the terms "husband" and "wife"—with all of their burdens and baggage—are applied to the text. In addition, throughout the text it will always be correct to translate *isshah* as "woman," but not all women are married in the biblical text (or beyond).

Their relationship gives rise to an etiological proverb in verse 24 that intends to explain the origin of a particular relational pattern, that men—and apparently not women—leave their parents (household? land?) and form a new enduring attachment with and to their women. While contemporary readers have tended to look to Genesis for guidance on the appropriate form for intimate, conjugal relationships, it is not the case that biblical readers, authors, and editors did so. The relationship described between the first two people is ultimately rejected in favor of patriarchal and polygamous relationships.

The long saga of the first woman includes her subsequent conversation with the serpent and its aftermath. In chapter 3 the reader is introduced to a new character, a God-made, crafty, talking snake. It is very difficult for modern readers, particularly Christian readers, to read or hear this text without imputing negative or even satanic attributes to the snake. However, snakes, serpents, and dragons[9] in ancient Near Eastern literature were revered as the forms of a variety of goddesses and gods and associated with a wide range of

8. "Husband" is introduced in Gen. 3:6; Fox and the IB retain the Hebrew "woman."

9. These terms share a common vocabulary. The relative paucity of words in the closed canon of Biblical Hebrew, slightly more than seven thousand, compared to more than one million words in the perpetually expanding English language, means that the same word in Hebrew conveys distinctions that another language would convey with different words.

benefactions: immortality, wisdom, renewed youth; medicine, royalty, power, and more. The snake is apparently unlike any of the other animals in its ability to speak; this may be related to how creatively intelligent—crafty—it is. I like to translate the serpent's acumen as "naked intelligence," because the words for the nakedness, *arumim*, of the humans in verse 25 and the snake's craftiness, *arum*, in the next verse share the same consonants.

The snake asks, "Did God really[10] say that you two were not to eat from any tree in the garden?" The use of the second-person plural for "you" is not apparent when reading the text in English; it harks back to the time when the woman and the man were literally one flesh as the *adam*. In their ensuing conversation the woman repeats the instruction that God gave the *adam*, though she omits the phrase "on the day you eat of it" when repeating the death sentence. She says further that God also said that they should not even touch the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden. For many interpreters, that there is no corresponding conversation recorded previously in the narrative means that the woman is embellishing. Without critiquing her for doing theology, interpreting her conversation with God, I hold open the possibility that the woman is faithfully repeating a conversation that the narrator did not record.

Rabbis and Torah scholars have long asked how humanity is to keep the commandments of God. One solution, the principle of building fences around the commandments or individual instructions, consists of developing a teaching that will enable the community to easily fulfill the specific *torah*. To wit, one will not eat fruit from a tree that one does not touch. In this reading of the story, the woman offers the first (proto-) rabbinic teaching in the newly created world.

The talking snake responds to the woman's *torah* with theology. It (he in the text) presents a novel perspective of God: God has not told the whole truth. The creation can transform themselves and become like God or like the gods who make up the divine council; both translations are equally possible.[11] The woman took a good look at the tree and its fruit and found it extremely desirable. The desirability, *ta'avah*, of the fruit is the same word

10. The "really" is missing from the MT but present in a Dead Sea manuscript, 4QGen^{k}.

11. "God" and "gods" are the same word differentiated by context. In the ancient world the realm of the gods, including that of Israel's singular God, was envisioned as a royal court in which there were other entities variously understood as gods, angels, or other kinds of divine beings. See Gen. 6:2; Jer. 23:8; Job 15:8; Pss. 82:1; 89:6–9. The council includes adversarial characters such as the lying spirit in 1 Kgs. 22:19–22 and the adversary of Job in 1:6 and 2:1; "the satan," *hasatan*, should not be identified as Satan there.

that is used for the Israelites' "craving" for meat in the wilderness in Numbers 11:4. While it seems to have a negative connotation in that text, in its other uses it communicates godly and wholesome desires, including for God (Isa. 26:8; Ps. 21:2; Prov. 19:22). When she saw that the tree would indeed increase her intellect[12] (*lehaskiyl* refers to intellectual acumen), she gave some of the fruit to her man who, it turns out, was with her while she and the snake engaged in conversation.

Then something happens between verses 6 and 7. Or rather something does not happen. The woman and her man did not die in the day that they ate from the proscribed tree in the middle of the garden. Their eyes were opened, as the snake had said, and they learned/discovered/knew that they were naked, the last thing revealed by the narrator before the snake spoke to the woman. Then they, the two of them, together sewed loincloths for themselves.

The newly expanded intellects of the woman and man led to their covering their genitalia; perhaps we are to understand that with their new knowledge, the shame that the narrator told us was previously missing has now been acquired. It is important to note that there is no mention of sin, of a fall from grace or innocence, or of loss in this text. Those are much later interpretations and interpolations of this story.

The couple works together in their project. Their labor is not gendered. Sewing is not "women's work." I imagine that there was some criteria for leaf selection: Were other plants considered and rejected? What did they use for needles? What did they use for thread? Were their coverings simply functional or were they ornamental? Were they hiding or accentuating their genitalia? And, since the *goroth*, "girdles or loincloths," cover only a portion of their lower bodies, the woman is bare-breasted. In comparison with our culture, in which breasts—even nursing breasts—are highly sexualized, I find the lack of shame imputed to her bare breasts refreshing and noteworthy.

Together, the woman and her man hear the sound of God walking in the garden (the use of the reflexive Hitpael stem here suggests that God is taking Godself for a walk). Together they hide themselves. In verse 9, God calls to the *adam* a single word, "Where?"[13] The *adam* is in two bodies, the woman and the man. The question is directed to both of them, the whole of humanity at that time. "He says . . ."; the speaker is not identified as "the man" or "the *adam*." He says, "I . . . , I . . . , I . . . , I . . ." Four times he says, "I." They are no longer together. God's questions invite accusation and confession. "You" is no longer plural. "Who told you . . . ?" And "Did you . . . ?" In verse 12 the

12. Gen. 3:6: "To make [one] wise" in many translations; however, the word for "wisdom," *chokmah*, is not used here.

13. "Are you" is lacking.

(male) earthling speaks; he blames the other earthling. God invites confession from the woman and receives accusation; she blames the serpent. But since God made the serpent, she is also accusing God.

God's response is to curse the snake that God made in the first place. And God curses the ground that God made, explaining that God does so because the male God-made earthling listened to (really obeyed here) the voice of his God-made woman. God also redesigns the snake; it will now crawl on its belly in the dirt; this is the first hint to the reader/hearer that the talking snake walked upright, opening the possibility that this story was at one time a performance piece, so that people would have seen the snake walking around.

God continues to reconfigure creation; however, this reconfiguration is not cursing. The offspring of women and snakes will no longer engage in conversation; they will be enemies. The text does not actually say that snakes will no longer be able to speak. Many and great will be the woman's work (not pain) and her conceptions (not full-term pregnancies or live births). Childbearing will be difficult, hard work. There will be pain, and there will be desire. And her man will rule *with* her. The preposition *b* means "in" and/or "with." If one uses one of the standard lexical tools, one will have to go quite a ways into the entry on the preposition *b* to find occasions when it is translated "over."[14] "In" and "with" are its primary meanings; the verse is intelligible with the simple, straightforward, primary meaning: *he shall rule with you*.

Some religious communities tout the Eve-Adam pairing as the normative biblical archetypal and prototypal conjugal partnership. In so doing, they add words and concepts to the narrative: "wife," "husband," "marriage." The Eve-Adam pairing represents one biblical model and is soon joined by a wholly human-conceived model (male conception in this case): polygynous polygamy. Religious readers who insist on a single scriptural paradigm for human intimacy and family composition ignore all of the social evolution that follows: the normative and pervasive portrayal of polygamy, regular practice of rape-marriage on and off the battlefield, and, most significantly, the divine silence on these biblical relational patterns.

MOTHER CHAVAH (EVE)

> Genesis 3:20 Then the *adam* proclaimed the name of his woman, Chavah[15] (Life-woman, Eve), for she became the mother of all living.

14. Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) or the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (*HALOT*).

15. I use the traditional names for biblical characters in the translations and the forms with which English readers are more familiar in the discussion.

The English name "Eve" seems to come from discarding the first and last consonants in the Chavah. The adjective *chaiy*, "living," refers to all life and not just human life.[16] God is "the living God" in Jeremiah 10:10 and many other places. The title becomes ironic with the death of Abel; she remains the mother of the living in the text, but is now also the mother of the dead.

As the story unfolds, the biblical authors focus on Adam and subordinate Eve. God does not. God kills for Eve, sews for Eve, clothes Eve. God made tunics for Eve and her man from skins. It seems that God brings death to paradise. God had said that on the day that the humans ate from the forbidden tree, on that day they would surely die. Instead, unidentified animals die. Then God evicted Eve. It is not reasonable that only Adam was evicted or that God was concerned that Adam alone would stretch out his hand to eat from the tree of life. Eve and Adam are banished together. *Ha'adam* means the whole of humanity, even when there are only two of them.

> Genesis 3:22 Then the SOVEREIGN God said, "Look! The human-creation[17] has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, it might stretch out its hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." [23]So the SOVEREIGN God sent it forth from the garden of Eden, to work the humus from which it was taken. [24]God cast out the human-creation; and God settled at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and a flame sword turning itself about to guard the way to the tree of life.

In chapter 4 Eve conceives and gives birth to Qayin, Cain. She names him, saying, "I have fashioned (*qaniyti*) a man with the HOLY ONE." Then Eve gives birth to Hevel (Abel).[18] Neither Eve nor Adam is described as naming him, and no etiology is given for his name. Nothing of Eve's life between these births is related. She is not even mentioned in the story of one of her sons killing the other and God's banishment of the killer. She is not mentioned in connection with the marriage of her sons. Genesis is unconcerned about the conflict in claiming that Eve and Adam are the first people and that there are people somewhere else for her sons to marry. Eve is not mentioned when her grandchildren are born. She is not mentioned by name again (until the book of Tobit).

In Genesis 4:25, Eve and Adam have sex "again"; surely we are not to believe that they had sex only two or three times! Eve names her son Seth,

16. See the "living creatures" of Gen. 1:20 and Lev. 11:46.
17. "The humanity" is awkward and "the man" misleading.
18. The text doesn't even say that "Adam knew Eve" this time. Eve is not "known" by name; she is simply Adam's woman.

"placed," whom God placed with her in place of her murdered son Hevel, Abel. Eve never speaks again in the Scriptures. In these last words she and the text acknowledge her sense of loss for her son. God has given *her* Seth; Adam is not mentioned. Eve appears once more indirectly in Genesis 5:3. The author reveals that Adam had other daughters and sons after Seth. Eve is not named as their mother, but Adam has not been associated with anyone else. And in spite of the mysterious origin of Qayin's (Cain's) wife and daughters-in-law, Eve is still functioning in the story as the first woman, the mother of all living. There is a subtle irony here: the mother of all living has given birth to the father of murder, who is inscribed in Scripture as the first to succumb to sin on earth, signaled by the first use of the word *chata't*, "sin," in Genesis 4:7.

The story of Eve and Adam in Genesis has enjoyed something of a resurgence in religious discourse since the first century of the Common Era. New Testament, rabbinic, patristic, and pseudepigraphal authors all weighed in on lessons learned from Eve and Adam. But prior to that, most notably during the composition and editing of the rest of the Hebrew and Greek First Testament Scriptures, there was silence on Eve and Adam. They are not reflected on by name in the rest of the Hebrew canon. (Isa. 47:27 mentions an unnamed "first father" [or ancestor].) The Exodus narrative by far outweighs any other biblical story in number of internal biblical citations and reflections.

The story of Chavah, Eve, west of Eden is left to the imagination of the reader. What womanist wisdom did she pass on to her daughters and daughters-in-law that has been lost to indifference? How much of the work necessary to survive in the new world did she do with her own hands? Did she build a home, plant a farm or garden, do herding, go hunting? What recipes did she hand down to her daughters that recalled the memory of the garden's delights?

ADAH, ZILLAH, AND NA'AMAH BAT ZILLAH

> Genesis 4:19 Then Lamekh (Lamech) took for himself two women. The name of the one-woman was Adah, and the name of the second-woman was Tzillah (Zillah).

Seven generations have passed from Eve and Adam through an otherwise unknown Eastern woman and Cain to the time of Adah and Zillah. These two women, Adah and Zillah, are the first named in the text since Eve, and they are the first to participate in a polygamous—polygynous—partnership. From this point forward in the Scriptures, Lamech-style partnership (polygamy),