Men in the Bible and Related Literature

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In the Grip of Specific Males

Edited by

John T. Greene

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“One Man among a Thousand Have I Found”
(*Ecclesiastes* 7: 28)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations ix

Prolegomenon xi
Mishael M. Caspi and John T. Greene

Rachel: The Shepherdess among Shepherds 1
Funlola Olojede

A Dreamer among the Shepherds: Joseph as a Threat to Jacob's Headship (*Gen*. 37) 17
Sophia Magallanes

Reading Reuben: The Man Who Protected His Mother's Honor or Slighted His Father's Honor? 24
Azila T. Reisenberger

Fathers and Sons: Primogeniture versus Parental Choice According to Rabbi Ya'akov Khuli's *Me'am Lo'ez* on the *Book of Genesis* (C.E. 1730) 35
Alisa Meyuhas Ginio

They Would Not Hearken Unto Their Judges 44
Mishael Caspi

The Sinister Ehud: Metalworker, Musician, and a Man of Gravity 69
David Z Crookes

Belshazzar's Last Supper: A Feast of Signs and Symbols 95
Ruthanne Wrobel

Elisha's Trickster Tales 109
Albert McClure

Ezra's (and Nehemiah's) Missions to *Yehud* in the Light of Achaemenid Persian Political Policies 131
John T. Greene

Ezra and the Taliban: What the Modern Imposition of Sharia Law Might Tell us about the Imposition of Torah Law and Nehemiah's Reforms.... 154
Donald R. Vance

The Enoch Narratives and the Literary Jesus in the Apocalyptic Mirror 163
J. Harold Ellens

Not All Comparisons are Created Equal: Moses and Aaron Compared to Jesus in the *Letter to the Hebrews* 186
Felix Cortez

ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANT.	Josephus Antiquities of the Jews
Ant.	Josephus Antiquities of the Jews
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
bBer.	Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Bereshit*
bMoed Qat.	*Babylonian Talmud Tractate Mo'ed Qatan (Minor Festivals)*
B.C.E.	Before the Common Era
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
C.E.	In/During the Common Era
CUP	Cambridge University Press
FOTL	X-Forms of Old Testament Literature
Hrwt	Transliteration (reversed) of the word *Torah*
INRI	The four letters on the crucified Jesus' headboard: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews
IVP	InterVarsity Press
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
JANES	Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JHS	Journal of Hebrew Studies
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSupp.	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
KJV	King James Version (of the *Bible*)
LAB	Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	The Septuagint (Greek) Version of the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures
Mid. Hag.	Midrash HaGadol
ML	Me'am Lo'ez (A People without Language)
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	New Testament Studies

OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
PRDS	*Pardes*, divided into *Parshat* (literal) and *Derash* (homiletical) (Methods of Interpretation)
PRE	Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer
PRSt	Perspectives in Religious Studies
PT	Palestinian Targum/Targum Jonathan
RaDaK/Radak	Rabbi David Kimchi-A Famous Commentator
Ralbag	Rabbi Levi ben Gershom-A Famous Commentator
Rashi	Rabbi Shlomo ben Itzhaki-A Famous Commentator
RBL	Review of Biblical Literature
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SCM (Press)	British publisher of theological studies
ST	Studia Theologica
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies, Monograph Series
SPCK (Press)	Publisher of Christian Books
Thysharb	Transliteration (reversed) of *bereshit* (the first book of the *Hebrew Bible*)
URJ	Press Union of Reformed Judaism
WBC 2	World Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

PROLEGOMENON

MISHAEL M. CASPI AND JOHN T. GREENE

"Mine Eyes Shall Be Upon the Faithful"
(*Ps.* 101:6)

A. *The Human Dress is forged Iron*

The Human Form a fiery Forge.
The Human Face a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.
—William Blake[1]

No biblical scholar in our time will doubt or even dispute the artistic sophistication of the biblical narrative. In fact, some scholars evaluate this narrative as the best ever written or composed by the finest poets and authors of all generations. To understand the biblical narrative, one must read it with great sensitivity to the hidden story within the one presented in the book. Already in the first story, we find some changes that increase the dramatic tension as God, who is the main character in the story, turns to an unseen persona and says: *"Let us make man in our image after our likeness."* (*Gen.* 1:26) Then, he accentuates the role of this new creation, causing him to have dominion over other natural phenomena.

Following closely upon this, the story presents God alone as creating humanity *"in his own image, in the image of God."* (*v.* 27) Then, this verse is added: *"And God blessed them and God said unto them ..."* (*v.* 28) Thus, humanity was created in the image not in the likeness, but on the other hand, the plural form in both texts, along with dominion over the natural phenomena, are kept. What is the reason for the change between the thought, (v. 26) and the actual creation? (*v.* 27) Does the difference between the two stories present a difference between God's perspective

[1] William Blake, "A Divine Image," in Robert Atwan and Laurance Wieder, eds., *Chapters Into Verse*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 11.

and that of the narrator? Or more simply, perhaps the narrator made these changes to add interest to the story.

Indeed, is it possible that from a philosophical point of view the gap between the two stories leaves the reader some avenues for interpretation? One of them is that all his life a person should search for the likeness of God within his actions and his relationships with other humans.[2] The narrator kept the plural, *"let them have dominion over..." "And God blessed them, and said unto them..."* in both stories to stress his perception that Adam was not an individual, but all of humanity. That way, the text is not just a story of the creation of one man, Adam, but as well, readers are led to uncover those details that can be identified only with a careful reading. This reading points to two stories, one of God: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,"* and one of the narrator: *"So God created man in his own image..."* These details, that are central in our reading, reveal a new text that strengthens the effects of the narrative, making two stories, one of which is a remnant of a hidden story.

Such high, literary techniques and conventions employed by the biblical narrator make him a great storyteller. Such literary sophistication does not exist in another story of the creation of Adam. The Quranic storyteller presents God talking to the angels:

> *Wa- la rab-buka lil-ma-la-i-ka-hi idha qa- / When your Lord said to the angels.* (*Q.* 2:30)

While the biblical narrator uses the verb *na-'a-seh*, "*let us make,"* this forms an ambiguous statement which contains two possible meanings: one, that God speaks and asks for advice from his "partners," and the other that the narrator uses this verb to direct the reader to the actual creation, *"so God created man."* The Quranic text presents the story of the creation of man as a folktale which ends with a strong statement not to doubt the story:

> *qa-la in-na aa'-la-mu ma la ta'-la-muu-na / I know that which you do not know.* (*Q.* 2:30)

In this story, it is revealed that God is speaking to the angels, advising them of his next creation. The biblical narrator presents his story hinting that there was a kind of a discussion, or an argument between God and unseen partners. *"Let us make man,"* (*na-'a-seh*), could also mean,

[2] This reading is an adoption of an interpretation made by our teacher, Professor Martin Buber.

"Should we make?" Indeed, the *Midrash* points out that God took counsel with different groups of angels.[3] The biblical text relates to the creation of man in general terms, while the *Midrash* emphasizes that the creation of man involved a few disagreements between God and the angels.

Reading the *Qur'an* is a struggle in terms of its style and the missing stories. What is lacking in this literary work is what is found in the *Old Testament*: the analogy in the plot/s. Thus, we are presented with a full story in parallel literary works. Let us examine three such analogies. First, the episode of selling Joseph to a "company of Ishmaelites," (*Gen.* 37:25) begins with the idea, and then he was sold to the "Midianite merchants." (*v.* 28) Then we are told:

> *And they sent the coat of many colors and they brought it to their father and said, 'This have we found: know now whether it will be thy son's coat or not.'* (*Gen.* 37:32)

The Hebrew text states:

> *Ha-ker na ha-ke-to-net bin-kha hee im lo.*

Onkelos, the *Aramaic Targum* states:

> *Ist-te-mo-da' khe-'an ha-khi-tu-na di-brakh hee im la.*

The *Palestinian Targum* states:

> *And they sent it by the hand of the sons of Zilpha and the sons of Bilhah, the figure garment, and they brought it to their father and said, 'This we have found, know now whether it be thy son's garment or not.'*

The phrase "*ha-ker na*" is repeated again in the episode of Judah and Tamar, which is the second example for analogy. The Hebrew text states:

> *va-to-mer ha-ker na le-me ha-ho-te-met ...* (*Gen.* 38:25)

Onkelos states:

> *va-a-ma-rat ish-te-mo-da' khe-'an de-man 'iz-ka-ta ...*

[3] See *Midrash HaGadol*, (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1978), pp. 55-56.

The *Palestinian Text* tells this story: Tamar could not find the three witnesses, pledges, but the angel Michael enlightened her eyes and she found them and brought them to the judges and said:

> *Yet though I may be burned, I do not make him manifest; nevertheless the Lord of the World will cause him in his heart to acknowledge them, and will deliver me from this great judgment.*

The *Palestinian Targum* does not state, "*ha-ker-na*" but,

> *ve-ak-ker Yehudah va-a-mar, zakh-ya hee Tamar mi-ni it-'ab-be-rat ...* (*v.* 26)

The third example is in the blessing of Jacob. The blessing begins with his first born, Reuben:

> *Reuben thou art my first born, my might and the beginning of my strength and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, thou shall not excel because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it ...* (*Gen.* 49:3-4, *KJV*)

The author presents a new idea which is not at all in the blessing of the father, which said:

> *Now the sons of Reuben, the first born of Israel, for he was the first born, but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel.* (1*Chron.* 5:1)

This story is found also in the *Palestinian Targum*:

> *Reuben, thou art my first born, the beginning of the strength of my generation, and the chief event of my thoughts. To thee belonged the birthright, and the high priesthood, and the kingdom: but because thou hast sinned, my son, the birthright is given to Joseph, the kingdom to Yehudah and the priesthood to Levi ...* (49)

The biblical narrator presents most of his characters according to their way of life, whether for good or for bad, criticizing their actions or praising them for their deeds. Thus, he accused Reuben. Another example is the case of Nabal, where the author states the following:

> *Now the name of the man was Nabal and the name of his wife Abigail and she was a woman of good understanding and of beautiful countenance, but*

> *the man was churlish and evil in his doings and he was of the house of Caleb*. (1 *Samuel* 25:3)

In the Hebrew text, it is written:

> *ve-hu khal-bo* (*read khal-be*)

Medieval interpreters responded to this version by stating that although it is possible that he was from the genealogy of Caleb, it could be interpreted that his deeds were so bad that the people compared his deeds to those of a dog.[4] For example, *Ralbag*, (R. Levi ben Gershom) states that his cruelty was like the cruelty of the dogs who do hate their own kind and bark when they come close and do not let them eat ...[5] *Rashi*, (R. Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040-1105), the great interpreter of the *Bible* and the *Talmud*, as well as the author of a *Responsa* (Halakhic decisions), interprets the word *khal-bo* (*bi*) as "from the house of Caleb." *Onkelos* states*: "ve-hu mid-bet Caleb,"* "*and he is from the house of Caleb."*

To draw negative characterizations such as Nabal, where did biblical storytellers turn? How does the divine image that sparked creation interact with common clay to become human nature? The stories of Abraham are filled with encounters that test the faith, wisdom and character of this man, this patriarch of his people.

B. Abraham the Hebrew

Abraham to kill him
Was distinctly told
Isaac was an Urchin
Abraham was old
—Emily Dickinson [6]

Remarkably, when the biblical narrator presents the story of Abraham, we hardly find a negative comment about him. God commanded Abraham to leave his country and his birthplace. "*lekh lekha*" is not "Get thee out" but "go to yourself, examine whether you are capable emotionally to be on your own." The *Palestinian Targum* states:

---

[4] See *Radak* (R. David Kimchi, 1160-1235), a great grammarian and biblical interpreter.

[5] See *Ralbag* (R. Levi ben Gershon, 'Gersonides', 1288-1344), a medieval Jewish philosopher, known for his controversial work, *Sefer Milhamot Hashem* (*Wars of the Lord*, 1329).

[6] Emily Dickinson, "Abraham to kill him" in *Chapters Into Verse*, *op. cit.*, 51.

it-pe-resh min yal-du-takh. "*Separate yourself from your kindred*."

Abraham does not give voice himself. He is passive. In fact, several times, God speaks to Abraham, commands him, promises him and Abraham does not respond or react. A few times, God is the protagonist, speaking and acting on the stage. (*Genesis* 12:1-3; 12:7-8; 13:14-18) Then, for the first time, Abraham is also heard. God appeals to Abraham in a vision and again promises him land and descendants, adding, "*I am thy shield."* (*Gen.* 15) As we have pointed out, in all cases Abraham is quiet, not responding to any of the promises. Here, for the first time, there is a dialogue between the two. This is the first time that Abraham speaks out himself; he has a voice, requesting proof, even questioning God:

> *The Lord came unto Abraham in a vision, saying:* God: *Fear not Abraham. I am your shield and thy exceedingly great reward.* (15:1)
>
> Abraham: *Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless and the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.* (15:2-3)
> God: *This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own loins shall be thine heir.... Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if thou be able to number them ... so shall thy seed be.* (15:4-5)
>
> The narrator: *And he [Abraham] believed in the* LORD*; and he counted it to him for righteousness.* (15:6)
>
> God: *I am the* LORD *that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give thee this land to inherit it.*
>
> Abraham: ...*whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?* (15:7-8)

From here on, the Promise of God and the covenant with Abraham were made. This is the first time that Abraham asked a question. He wanted to know what the reward was to be. The word of the Lord came to Abraham and he responded. The narrator twice repeats the words of Abraham:"*va-yo-mer Abraham. . ." (v.* 2*); "va-yo-mer Abraham. . ."* (*v.* 3) Between these two statements there was no response from God. Was he (God) afraid that Abraham was losing his faith? Or did the narrator want to present his protagonist, Abraham, as a skeptic who required answers and assurances for all the promises made by God? It is here for the first time that the narrator presented Abraham as a doubter, a skeptic, and at the same time, he increased the drama in the story. "*And he said, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"* (*v.* 7) Here, Abraham is presented as

uncertain. Now the readers are awaiting a shift in the dramatic scene. Instead of a single blessing, the promise was multiplied and expanded:

> *And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.* (*v.* 13:16)

God took Abraham out and promised him seed as much as the stars:

> *And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, so shall thy seed be.* (*v.* 15:5)

Heaven and earth are a part of God's promise to Abraham; heaven and earth are witnessing this promise. 'Heaven and earth' as a literary convention appears in the *Bible* over fifty times, intensifying the drama in each story.

The *Palestinian Targum* adds a line which is not a part of our story. The narrator in the *Targum* offers the following translation of verse 6:

> *And he believed in the Lord and had faith in the word* (*mem-ra*) *of the Lord and he considered it to him righteousness* since he did not dispute him, (*de-la a-tah le-qa-meh be- mi-lin*).

So, the next episode must deal with the fact that Sarah is still barren. Here, readers are introduced to another player, Hagar. Sarah hopes to obtain children by her. But this story serves as a mirror to events of the previous chapter. Hagar is a handmaid, an Egyptian, (*shif-ha mitz-rit*). (16:1, 3) In the previous episode, the text said: "*Thy seed shall be a sojourner ... and shall serve them.*" (15:13)

Handmaid – serve / shif-ha-'Av-dut
Hagar – sojourn / Hagar – ger

The readers are told: *Sarai dealt harshly with her.* (16:6)

In the previous episode: *And they shall afflict them ...* (15:3)

Dealt harshly – va-te-'a-ne-ha
Afflict them – ve-in-nu o-tam

From the episode of the vision between the pieces, we hear Abraham's voice. He responds to Sarah's complaints about Hagar. The readers feel Abraham's impatience:

> *... thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee.* (16.6)

This short response comes after the narrator presents Sarah as a *nagging woman* who cannot accept her own faults.

> *The wrong done me be upon thee... I was despised in her eyes; the Lord judge between me and thee.* (16.5)

It is not clear why Abraham responded impatiently. The narrator leaves a space for readers to fill in the gaps. And indeed, the narrator of the *Targum* introduces us to a long monologue by Sarah. In the *Palestinian Targum*, we find the following:

> *And Sarah said: my judgment and my affliction* (*di-ni ve-'ul-ba-ni*) *are in your hand. I left my land, my birthplace, the house of my father, and came with you in the faith of heaven* (*be-ham-nut she-ma-ya*). *I went with you before Pharaoh, king of Egypt and before Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, and I have said that you are my brother, so they might not kill you. [Now] when I saw that I am not able to get pregnant, I gave you as a wife Hagar the Egyptian, my maid* (*am-ti*)*... But now that she has conceived, my honour is despised in her eyes. Let the Lord appear and judge between me and you, and the Lord will have mercy [upon us] and will bring peace between me and you and the world will be filled from me and you.*[7]

The narrator of this *Targum* wanted to understand the impatience of Abraham and added his story, filling up the gap between Sarah's monologue and Abraham's short response.

In Abraham's narrative the angel of God appeared three times. Once to Hagar, the second time to Abraham and Sarah and the third time on Mount Moriah. We are interested in several revelations to women in the *Bible*. In general, the angel appeared to reveal and proclaim the end of the barrenness. We meet him with Sarah:

> *And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah, thy wife shall have a son.* (18:10)

The *Aramaic Targum* adds: *ve-at-tun ga-ya-min / you shall be revived.*

---

[7] Another *Targum* (*T. Jerushalmi*) ends this long monologue of Sarah by stating: "*And the land will be filled from us and we need not the help of the seed of Hagar the daughter of Pharaoh, the son of Nimrod who threw you into the furnace of fire."*

Another woman who received a similar message is Samson's mother:

> *And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren and bearest not, but thou shalt conceive and bear a son.* (*Judges* 13:3)

The other two women are Rebecca and Hannah. With Rebecca, the text states:

> *... and the Lord was entreated by him and Rebecca, his wife, conceived.* (*Gen.* 26:21)

In the case of Hannah, it is said:

> *... and Elkanah knew Hannah and the Lord remembered her.* (1*Samuel* 1:19)

But, the case of Hagar is different. She was not barren. She knew that she was pregnant: *... and when she saw that she had conceived ...* (*Gen.* 16:4) This verse contradicts the previous one when the angel said: *Behold thou art with child and shall bear a son.* (16:11) The narrator of the *Midrash* realized the contradiction between the two verses and said:

> *It means that out of the affliction she miscarried a son, thus, she got a good tiding that she will conceive and bear a son.*[8]

The dialogue between the angel and Hagar demands our attention. The angel found Hagar by *a fountain of water in the wilderness.* (*v.* 7) Pretending to be a friend, he asks a naive question:

> *Hagar, Sarai's maid, from where camest thou? and where wilt thou go?*

Hagar answers: "*I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai."*[9] She surely was fleeing from Sarah, but she did not know where to go. Thus, she responded: "*flee from my mistress ...*" The angel then commanded her to go back to her mistress and to submit to her wishes; "*submit thyself under her hand."*(*v.* 9) Hagar did not answer. This missing response requires close examination. Why did Hagar not answer? The literary convention of

---

[8] *Midrash HaGadol*, 267.

[9] The *Midrash* compared the statement made by Manoah: "*We shall surely die because we have seen God (Elohim)," Judges* 13:22 and Hagar, a maid who saw five angels and had no fear of them. *Mid. HaGadol*, 266.

va-yo-mer lah (*lo*) in verses 10 and 11 suggests that Hagar was silent which could be viewed as a mirror to the silence of Abraham in the previous episode. (15:5)[10] At this point, the angel promised the reward, as if to convince her to go back to her mistress, telling her that he would multiply her seed ... *that it shall not be numbered for multitude.* (*v.* 10) Then why tell her that "*... thou art with child ...*"*?, f*or, in fact, she already knew that, so the narrator tells us: "*... and when she saw that she had conceived...*" From the beginning, we know that she was not a barren woman. Her role was to replace the barren Sarah, thus there is no new tiding here. She was told to call the name of the son Yish-ma-'el (Ishmael), but then we are told that: *Abraham called his son's name whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.* (*v.* 15) Did Hagar tell Abraham of the angel's commands? The only information we have is that after the encounter with the angel she called the name of the place, *El-roi*, which refers to "*the one who sees me.*" The *Palestinian Targum* adds:

> *And she gave thanks before the Lord whose Word spoke to her and said, You are he who lives and you are the eternal whom I have seen for here you revealed your Divine Presence* (*she-khin-ta*) *after the vision.*[11]

The next dialogue is the one with the angels. In fact, on the stage we find a play of three characters, Abraham, the angels and Sarah. We must pay attention to the fact that it is the angel'/s' turn to bring to Abraham the tiding that a son is to be born:

> *Where is Sarah, thy wife ... ? And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and lo, Sara, thy wife shall have a son ...* (18: 9-10)

The Hebrew text used the third person plural pronoun, *va-yom-ru* / *and they told*. The *Palestinian Targum* states:

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[10] It is possible to ask the question, What was said by Abraham when God took him out to number the stars? And the second part: "*so shall thy seed be,*" in verse 6, is a note from the narrator. God continues the monologue by saying: "*I am the Lord who brought thee out of Ur ...*" The *Palestinian Targum* adds: "*I am the Lord who brought you out of the fiery furnace of the Qasdai*" (*de-a-fig-takh me-at-tun nu-ra de-khas-de-ei*). Another version reads: *a-na YHWH de-a-fig-kit ya-takh me-at-tun nu-re-hon me-lir de-khas-de-ei.*

[11] *Jonathan* (*Jerushalmi*) states: *di ha-mit be-tsa-'a-re a-rum am-rat da le-hod 'a-lai it-ga-le-ta hekh be-tar de-it-ge-le-ta 'al sarai ri-bon-ti /" you have manifested yourself to me as you have manifested yourself to Sarai my mistress."*

> *And one of them said, indeed, I shall return to you in the coming year and you will be alive and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son. Sarah was listening by the door of the tent and Ishmael stood behind her and noted what the angel said.*

It is interesting to observe how the author of the translation allows himself to fill up the gaps. Ishmael is present there, too, since he was a member of the household, but yet pointing out how cunning he was: *ve-tsa-yat / and he noted.*

So another son was born, named Isaac, and again, comes a harsh complaint on the part of the new mother:

> *... And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... mocking ... cast out the bond woman and her son, for the son of this bond woman shall not be heir with my son.* (21:10)

Abraham, as a father, faces a severe dilemma: to follow his wife's demand or to refuse her. At this moment, Abraham is silent. To help the old man, God appears to him and orders him to hearken unto his wife. The question stands, Why is Abraham silent? God comes into the scene and encourages him to heed Sarah's words, to follow blindly her harsh judgment. To ease the feeling of the audience that Sarah is acting through a divine voice, the narrator involves God in this scene. This story is in many ways parallel to the binding of Isaac, and thus, may be considered as the binding of Ishmael.[12] In fact, the language the narrator uses at the beginning of the two stories is almost the same:

> *And Abraham rose up early in the morning; va-yash-kem.* (21:14).
> *And Abraham rose up early in the morning; va-yash-kem.* (22:3).
> *And God opened her eyes and she saw; va-yif-qah ... va-te-re.* (21:19).
> *And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked; va-yis-sa...et 'e-nav va-yar.* (22:13)

Both narratives end with a tone of tenderness and serenity:

> *And he (Ishmael) dwelt in the wilderness; va-ye-shev ba-mid-bar.* (21:21)
> *And Abraham dwelt at Beer-Sheba; va-ye-shev Abraham bib-er-she-ba.* (22:19)

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[12] See, Mishael M. Caspi, *Take Now Thy Son*, (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 2001), and "The Binding of Isaac Between Two Traditions," in *Unbinding the Binding of Isaac*, Mishael M. Caspi and John T. Greene, eds., (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 2007), pp. 165-166.

In this narrative, readers are faced with strikingly different forms of language that the narrator uses to increase the drama in the story. For example, we find essential, but different elements: water and fire:

> *... took bread and a skin of water; va-yiq-qah le-hem ve-he-mat ma-yim.* (21:14)

> *... and he took fire in his hand; va-yiq-qah be-ya-do ef ha-esh.* (22:6)

The most striking contrast is that in one story, the protagonist is *the mother*, while in the other narrative, it is *the father*.

An interesting story may be read in the *Palestinian Targum* where Abraham has concerns about Hagar's future:

> *Abraham rose up in the morning, took bread and a skin* (*qir-va*) *of water, gave it to Hagar to carry upon her shoulder, and tied it to her waist to make known* (*o-do-'ei*) *that she is a maid and dismissed her with a bill of divorce* (*uf-ta-ra be-gi-ta*).

The story of the binding of Ishmael ends with the following note:

> *And he dwelt in the desert of Paran and took a wife, Adisha, and he sent her away (ve-tar- kha) and his mother took him Fatima from the land of Egypt as a wife.*

In the midrashic literature, as well as in the *Qisasul Anbiyaa*, the post-Quranic literature filled up the gap that we find in the story of the *Targum*. The narrator here said that he married a woman named Adisha, and that he divorced her, but with no reason for this divorce. In both the *Midrash* and the literature of the *Qisas*, it is told that Abraham paid a visit to his son Ishmael:

> *... he promised Sarah not to dismount the camel when he arrived to the dwelling place of Ishmael. He arrived there in the middle of the day and found there Ishmael's wife. He asked her: "Where is Ishmael?" she replied: "He went with his mother to bring from the desert fruit and dates." He said: "I am very tired, being so long in the desert, may I have a little bread and water." She replied; "I have neither bread nor water." He said; "When Ishmael comes, tell him to change the threshold of your house since it is not good for you. When Ishmael returned, she conveyed to him*

these words, and as a son of a wise man is like half a wise man, Ishmael understood and he sent her away.[13]

Following the other storyteller, we can acknowledge the difficulties faced by interpreters of the text, for the main protagonist of the story, Abraham, was silent.[14] Abraham did not react, object, rebel against God, but followed this cruel command. The same silence is noticed in the story of Hagar and Ishmael, the one we identified as *The Binding of Ishmael.* Hagar was silent. She was a maidservant, but she gave birth to the heir of Abraham. Yet, Hagar was more human than Abraham. The narrator accentuates her feelings: For she said: "*Let me not see the death of the child."* (*21:16*) We do not find any interpreter who relates to Hagar's sorrow. God does not hear her cry, but as the storyteller conveys: "*And God heard the voice of the lad."* (*v.*17) The mother feared for her son's fate, but not for her own. After all, she was also suffering from thirst and in danger of death. The mother's thoughts were for the well-being of her son. The story of the binding of Isaac presents before us a very cold father who follows a cruel command without question. He is insensitive, no feelings are expressed. Moreover, once again we meet him lying. Just as he lied to Pharaoh and to Abimelech, so in this scene, he lies to his son and to his servants. Is lying a key characteristic of Abraham, the Hebrew? In the binding of Isaac (*'aqeda*), Abraham tells his servants (*ne-'a-rav*):

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[13] *Yalkut Shimoni, Gen. 95. Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, (PRE),* has another version. Ishmael's wife, named Ayesha, is from the daughters of Moab. To Abraham's question, "Where is Ishmael?" she responded: "*He has gone with his mother to fetch fruit of the palms."* When he asked for a little bread and water, she replied: "*I have neither bread nor water."* To her answer, he said: "*When Ishmael comes tell him ... A certain old man came from the land of Canaan ... Exchange the threshold of thy house for it is not good for thee."* This text ends with the same phrase found in *Yalkut*: *"A son of a wise man is like a half a wise man."* Besides some minor changes, *Yalkut* and *PRE* are almost the same. See *PRE*, Gerald Friedman, tr., (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), pp. 218-219. Then, *al-Kisa'i* presents us with a different story, somewhat more imaginative. In this tale, Gabriel brought Abraham a horse from Paradise. Greeting the woman, she did not answer, but asked him the purpose of the visit. Abraham said to the woman: "*When your husband comes tell him to change the threshold of his house."* So Ishmael told her: "*Go rejoin your people."* While the first woman in *Kisa'i's* story is unnamed, the second one is named Hala, the daughter of Imran ibn al-Harith. See, *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, W.M. Thackston, tr., (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), pp. 152-153.

[14] The only short dialogue in the story of the *'Aqedah'* is the short and very dramatic one between the father and the son. (*Gen.* 22:7, 8)

"*Abide you here with the ass ... and worship and come again to you." / Sh'vu la-khem 'im ha-ha-mor ... ve-nish-ta-ha-ve ve-na-she-va a-le-khem.* (22: 5). For the second time in the same story, Abraham lied to his own son:

> Isaac asks: ... *where is the lamb for a burnt offering? / ve-a-yeh ha-seh le-'o-lah*
> Abraham replies: *God will provide himself a lamb; / Elohim-yir-eh lo ha-seh le-'o-lah.*

The most interesting contrast, accentuating the relationship of the parent to the son is presented in a very short description. In the *Binding of Ishmael* we read:

> *Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.* (21:18)

In the story of the *Binding of Isaac*, are these words:

> *And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything to him* ... (22:12).

The proclamation from God is that now Abraham has proved that he feared his God: "*... now I know that thou fearest God."* The cruel request of God to an old man, who probably was not fully in control of all his faculties, was to test whether the old man still had fear of him. Abraham, blindly, followed his God and at this crucial moment, he also was commanded to distance himself from the lad: "lay *not thine hand upon the lad," / al tish-lah yad-kha el ha-na-'ar*.

Reading the *Palestinian Targum* (*PT*) in relation to the word of God to Hagar strengthens our assumption that there were two different Gods in the stories of the binding. The *PT*'s narrator conveys:

> *Arise, lift up the child and hold tight*[15] *(ve-it-qi-fi) your hand in his, for I shall make him a great nation.*

This God cares about the child, demands the mother to be close to her son, to support him, and in the future he will be a great nation. In the *Binding of Isaac*, the angel appears and commands Abraham to lay no hand upon the lad. Where was God? The *PT* follows, more or less, the biblical narrator, stating:

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[15] The stem is *T.L.Y.*

> *... stretch not out your hand upon the lad neither do to him any harm* (*mida'am bish / anything bad*).

Is it possible that as readers, we encounter two different Gods?[16] The biblical narrator mentions Ishmael's relation to Abraham as one who took part in the burial of Abraham. (25:8) The end of this short note about the burial of Abraham relates the following sequence. One is the blessing to Isaac; the second, the generations of Ishmael. Why is the blessing of Ishmael missing? The story conveyed by the *PT*'s narrator is somewhat surprising. It says:

> *Since Abraham did not choose* (*tsa-ve*) *to bless Ishmael, he did not bless Isaac either, that if he blesses Isaac and not Ishmael, he might keep enmity between them. Thus, after the death of Abraham, God blesses Isaac...*[17]

Neither this narrator, nor the biblical narrator explains the fact that there is no relationship between Abraham and Isaac after the traumatic event on Mt. Moriah. Is it possible that Isaac recognizes the fact that Abraham, the Hebrew, is dangerous, possibly insane, and thus, it is better to stay away from him? That Isaac kept himself afar from his insane father is hinted at the end of the episode with Rebecca:

> *And Isaac brought her into his mother's tent ...* (24:67)

The *Palestinian Targum* adds:

> *And Isaac brought her to Sarah's, his mother's dwelling, [immediately] light shined [that] which had gone out after the death of Sarah.*

Yalkut Shimoni tells us about the cloud which was connected with Sarah's dwelling place. On her death, the cloud disappeared, and now with Rebecca, the cloud returned. All the time of Sarah's life, a candle was lit from one Saturday to the next. On her death, the light was put out; now with Rebecca, the light of the candle returned.[18] The man who argued with God to save people whom he did not know or those who were not his kin, is totally silent when he is commanded to sacrifice his own son, the one

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[16] Or, do we experience different aspects, different expressions of one God, comforting, maternal hands; rigid, stern, paternal arms, a parental deity who both mothers and fathers the child?

[17] See also *Midrash haGadol, Gen*., 422-423.

[18] *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Gen.,* 109. *Midrash HaGadol* states that it was the light which returned to its place, *Mid.Hag.,* 412.

God promised to bless and become a great nation. Three times Abraham responds with the preposition *hin-ne-ni*, which translates as "Here I am," but it refers to the fact that the person is ready to follow the command before even knowing or hearing it. Abraham followed the command; he was tested as a believer and as a father. All texts praise him for being a true believer. In Arabic literature, he is called *al-kha-lili*, the friend (of God), for he displayed unconditional love for God in his willingness to sacrifice his own son. In Christianity, emphasis is placed on the Lamb of God and the love for God:

> *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested that love of God toward us, that God sent his only begotten son into the world that we might love through him.* (1 *John* 4:8-9)

As a father, Abraham failed. He acted as a person mentally deranged, who hears voices and rushes to fulfill them. Poor in ethical judgment, Abraham in his old age is presented as a cold, insensitive and even cruel father.

One may wonder in whose image our narrator has created Abraham? How does Abraham compare with Adam, as one made in the image of God?

RACHEL:
THE SHEPHERDESS AMONG SHEPHERDS

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"… One man among a thousand I have found,
But a woman among all these I have not found"
(*Ecc*. 7:28).

Abstract

Ecclesiastes 7:28b presupposes that in certain situations you find a rare man among a thousand men. However, what is easily overlooked is that the verse further states that, "a woman among all these I have not found." This last statement presupposes that in many situations which one would find a rare man in a thousand, it is possible not to find a single woman among them. In other words, one has to look beyond a thousand men to find a rare woman. In this essay, the statement is examined in the light of the character of Rachel who is the only named woman mentioned in the *Old Testament* as a shepherd (ess). From the literary viewpoint of characterization, the essay traces Rachel's relationship with her husband, her sister, her father and other shepherds showing that hers was a conflicted life. Although *Scripture* mentions some other women who watered their father's flock (*Exod*. 2:16-17), it is argued that Rachel did not only stand out among men, she stood out among women, as well. The implication of the interpretation for women working male-dominated institutions and for women's self-esteem and dignity is also underscored.

Introduction

When I saw the theme of this session on biblical characters which says, *"…One man among a thousand I have found"*, what immediately struck me was the omission of the next part of the verse in *Ecclesiastes*

7:28 which says, *"but a woman among all those I have not found."*[1] The verse is said to point to unflattering and misogynist attitudes toward women that is common in ancient literature, and it reinforces negative statements about women in general.[2] Although *Qoheleth* makes the statement in his search for virtue and in reference to men who might escape from the snare of a dangerous woman, the statement may well apply to instances in which men stand out (or women for that matter). It is not surprising, however, that the second part of the verse is easily glossed over; perhaps because in the *Old Testament* world, you would truly have to look beyond a thousand men to find an outstanding woman, and until recently, in some modern settings, where men prevail and have the last say, they would have to look much farther before they find an outstanding woman or, rather, before an outstanding woman is acknowledged.

The *Old Testament* (or its interpretation) is replete with accounts of male characters who stood out in their own generation. Some of them can truly be considered one among a thousand, while a few possibly stood head and shoulders above these, and are said to be worth more than ten thousand men. David's men told him to stay away from the battlefield because he was worth ten thousand of them. (2 *Sam*. 18:3) The maiden in *Song of Songs* points to the physical presence of her beloved who, according to her, is "radiant [dazzling] and ruddy," and is the "chiefest [outstanding, distinguished] among ten thousand." In common parlance, he is one in a million.[3]

Many distinguished male characters in the *Old Testament* have been celebrated through the ages for their greatness, prowess, faith, leadership

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[1] This essay was presented at the July 2013 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in St. Andrews, Scotland.

[2] See James Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1988), p. 147; Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth*. Hermeneia – A Critical Historical Commentary on the Bible, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2004), p. 148.
Tremper Longman III claims that the verse is an uncomplimentary remark about humanity in general and women in particular. Nearly a century before him, Aaron Barton had commented that Qoheleth is a misogynist who portrays oriental women as more prone to sin than the men. He suggested that "Qoheleth is saying, 'Perfect men are rare, perfect women are non-existent'"; Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 205; Aaron George Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, The International Critical Commentary, (Edinburgh: T.&T., 1908/1959), p. 147.

[3] Cf. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

qualities, wealth or wisdom, etc.[4] A disproportionate number of women, such as Sarah, Deborah, Ruth, Naomi, Abigail, Esther, etc., have also been admired for their outstanding qualities and roles in the *Old Testament* world – whether as mothers or as queens, queen mothers, prophetesses, etc. Some of the women are remembered for performing roles that are recognized as essentially male, e.g., female prophets such as Huldah or Deborah who was also a military commander.[5] Although women are found in various occupations in the *Old Testament*,[6] it is instructive that Rachel is the only named shepherdess in the Hebrew canon. In fact, of the matriarchs, she is the only one designated as having a profession. The question is: What is it about Rachel that stands her out not only among the matriarchs but among the women of ancient Israel and as the only female among the too many named and unnamed shepherds in the *Old Testament*? Rachel's life is characterized by tension – tension between her and Jacob because he cannot give her children; tension between Rachel and her father who tricks Jacob into marrying her sister; tension between her and her sister, Leah, who oddly enough accuses her of taking her husband.

In what follows I shall consider the significance of the brief portrait of Rachel as a shepherdess through a literary reading of her character – first in relation to Jacob, then to her sister, Leah, and her father, Laban, and finally to the shepherds.

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[4] Some of their names have been etched proudly and boldly in the *New Testament* "Hall of Faith" by the writer of *Hebrews* 11. Among these men of faith, only Sarah and Rahab (*Heb*. 11:11, 31) received mention besides the unnamed women who received their dead (11:35) and Pharaoh's daughter who was mentioned in connection with Moses' faith. (11:24)

[5] On the issue of women's equal standing with men in the *Bible*, Shapira lists seven areas of equality, one of which is "the special personal status attained by some women – as mothers, judges, prophetesses, queens, and others." Amnon Shapira, "On Woman's Equal Standing in the Bible–A Sketch: A Feminist Re-reading of the Hebrew Bible: A Typological View," *Hebrew Studies* 51, (2010): 7-42:12.

[6] In her *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History*, Bachmann notes that there are at least twenty-five feminine nouns that denote professions or occupations in the *Hebrew Bible*. She points out that "In the Hebrew Bible one finds mentioned, among others, female slaves, bakers, cooks, harlots, perfumers, child-care providers, messengers, and women who are said to draw water for herds, spin and weave, wail and sing"; Mercedes L. García Bachmann, *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History*, IVBS (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), p. 8.

Rachel and Jacob

In the type-scene of a meeting by the well,[7] Jacob arrives in Haran and finds a group of shepherds waiting to water their flock. He enquires from them about his uncle Laban, and they point out his daughter Rachel who comes along with her father's flock. Unlike Jethro's seven daughters who band together at the well, Rachel is alone with the flock, but then Rachel alone is called a shepherdess. She is a complex character lost in her own world where she is friend to only her kind – the ewes, the rams and the lambs. Even though she operates as a lone ranger, shepherds do not trifle with her as they do with Jethro's daughters. The shepherds recognize her as a professional colleague. As Rachel approaches them, Jacob's attention immediately shifts from the shepherds to the lone shepherdess. He rolls the stone away and waters her flock. Although interpreters generally see Jacob as a superman who rolls away a large stone which would require "several" men to roll away,[8] there is nothing in the story that suggests that any of the other shepherds by the well could not have done the same. They are simply waiting for everyone to gather before taking action, not because they are incapable of rolling away the stone.

Jacob, therefore, waters his uncle's flock, but he ignores the other three flocks. Does he help Rachel because she is his cousin or because she is a beautiful woman? An aspect of female-male dynamics that could be readily overlooked by feminist hermeneutics is shown here. In spite of the war of the sexes, many a time, men could also act protectively towards women, even in the workplace or public sphere. They could go soft on women in situations where they would act aggressively towards their fellow men (cf. David versus Abigail and Nabal in 1 *Samuel* 25). However, the motive behind such an action remains questionable. Perhaps

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[7] *Genesis* 24:10-33; *Exodus* 2:15-21; Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis*, Hebrew Bible Monographs, 23 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), p. 87.

[8] Westermann claims that Jacob is given superhuman strength "in his service of love" while Sarna states that Jacob experiences "a sudden surge of strength at the sight of Rachel" that enables him to roll away the stone singlehandedly. Fokkelman notes that Jacob "rolls the stone from the well with gigantic strength" – Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*. Translated by John J Scullion S. J. (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 465. Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis thysyarb/bereshit*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 202; J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, Second Edition (Sheffield: JSOT Press/ Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), p. 123.