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Senior Thesis

MOTIVATIONS FOR MOTHERHOOD: A FEMINIST AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF BARRENNESS AND SUFFERING IN GENESIS

submitted by

EMMA CLAIRE STERNBERG ‘21

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

2021

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Acknowledgements

To Gabriel Hornung, for introducing me to the academic study of the Hebrew Bible and for welcoming me into a major for which I never expected to have such a passion. His Biblical Traditions course reminded me how much I love to learn, and the past four years of countless office-hour visits have fueled and sustained my interest in the discipline.

To Tamsin Jones and Sheila Fisher, who taught me how to critically read texts I thought were beyond my understanding, and who taught me how to articulate my ideas through concise and powerful writing. They have both transformed my writing abilities, which is a lifelong gift for which I will forever be grateful.

To Ronald Kiener, for embracing me on the first day we met and for always reminding me what a remarkable thing it is to be a Jewish-Minnesotan-Trinity College Religious Studies student. He is the confidant, teacher, and friend I did not know I needed, but am so lucky to have.

To Clare Rossini and Ethan Rutherford, who, while guiding me through my Creative Writing endeavors, have so kindly supported my interest in Religious Studies.

To the Theodor Mauch Senior Thesis Research Grant, which subsidized my research expenses.

To the Humanities Gateway, for fostering such a welcoming environment that taught me how to think, read, write, and speak. And most importantly, for giving me my first and closest college friends (most notably, Annika Davies, Connor Wilde, and Maura Thompson). I am fortunate to have found friends who support all facets of who I am.

To Grace Leslie, Sami Maddock, and Megan Albers, whose unconditional support I feel constantly, even while we are apart.

To my family, who has believed in who I am and what I am capable of. And, for being my personal readers, editors, and collaborators on almost everything I have ever written. I could not have achieved all that I have without their love and editorial expertise.

Finally, to Sarah and Rachel, for allowing me to use their stories as the starting points for a larger feminist conversation in biblical scholarship. Through reading and writing about their narratives, I have been reminded of the importance of giving voice to female stories that too often go unheard, especially in a field that has been dominated by men for so long.

Introduction

When Eve walked among / the animals and named them— / nightingale, red-shouldered hawk, / fiddler crab, fallow deer— / I wonder if she ever wanted / them to speak back, looked into / their wide wonderful eyes and / whispered, *Name me, name me*.[1]

In her poem "A Name," Ada Limón wonders if, when Eve gave animals their names, she too wanted to be named. Limón's poetic inquiry considers the point of view of Eve. She wonders what Eve thinks and what Eve desires. Her contemplation of Eve as more than an accompanying character to Adam gives recognition to Eve's humanness and individual experience. Limón gives Eve a voice that so often goes unheard. While Limón only describes Eve in her poem, Eve is merely the Genesis for which a conversation about unheard biblical women begins. Just as Limón investigates Eve's story, this thesis will explore the stories of Sarah and Rachel and the themes of barrenness, motherhood, rivalry, and suffering that accompany them in the Hebrew Bible.

Stories of biblical women such as Eve, Sarah, and Rachel, are unheard or misunderstood because the Hebrew Bible was written by men for a male audience in a male dominated society. As a result, the stories that are told about women are influenced by these male perspectives. Therefore, it is essential that we reexamine the stories of Sarah and Rachel with the knowledge that what is written about women may not be representative of their actual reality. Susanne Scholz, in her book, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament*, reminds readers that "[s]ince there is a difference between what

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[1] Limón, Ada, "A Name," in *The Carrying: Poems* First Edition. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2018,) 3.

people say and do and what they actually do, this incongruence should also be assumed for the Hebrew Bible. Biblical texts, then, do not necessarily serve as evidence for what ancient Israelites actually did."[2] Scholz's warning is an excellent reminder at the beginning of this exploration; we cannot take the written stories as true evidence of female experiences. Instead, we must look carefully at the literary techniques used by the biblical authors to portray a particular image of women, and from there we can attempt to understand what has been misunderstood and misrepresented.

To add to Scholz's point and push her ideas even further, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her book, *In Memory of Her*, illuminates the implications of these patriarchally influenced stories. She writes that "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the initiator of [*The Woman's Bible*], outlined two critical insights for a feminist theological hermeneutics: (1) The Bible is not a 'neutral' book, but a political weapon against women's struggle for liberation. (2) This is because the Bible bears the imprint of men who never saw or talked with God."[3] Other than pointing out the obvious but often forgotten fact that the biblical writers never spoke with God, she also highlights that the stories of women written by men do not bring freedom to women but further trap them in limiting roles imposed by an androcentric society. The biblical narratives about women restrict them because the specific stories told relegate women to a specific and peripheral role. This thesis will explore how the responsibility and theme of motherhood places a real and literary pressure on the biblical women, which confines them to patriarchal values and forces the women to uphold them.

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[2] Susanne Scholz, "Chapter 3: Gendering the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Considerations," in *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 72.

[3] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Part I/Seeing-Naming-Reconstituting," in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 7.

The stories about Sarah and Rachel highlight their barrenness and their need to become mothers, which limits the development of their complete personhood. There is a reason why, however, the Bible's illustrations of women portray them only in roles that relate to their reproductive abilities. The patriarchal society in which Sarah and Rachel lived promoted motherhood because through childbearing, men were able to continue their own lineage. Esther Fuchs, in her essay "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," says that the "institution of motherhood is a powerful patriarchal mechanism … The institution of motherhood as defined by the patriarchal system guarantees that both the wife and her children will increase his property during his lifetime and perpetuate his achievements after his death."[4] Here, Fuchs highlights that creating a family was important for men because it allowed them to carry on a patrilineal line. As a result, there was pressure in ancient Israel on women to be mothers so that a male dominated society could continue.

In addition, Scholz cites Fuchs stating another reason why motherhood was so heavily emphasized in the biblical text. Scholz writes, "[t]o Fuchs, the stories promote motherhood as the superior female role because it reinforces the androcentric convictions and strengthens patriarchal power … Because mothers conform to androcentric interests, they are popular in biblical stories."[5] Therefore, not only was there pressure on women in their actual society, but the male authors of the Bible emphasized motherhood through their writing to their male audience to promote and uphold a patriarchal system. This thesis will explore the literary techniques the biblical authors use to portray women and force motherhood upon female characters to defend patriarchal ancient Israel's values.

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[4] Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 134.
[5] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 77.

In chapter one, I will explore the pattern that has prompted and propelled this thesis: the dual duty. Sarah's story highlights her common struggle with feeling responsible as a woman in ancient Israelite society to give birth to a child in order to continue her husband's line. However, what sets Sarah apart from other women in her world is that she is the wife of the man chosen by God, Abraham, who is said to be the father of innumerable nations. Therefore, Sarah is placed under a dual pressure—a dual duty to not only give birth to a child so that her husband's family name may continue but also so that her husband can fulfill the divine covenant proclaimed by God. While exploring Sarah's two responsibilities, I will examine why these responsibilities exist for women, how they perceived their role as mothers, and what their strained relationship with other women looked like while working through these struggles. Furthermore, I will explore how these dual duties connect women to their husbands and how biblical scholars, although are able to highlight the patterns across the biblical male experiences, neglect to illuminate this very pattern that I have brought to light.

In chapter two, I will analyze the story of Rachel in a similar fashion, examining how Rachel and Leah navigate the dual motivations that push them to desire children. Furthermore, I will discuss the female relationships and conflicts that exist within the Rachel narrative. In both these points, I will highlight areas of similarity and divergence between the Sarah and Rachel stories, which will offer insight into the commonality of women's experiences while also demonstrating the unique challenges every ancient Israelite woman faced. Finally, I will expose how the biblical authors gave their female characters little autonomy and illustrated women as pawns for their fathers and husbands to exchange, which many modern male scholars fail to address in their commentaries on these stories.

Ultimately, then, this thesis will analyze what it means to be a woman and mother in ancient Israelite society through understanding the male authorial influence on female stories, therefore exposing the suffering and perseverance of biblical women. In addition, this thesis will also highlight how modern biblical scholarship has maintained many of the same androcentric values the biblical authors employed through their failure to recognize the pattern of the dual duty and the significance of the narratives of biblical women.

Literature Review

In the introduction to his 1972 edition of *Genesis*, Gerhard von Rad wrote about reading Genesis within the Hexateuch[6], the creativity and consequences of the Yahwist writing down the oral cult traditions that created the Hebrew Bible, the traditions the Yahwist encountered and combined to make Genesis, and the definition and function of the saga. Von Rad begins his introduction by explaining that scholars too often read Genesis in isolation; it is read not as the beginning of a larger narrative that gives an account stretching from creation to the entrance into the promised land but instead as an individual story without connection to the books that follow.[7] Genesis must be read in conjunction with the other five books because it helps contribute to the larger theme of the Hexateuch, which Von Rad argues is a simple theme complicated by the narratives that make up the books.[8] The narratives of Genesis were originally part of an oral cult tradition which was passed down through storytelling through those that lived thousands of years ago. Eventually, those stories were written down and edited to create the canon.

One of the greatest arguments within biblical conversation deals with biblical authorship, and Von Rad's ideas were influenced by the prominence of the Documentary Hypothesis[9] in Germany during his time. His introduction indicates both adoption and adaption of the Documentary Hypothesis. Von Rad recognizes how the J, E, P, and D authors wrote different portions of Genesis at different times, but he complicates those source divisions by also investigating a thematic breakup of the text. Von Rad sees that the Yahwist (J) was the one who wrote down the oral cult traditions and creatively wove together the distinct stories of the Sinai

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[6] The Hexateuch is the first six books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

[7] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 13.

[8] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 13-14.

[9] The Documentary Hypothesis is one explanation for the composition of the Torah, and it argues that the Pentateuch is composed of four separate sources (J, E, P, and D), and were eventually combined by redactors.

tradition, the patriarchal tradition, and the primeval history to create the entire narrative of Genesis.[10] While writing down the oral stories created the Hebrew Bible, Von Rad says that the Yahwist changed the cultic traditions through concretizing them within writing.[11] By writing down stories that were originally only told verbally, the Yahwist set those stories within a context and both consciously and unconsciously influenced how those tales were told.[11] As a result, Von Rad defines the stories of the Bible as sagas: stories that are demonstrative of a people and a time but are not factual history.[12] Von Rad's introduction sets his readers up to understand that although he is going to dissect Genesis through a textual and theological lens, he wants his analysis and his audience's greater understanding to be put into conversation with the rest of the Hexateuch. Additionally, through outlining the work of the Yahwist, explaining the distinct traditions, and defining the nature of the stories, Von Rad indicates the background of research and scholarship that he considers when writing his commentary on Genesis.

Von Rad emphasizes the importance of reading the Hexateuch as a continuous text, where Genesis functions as its introduction. However, while he considers continuities across the patriarchs, such as the tribulations that exist within the lives of the chosen men, Von Rad neglects to point out patterns within the stories of the matriarchs that if he had included, would have added to his promotion of continuous reading. Therefore, this thesis will use Von Rad's suggestion for how to read Genesis as a method for further investigating the stories of barrenness in the lives of Sarah and Rachel.

While Von Rad's emphasis on the continuity of the Hexateuch, his appreciation for the Yahwist's work on Genesis, and his nuanced approach to the question of source division are well

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[10] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 17-20.
[11] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 18.
[12] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 32.

supported and will be used as part of the foundation from which this thesis is going to expand, Von Rad is just one scholar amongst countless others who have contributed to this conversation. Therefore, to add to and complicate Von Rad's approach, I will also examine the work of Claus Westermann.

Claus Westermann writes about, in his introduction to his 1985 work *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, Genesis' illustration of an exploration of life through a single family, the three stages of the patriarchal story and how they combine to demonstrate a history, and the contrasting approaches to the examination of Genesis and their advantages and disadvantages. To begin his introduction, Westermann says that the stories of Genesis revolve around a people whose tribes were becoming a state, and that no matter how that state progressed throughout time, their community was rooted within the family unit.[13] To demonstrate the continuity of the family line, Westermann sees the story of Abraham and his descendants as the illustration of what the general people were experiencing in ancient Israel. Westermann highlights the three stages of the patriarchal story and their themes: Abraham and Sarah's story deals with life, death, and continuity; Jacob and Esau demonstrate the complexity of brotherly relationships; and Joseph's story combines qualities from the first two stages as well as introduces the concept of kingship.[14] The three stages of the patriarchal story combined demonstrate the history of a family that Westermann says was representative of the people of their time.

In order to examine these stages, Westermann explains there are numerous approaches to reading the bible that have developed throughout time and have both benefits and drawbacks. First, he explains the literary approach, which focuses on evaluating the text and work of the

[13] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: a Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 23.

[14] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 28-29.

writer. Westermann says the literary approach deals with "a definite text in a definite context," which allows scholars to examine the biblical sources of the Bible without having to consider the dynamic world in which the text was written.[15] The mission of the writers, according to Westermann, was to pass along meaning through writing within their time while relating the stories to the past, present, and future.[16] He considered the authors not as writers but as "bearers of tradition."[16] Where the literary approach finds connections between the text and writer in its final form, the form-critical approach looks at the origin and history before the narratives found themselves as a formal, written work.[17] This approach explores how the narratives, genealogies, and promises that are seen in the text itself existed historically, and Westermann points out that the form-critical approach often has trouble bridging the gap between history and the Bible. Finally, Westermann lays out the archaeological approach to the study of the Bible, which emerged from the foundation of the literary and form-critical approaches as well as the advancement in archaeological studies.[18] The archeological approach sought to find evidence of that which is told of in the Bible, such as names, places, and customs.

By explaining three approaches to studying the Bible, as well as setting up the idea of the representative family, Westermann allows his introduction to function similarly to Von Rad's. Westermann shows his readers the methods and ideas that already exist within scholarship and how he will use them as a foundation for his commentary on Genesis. His commentary logically breaks up Genesis 12-36 into thematic sections and explains each division's form, setting, commentary, and purpose and thrust. This structure helps him guide his reader through the physical arrangement of the section, the context in which the story took place, and his thoughts

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[15] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 31.
[16] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 33.
[17] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 35.
[18] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 58-59.

on the meaning of each story. He uses a combination of the approaches he introduced as the form of his commentary and includes his ideas on the biblical family as a thread throughout his work.

In addition to their introductions sharing a similar purpose, Westermann and Von Rad both understand that Abraham and his family were not a literal example of a historical family but instead are a representation of the people in their time. Their understanding of this fact allows them to evaluate the stories in Genesis not as true tales but as concepts of people who lived out the experiences of that time. Furthermore, both Westermann and Von Rad note how writing down the oral traditions from which the Bible drew inspiration took away some of its vitality. They note this because in the same way that they make it clear the biblical characters were not real people, the text that we have of the Bible is only representative of a portion of the stories that constructed it. Finally, both scholars stress the idea of continuity; Von Rad sees Genesis as being part of a continuous narrative, and Westermann highlights the importance of the continuous family line.

Just as the two works share commonality in their consideration of previous scholarship, like Von Rad's failure to analyze the continuity of the matriarchal stories, Westermann's commentary contains a hole, which this thesis intends to explore and depart from. Westermann emphasizes, through his discussion of the family line, the idea that the father figure is representative of the family and its function.[19] However, Westermann fails to see how the mother also plays an important role as a member of the family. Westermann says that the father helps trace family origin and show lineage, and this thesis will explore how and why the mothers work in the same way.

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[19] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 24-25.

Westermann and Von Rad's works, although different, share similarities that demonstrate the considerations both writers took when creating their commentaries. Their insight and thoughtfulness are why their works will serve as part of the groundwork for this thesis. Von Rad and Westermann give the important textual, historical, and theological foundation about Genesis, and the Hebrew Bible establishes where the stories of mothers and their fertility exist. However, just as the biblical writers wrote the Hebrew Bible as men for men in a world that looked very different from the present, so too did Von Rad and Westermann write as men whose gender dominates biblical scholarship. As a result, and because this is a thesis focused on stories of women and their unique experiences, it is essential to bring in female scholars who read these stories through a feminist lens in order to both support and complicate the arguments Von Rad and Westermann make. Using these two types of sources will give us a rich, although in no way comprehensive, perspective on the stories of Sarah and Rachel.

In "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," Esther Fuchs writes about the mother figure's lack of true autonomy through her analysis of the annunciation type-scene. Fuchs cites Robert Alter's definition of the biblical annunciation type-scene, which consists of the following: "the initial barrenness of the wife, a divine promise of future conception, and the birth of a son."[20] Fuchs applies this type-scene to the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, the unnamed woman married to Manoah, and Hannah to demonstrate the pattern that occurs across scenes as well as the important variations that occur for individual women. Through highlighting continuities and changes across the text by using the annunciation type-scene, Fuchs demonstrates that although the stories illustrate a trend towards women's greater autonomy in their relationships with their husband and with God, that apparent freedom

[20] Fuchs, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 119.

does not actually argue for the centrality of the woman in her own story but instead simply further upholds patriarchal ideals.[21] Fuchs concludes that the stories of fertility exemplify motherhood's subversive relationship to the patriarchy, and that the female characters do not receive the same literary depth and complexity as the male characters.[22]

This thesis has been inspired by Fuchs and Alter's creation and consideration of the annunciation type-scene to expose a different literary pattern that exists within the tales of Sarah and Rachel that will be used to better explore their stories. In addition, this thesis will use Fuchs' assertion that the Bible's portrayal of desire for motherhood does not actually illustrate women's true aspirations. To further bolster Fuchs' arguments, and their function within this thesis, I will also bring in a text by Susanne Scholz, which discusses these similar themes.

Scholz's book *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible* highlights feminist biblical scholarship from the past forty years to both show her readers the conversations and criticism that have arisen, as well as propel her readers into the future by helping them consider where feminist biblical thinking is headed. In her chapter "Gendering the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Considerations" Scholz gives an overview of three methods of feminist biblical interpretation: "historical criticism," "literary criticism," and "cultural criticism."[23] She uses these three approaches to argue that the stories of biblical women were written by men for men and therefore reflected men's thoughts and values.[24] Furthermore, Scholz writes that despite the focus on women and motherhood in the Bible, the stories are never actually about them but about what they can contribute to the patriarchal society.[25] Scholz cites Fuchs when crafting this

[21] Fuchs, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 129.
[22] Fuchs, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 136.
[23] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 6.
[24] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 72.
[25] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 76-77.

argument; both scholars emphasize that the stories of yearning for motherhood function solely to uphold men's and God's power over women, and that the biblical writers were conscious of their intentional storytelling.[26] Where Von Rad complimented the Yahwist for his creativity in crafting the stories of Genesis into a continuous narrative, Scholz sees the Yahwist's creativity as an indication of his unchecked autonomy to influence the text in whatever way he wished.

This thesis will consider Scholz's argument that the biblical stories reflect men's voices and interpretations when analyzing the stories of Sarah and Rachel. Scholz's assertion prompts the following question that will guide portions of this thesis: how much of the stories of fertility are reliable in relaying what women's experiences were like during biblical history and how much of those stories were a reflection of the values the men in those women's lives or the male writers thinking about those stories within their own context?

The final text that will be brought into conversation is *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* by Candida Moss and Joel Baden. In the introduction to their book, Moss and Baden begin writing broadly about the topic of fertility and how it exists within the modern world, and then they narrow in by introducing how the topic of fertility is prominent within the Bible. To begin broadly, Moss and Baden define terms that, while often used interchangeably, have different definitions and connotations. They explain that "childlessness" refers to anyone without a child, but the term has been subconsciously riddled with hints of "loss and bereavement."[27] Additionally, "barren" and "infertile" can be used to describe a biological condition. While the latter two terms are defined through medical diagnoses, all three are influenced by cultural expectations, and because these definitions extend

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[26] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 78.
[27] Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

beyond the medical world, Moss and Baden define infertility as a disability.[28] Definitions of infertility take cultural influence into consideration, and since culture so greatly affects the perception of infertility, Moss and Baden want to define it as such.[29] By defining infertility as a disability, Moss and Baden are able to examine the multiple cultural factors that play a role in how infertility is understood and stigmatized. They argue that familial, religious, workplace, and political expectations all influence how infertility is perceived.[30]

In addition to being affected by numerous cultural factors, infertility is completely gendered and places all responsibility on the woman.[31] Moss and Baden then narrow in on this topic of society's expectation that women are obligated to take part in motherhood. They write that pregnancy and childbirth are almost assumed to be default for women; "womanhood continues to be associated with motherhood, and with the assumption that motherhood is the highest state of womanhood."[31] This argument is what catapults Moss and Baden into the biblical text. They align the modern association of women and mothers with the biblical association of fertility with blessing. Moss and Baden explain that barrenness in the Bible was caused by a curse from God, and therefore barren women were "a sign of divine judgement and moral failure."[32] Since modern women still look to religion and the biblical stories of infertility as guidance through their own personal struggles, Moss and Baden want to make it clear through their book that infertility in the Bible was not necessarily a result of divine punishment but instead used as foreshadowing or to indicate a divine plan.[33]

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[28] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 5.
[29] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 4.
[30] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 5-9.
[31] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 7.
[32] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 14.
[33] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 17.

Moss and Baden's book, specifically their chapter "The Matriarchs as Models," will provide this thesis with an explanation of the reasons why ancient Israel so heavily emphasized motherhood as a female responsibility. In addition, their book will work in collaboration with Fuchs' and Scholz's texts to illuminate how much of modern scholarship has failed to examine the biblical stories of women as more than texts secondary to the narratives of men but as primary stories through which the Bible is able to exist.

Each of the texts outlined in this literature review has informed my reading of the biblical text and will be used both to further explore the stories of Sarah and Rachel and as points of departure from which critique and new analysis will arise. I will begin this thesis by exploring the story of Sarah. In this chapter, I will look at the literary pattern of the dual duty, the intentional rhetoric used by the biblical authors, and how scholarship has both touched on and neglected to recognize essential features of Sarah's story.

Chapter One: Sarah – The Barren Matriarch

Sarah's narrative is unique and painful. Yet, while her tale is distinct, it does not exist in isolation but instead functions as the Genesis for which other stories of barrenness stem. The sorrow of Sarah's story is doubled: not only does her barrenness mark her as a failure in the eyes of a culture which values women primarily for their ability to bear children, but moreover this failure has a tribal significance in so far as it would seem to indicate her failed part in supplying the generations of descendants as a chosen people that God promised her husband.

In the introduction to his commentary, Von Rad argues for the importance of the continuous reading of the Hebrew Bible. He writes, "Genesis is not an independent book that can be interpreted by itself. On the contrary, the books Genesis to Joshua (Hexateuch) in their present form constitute an immense connected narrative … the reader must keep in mind the narrative as a whole and the contexts into which all the individual parts are to be understood."[34] Von Rad believes that too often Genesis is read in isolation, divorced from the books that follow it.[34] Instead, he pushes readers to view the books as an entire connected being, for "one must not lose sight of the great unit of which these are only parts."[34] Von Rad takes his own advice within his commentary and connects countless points across Genesis, drawing lines of similarity between Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, despite strongly endorsing a method of continuous reading, Von Rad fails to identify points of continuity in the stories of the female characters. This thesis attempts to do what Von Rad neglected to. This thesis has found a literary pattern in the story of Sarah that exposes the patriarchal values of Sarah and the biblical authors' societies, as well as extends beyond Sarah's story into the narrative of Rachel.

[34] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 13.

Before looking at Sarah's story with this particular literary pattern in mind, I will first explain the pattern itself and how it surrounds the barrenness that exists within both Sarah and Rachel's stories. In the Bible, Sarah and Rachel are tasked with dual duties that tie them to shared struggles of barrenness, but also set them apart from other women. The first duty ancient Israelite women faced was the expectation that they were to be mothers. All ancient Israelite women dealt with this reality as they lived in a patriarchal society that promoted childbearing to protect and preserve family lineage. As a result, the emphasis on having children within the Bible demonstrates the commonality of the situation for women during this time. Navigating the pressures of motherhood tied women together. However, Sarah and Rachel have a second duty that sets them apart from other women and heightens the suffering they already endure because of their barrenness. Sarah and Rachel not only need to be mothers because of societal expectations, but also because they are expected to be the mothers of the chosen nation by God. As the wives of the chosen patriarchs, Sarah and Rachel, the barren women, need to give birth to their descendants so that God's chosen people can continue on. Where they may have found solace in the commonality of their experience, Sarah and Rachel are ostracized because of their unique situation divinely imposed by God. This pattern of the dual duty exists in the stories of Sarah and Rachel, and by examining its literary function, we may be able to see both the influence of the patriarchy on ancient Israelite women's experience and the influence of male values on how the text was written.

Sarah is first introduced in Genesis 11, and in her moment of introduction, she is defined by her barrenness. The text says, "Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Gen. 11:29-30). The first trait

given to a character often defines them throughout the rest of their story and reflects the values of the author. Therefore, by being described as a childless, infertile woman, the authors demonstrate that they want readers to characterize Sarah as barren. Not only is barrenness Sarah's highlighted characteristic, but it is her only quality. Through this first description, Sarah is to be understood solely by her infertility and her marriage to Abraham. Moss and Baden emphasize this narrative technique that both defines and limits Sarah. They write that the "laser-like focus on each woman's infertility, to the exclusion of nearly every other aspect of her identity means that infertility is effectively her identity. If women in the ancient world were reduced to vessels for childbearing, barren women were just fragile shells, empty of consequence."[35] Moss and Baden explain that barrenness was intended to be the only perceivable trait of Sarah's because society so heavily emphasized childbearing. Therefore, the biblical authors knew that readers needed to be aware of Sarah's inability to perform that purpose, and their use of brief description helps them achieve that goal. Sarah's first description in the Bible classifies her as a wife and a barren woman, and while this description alone sheds a negative light on Sarah, her negative status is heightened even more by being placed in direct contrast to the positive defining features of Abraham, namely his chosen status by God.

In chapter 13, not long after Sarah and Abraham are introduced, God speaks to Abraham and lays out his fate, which adds stress to Sarah's already precarious situation. Once Abraham and Lot separate from one another, God says to Abraham, "'[r]aise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and make offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted'" (Gen. 13:14-17). Abraham

[35] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 24.

is told by God that he will have infinite children to cover all the land around him. While God's proclamation presents a hopeful future for Abraham and his descendants, God nor Abraham consider, in that moment, that Abraham's wife, the assumed bearer of Abraham's infinite children, is barren. However, the biblical authors compiling the stories were probably aware of the juxtaposition between the information relayed two chapters prior in Sarah's introduction and the declaration made by God about Abraham's children. The authors knew the stories stand in contrast to one another and still placed them not far from each other in the narrative. Why would the biblical authors allow such conflicting stories to remain together? Sarah, who becomes aware of Abraham's future as a father, and is most certainly aware of her own barrenness, feels the discord present between knowing she is barren and hearing her husband is to have countless children. As a result, the biblical authors may have placed these stories close enough together for readers to experience that same tension Sarah endured. The Patriarchal History begins by presenting Sarah as an infertile woman and Abraham as a father-to-be, and the dissonance between the two facts is how readers are to enter the rest of the narrative to come. Sarah is introduced from the start of her story under stress, and with the progression of each chapter, that stress continues to grow. The epitome of Sarah's suffering is exposed when the rest of her story is understood as being part of the literary pattern of the dual duty that exists in numerous stories of barrenness.

Within the pattern of the dual duty, the first responsibility Sarah faces is the expectation that ancient Israelite women were to give birth and create families. Moss and Baden point out that even before God spoke to Abraham about the promise, Sarah was characterized as barren; ancient Israelite society deemed childbirth a necessary function that women must fulfill.[36] The

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[36] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 26-27.

question then presents itself: why did the world around Sarah so heavily emphasize childbearing? Moss and Baden provide numerous answers to this question. First, they explain that "families and clans required a certain population to gain an economic foothold, to ensure the proper transmission of inherited property, and to provide for a measure of self-defense if necessary."[37] Then, they add that since the "economy was primarily household-based, … the more hands to work the better."[38] Furthermore, "[f]rom the perspective of a parent, children were a safety net … The elderly would be supported by their offspring."[39] And finally, "[f]rom the viewpoint of the family patriarch, children were viewed as necessary because without them one would effectively disappear from history … It was up to the son to maintain the memory of the family."[40] Essentially, Moss and Baden illustrate that there were countless practical reasons why children were a necessary and stressed part of life. Therefore, Sarah's barrenness contrasts with what is expected of her, and that dissonance places strain on multiple aspects of her life. Sarah's suffering is first alluded to through Abraham, when Abraham asks God, "what will you give me, for I continue childless" (Gen. 15:2). While Sarah's voice is not heard until later in her story, Abraham's question serves as the first, small allusion that barrenness is the cause of their pain. Sarah's strife stems not necessarily from her yearning for a child but from her inability to meet the expectations required of an ancient Israelite woman; she is unable to fulfill her duty and suffers as a consequence.

Von Rad and Westermann further explain, in their commentaries on Genesis, the emotional grief Sarah feels because she cannot satisfy the needs asked of her. Von Rad writes, "[t]here was no greater sorrow for an Israelite or Oriental woman than childlessness. Even today

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[37] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 27-28.
[38] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 28.
[39] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 28-29.
[40] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 29.

among the Arabs the barren woman is exposed to disgrace and even grievous wrongs."[41] In addition, Westermann says, "[f]or a married woman to be without children in the patriarchal world is a misfortune of overwhelming proportions."[42] Although there are no textual examples until Abraham's outreach to God in Genesis 15 of Sarah experiencing societal humiliation, her next actions demonstrate she understands she must have a child; they are illustrative of her suffering and that she seeks a method for reprieve and rectification. Westermann continues, in that same quote, "Sarah, therefore, takes means which, though not doing away with the misfortune, can at least alleviate it … It is a question primarily of alleviating the wife's distress; she is going to make a family for herself."[42] And in Genesis 16, Sarah attempts to do just that. Unfortunately, as Westermann alludes to, and as biblical readers already know, her efforts, although used by other women throughout ancient Israel, do not create the fruition she needs.

Sarah is aware of the first of her dual duties, and in reaction to that responsibility and in hopes of assuaging her suffering, she uses Hagar to achieve what her own womb cannot. In Genesis 16, "Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, 'You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her'" (Gen. 16:1-2). The problem at hand, for Sarah, is her barrenness, so the solution must be to have a child through another woman. Sarah believes that through Hagar, she and Abraham can have a child. She can become a mother and fulfill her duty. And Sarah is not wrong for believing that Hagar is the solution to her predicament, for having children through other women was a common practice in ancient Israel.

[41] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 186.
[42] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 237.

However, Sarah's belief in the obvious solution of using Hagar's womb as her own proves to be faulty. Abraham "went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress … Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her" (Gen. 16:4-6). Hagar's look of scorn towards Sarah illustrates the change in status that occurs through the conception of the child. Hagar is elevated to the status of wife and soon-to-be-mother, whereas Sarah, who remains childless and now shares a husband with her slave, is relegated to a position beneath Hagar. Sarah seeks a child to alleviate the suffering she endures because of her childless position, and by helping impregnate Hagar, Sarah undergoes even greater suffering. The exact ability Sarah wishes to have stands in her own place, so Sarah is left with no choice but to send Hagar away. Hagar's absence is the only opportunity to create the presence of Sarah's peace.

In addition to Hagar functioning as the embodiment of what Sarah is not, and therefore causing Sarah pain, Westermann proposes another explanation for why Sarah's plan did not serve her desires. He says, "[t]he narrative joins the conflict between Abraham's two wives, which arose out of the distressing situation of no children, with a promise narrative. But the promise of a son is not directed to Sarah, but to Hagar, who fled from her."[43] Westermann's analysis shows that Hagar, not Sarah, was promised a son by God and therefore Sarah should not have expected to gain a child of her own through her. However, what Westermann's point does remind us is that someone else is promised a son, and that promise is the real explanation for why Sarah's plan could never work and why her suffering is doubly painful. Abraham is promised a son—and not just a son but a great nation of descendants, which is why Sarah endures so much pain. Not only is her suffering doubled, but rather her predicament is tightened

[43] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 249.

by two considerations. Sarah must both shoulder societal pressure, as well as satisfy a peculiar divine demand as well. And as the situation with Hagar makes abundantly clear, satisfying one responsibility does not help as long as the other is still unfulfilled.

Sarah needs to be a mother both because of the societal expectations placed on her and because if her husband is the chosen patriarch of a great nation, then she must be the matriarch. In Genesis 17, Sarah's second duty is outlined when "God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her'" (Gen. 17:15-16). Sarah's responsibility to birth the chosen nation is explicitly stated by God, and it is this obligation that exacerbates her already painful struggle as a barren woman in a patriarchal society.

Not only is the pain she experiences from being unable to give birth to a child for societal reasons heightened because of this second duty, but this latter responsibility illuminates why using Hagar could not be Sarah's solution. If Sarah was not married to Abraham, the chosen patriarch by God, then perhaps bearing a child through Hagar would have brought her the child she needed and the peace she so desperately sought. However, Sarah is part of the divinely selected family, and therefore her responsibilities are double that of a normal ancient Israelite woman. And, even if Hagar had not looked upon Sarah with contempt and the child became Sarah's to keep, the child would not have satisfied the promise placed on Sarah by God. Von Rad explains, "the reader understands that a child so conceived in defiance or in little faith cannot be the heir of promise."[44] Von Rad's reasoning for why the child could not fulfill the promise is theological; Sarah did not have enough faith in God to know that she would

[44] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 191.

eventually give birth. However, I neither agree with Von Rad that Sarah acted out of a mistrust in God, nor do I agree that the issue is theological. He claims Sarah's use of Hagar represents a lack of trust in God, but I see Sarah's actions as a desperate and logical attempt at solving a problem that has brought her pain since the start of her story. Additionally, Sarah is aware of the common practice of using other women to bear children in ancient Israel, so her measures were not drastic but instead strategic and hopeful. Furthermore, while I've argued that Sarah's use of Hagar was not an act against God, I think Sarah is completely in the right to wonder why God has not yet given her and Abraham the child he so frequently promises them. She has waited long enough, and been taunted for so long, that she needs to take her future into her own hands. Finally, the problem is not theological but instead that the son has not yet been born to the chosen mother. The child must only come from Sarah. As a result, Sarah's pain from being childless and still not fulfilling God's promise endure. Eventually, however, she learns of her optimistic fate.

In Genesis 18, after Hagar is sent away, three men approach Abraham's tent and tell him that Sarah will conceive. One of the men says to Abraham, '"I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him" (Gen. 18:10). This example demonstrates two important facts. The first is that Abraham is explicitly told Sarah will give birth to a child. In Genesis 17, God promised Abraham that Sarah will be the mother of his great nation, and here, again, that promise is made. To combat the countless instances of doubt and lack of success Sarah has with conceiving a child and alleviating her suffering, the biblical authors include this additional promise that Sarah will conceive. By using another voice to relay this message only a chapter after the same

proclamation was said by God, the biblical authors place emphasis on the truth of the matter and highlight its urgency. Sarah is going to have a child and that child is going to come soon.

The second observation of note that arises from this situation is that Sarah's fate is at the center of the conversation; meanwhile, Sarah only exists in the periphery. In that same scene in Genesis 18, Sarah is not directly told but instead hears of her future motherhood through the veil of the tent. In addition, in Genesis 17, when God tells Abraham that Sarah will be the mother of his nation of decedents, Sarah is nowhere to be seen. Both God and Abraham speak about Sarah in the third person and discuss her reproductive abilities and motherhood without her present. Where the biblical authors' inclusion of doubly stating Sarah will conceive functions as an effective literary technique, their choice to illustrate Sarah indirectly receiving her own fate proves problematic.

Moss and Baden comment on the imbalance between the centrality of Sarah's reproductive abilities versus Sarah herself. They say, "though almost entirely silent in the biblical text before giving birth to Isaac, when she does speak it is either to Abraham, to complain about her infertile status when compared to her handmaid Hagar, or to herself, doubting God's ability to make her pregnant (and then to God, trying to deny her doubts)."[45] Sarah's ability to give birth to Abraham's promised children is discussed numerous times, yet Sarah's voice is almost never heard. While the possibility remains that Sarah simply stayed quiet throughout these conversations, the more probable conjecture is that the biblical authors excluded Sarah from being physically present at these times. The choice to keep Sarah on the sidelines of her own story demonstrates the lack of attention the biblical authors give her, despite her essential role in fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. Their decision to write Sarah only in

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[45] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 23-24.

the periphery relates directly to their decision to characterize her as a barren, childless woman in Genesis 11. Limiting Sarah to specific characterizations, and keeping her out of scenes specifically involving her, forces Sarah to remain a two-dimensional character. While the biblical authors may not have written Sarah in such a restrictive fashion out of malicious intent, their lack of consideration for her as a character is demonstrative enough of the patriarchal ideals at play in the authors 'lives. By recognizing Sarah's relegation, despite being the central character, the influence of the male authors writing for a male audience becomes apparent. From this understanding, it is our responsibility as readers to be aware of how the biblical authors affect the storytelling at play and then adjust our readings of the text, especially in some of Sarah's final moments. In addition to Sarah's voice being silenced within the biblical text itself, her story has also been kept out of modern biblical scholarship. By missing the literary pattern of the dual duty and by failing to recognize Sarah's suffering, biblical scholars, too, have kept the crucial roles that women play on the sidelines.

Eventually, in Genesis 21 Sarah's womb is opened by God, and she gives birth to Isaac; however, the language of the text attributes little credit to Sarah despite the paramount nature of the act. The text says, "[t]he Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son whom Sarah bore him" (Gen. 21:1-3). While the text does say Sarah gives birth to Isaac, much of the action in this moment is given to God and Abraham. God is the one who gives Sarah the ability to give birth; Sarah only gives birth, not to her own son, but to Abraham's; and Abraham is the one who gives Isaac his name. Sarah gives birth to the first chosen son of God, the son that is fulfilling the divine promise set upon Abraham, and yet she is buried underneath the male characters. If the

Abraham cycle is a narrative with its own plot within the Patriarchal History, the birth of Isaac is the climax. Without Sarah, Isaac would not exist, and the covenant with God would remain instable. Sarah creates the future of the chosen people.

Where the lead up to the birth of Isaac is lengthy and arduous, the scenes following his birth move rapidly towards his near-death. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to "'[t]ake your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you'" (Gen. 22:1-2). For so long Sarah yearns for a child to please the expectations placed upon her by ancient Israel and to fulfill the divine promise placed on her by God. Yet, only a chapter after God helps Sarah give birth to Isaac does God demand Isaac to be sacrificed. The painful nature of this request is amplified by God's description of Isaac as the most loved son. The language of the text plays into the cruelty of the situation; the loved and long-awaited son must die.

Scholars have inferred Abraham's emotions as he takes Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed, since the text itself does not provide a view into his mind. Von Rad says that as they ascend the mountain, "the tempo of the narrative slows down noticeably … Our narrator exercises a chaste reticence on the emotional side and manages to use that indirect method in the presentation or suggestion of inner emotional circumstance with great skill. Thus he shows us, for example Abraham's attentive love for the child in the division of the burdens."[46] Von Rad notices a fascinating point about the pacing of the scene's development and how that reflects an emotional Abraham. While Sarah has faced dual duties in her story, Abraham too has endured his own dual challenges that this scene intensifies. Abraham receives the responsibility of fathering the child that will carry on the chosen nation, but he is also tasked with sacrificing the

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[46] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 240.

very child he has waited for all his life. The literary pattern that is prominent throughout Sarah's narrative is also present in Abraham's, which demonstrates the biblical authors' desire to apply pressure and create tension all through the story. While Von Rad's analysis of the text and of Abraham's emotions, and how they threaten his duties, is astute, he fails to recognize a key emotion missing from this scene altogether.

Sarah and her feelings are excluded from Genesis 22 completely. Where Abraham's emotions can be pulled out of a rather objective narrative, Sarah's feelings cannot be inferred because she is not present at all. The woman who satisfies God's demand for Abraham to have the correct son to continue his great nation is kept out of the very scene that intends to strip her of the son she has so desperately desired. The biblical authors spend ten chapters on Sarah's struggle to fulfill her dual duties, and in only one chapter is any sense of success taken away from her. By nearly sacrificing Isaac, the biblical authors demonstrate what they believe Sarah's purpose to be. She is merely the body through which God births his nation, and once she gives Isaac life, her presence is unnecessary to the story.

The Sarah story highlights how the biblical text is influenced by its male authors and male intended audience, and as a result, the writing forces one of the narrative's most important characters to appear secondary despite being essential. Furthermore, the literary pattern illuminates the societal expectations at play in ancient Israel as well as how the biblical stories complicate what might otherwise be a common tale of female infertility. Sarah suffers because of the society in which she lives, because of how the biblical authors write her tale, and because modern scholars have failed to fully consider the complexity of her narrative.

Chapter Two: Rachel – Favored and Infertile

While I have structured this thesis to examine the first two matriarchs in the Patriarchal History of Genesis, this chapter will focus on both Rachel, the next mother of God's nation after Sarah, and Leah, the sister of Rachel and Jacob's other wife. Rachel's name appears more prominently because she is the chosen wife to continue the descendants stemming from Abraham; however, Rachel's story of barrenness cannot be told without speaking about Leah as well, as Leah endures her own suffering revolving around fertility throughout the narrative. Similar to the examination of the story of Sarah's infertility through the lens of the literary pattern of the dual duty, so too do Rachel and Leah experience their own type of dual motivations that overlap with and diverge from those of Sarah's tale. In this chapter, I will explain how the biblical authors pit Rachel and Leah against one another through their initial descriptions of the women and as a result initiate a trope of female rivalry that follows them throughout their narrative. In addition, I will explore the dual duties Rachel and Leah face, how each of their responsibilities compare and contrast, and how they converse with Sarah's. Finally, I will investigate these duties as literary motivations created by the biblical authors as methods of portraying male perceptions of female life.

Rachel and Leah are first introduced in Genesis 29 by their familial status and physical features, and the syntax of this descriptive sentence places them in opposition to one another. The women are the daughters of Laban; "the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful" (Gen. 29:16-17). First, the familial relationship between the two women is established, and the authors demonstrate that Rachel and Leah's ages are of importance. While this detail could be

understood as a simple description included to acquaint readers with the characters in the story, their ages become a necessary feature and point of tension in later on.

Rachel and Leah are then identified by their external beauty which, like Sarah being characterized by her barren and childless status, indicates how the biblical authors intend the women to be imagined by readers. Leah's description complements just one physical facet: the beauty of her eyes. However, Rachel's beauty and grace describe her entire being. This difference is slight but signifies something larger about how the biblical authors set up their characters. The authors introduce Rachel as a person but Leah as a feature in order to place emphasis on Rachel. Rachel is given a more encompassing description and therefore the biblical authors indicate she is the primary character in the narrative. Leah, on the other hand, is described by a single quality and therefore will be illustrated through a narrow lens in the story to come. In addition to considering how their introductions inform readers' perceptions of them, it is also essential to note the syntax of the descriptive sentence itself. The characteristics given to Rachel and Leah by the biblical authors do not define them in insolation but instead place them in conversation with one another. Since their descriptors follow each other on the page, readers digest them together. Consequently, their beauty becomes relational, and their stories become tied. Rachel and Leah are set up to be unique but not individual.

Jacob's love for Rachel becomes even more apparent as the narrative continues, which sets up Rachel to be the chosen wife but also establishes a rivalry between the sisters. While Leah has beautiful eyes and Rachel is graceful, the authors state plainly, "Jacob loved Rachel" (Genesis 29:18). The authors make it clear that Rachel is the one Jacob loves and no matter how they are presented on the page, it is Rachel that is of the most importance to Jacob, the authors, and the biblical readers. Jacob further emphasizes his love for Rachel and tells her father, "'I

will serve you seven years for your daughter Rachel' … So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:18-20). Rachel is clearly adored by Jacob through his dedication to marry her after serving her father. The lack of mention of Leah would not be problematic if she had not been described and tied to her sister in their introduction. However, because she is a main character and is linked to her sister, her absence feels present in this moment. Not only is Rachel chosen by Jacob, but she is also chosen over Leah. The consequences of their introductions play out in this scene. Rachel's introduction highlights her, whereas Leah's places her in the periphery. Not yet is there clear rivalry between Rachel and Leah at this point in the narrative, but the biblical authors' choice to link them while setting them in opposition to one another primes readers for the tension to come. And the tension does come not long after, for when Laban switches Leah in for Rachel at Jacob and Rachel's wedding, the rivalry between the sisters is set.

Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel because he claims customary tradition requires the eldest daughter to be married first, thus solidifying the rivalry the biblical authors instituted. After Jacob serves Laban again for Rachel, "Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife … So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen. 29:30). Where the biblical authors set up two women to be competitors, Laban activates the competition. Laban plays with his daughters like pawns by making them co-wives of Jacob. As a result, Rachel and Leah are intuitively compared and therefore the perceptions readers have of the women up until this point come into play. Because they are now not just sisters but also wives of the same husband, Rachel is characterized as the chosen, graceful, and loved wife of Jacob, and Leah becomes the unchosen wife with only beautiful eyes. Their introductions extend for one verse longer and set up the final tension that drives their story.

Rachel and Leah's oppositional qualities arrive at a climax when a final characteristic comes into play: fertility. At this point in the start of their narrative, Rachel appears superior to Leah both in terms of her physical beauty and her relationship status with Jacob. However, "[w]hen the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren" (Gen. 29:31). The qualities bestowed upon Rachel and Leah by the biblical authors have built in importance as they have been added, and the concluding characteristic of barrenness follows that same pattern. Leah's womb is opened while Rachel's remains closed, which the biblical authors attribute to whether or not they are loved by Jacob. The authors' illustration of Rachel and Leah up until this point is drastically changed by this addition. As recognized in Sarah's story, fertility is a dominating pressure that greatly influences the characters of the bible, and therefore for Rachel and Leah, their images are shifted because of their fertility status. Their shared introduction now reads as follows: despite the beauty, grace, and love, that once elevated her above Leah, Rachel's barrenness relegates her to an almost equal status with her common and unloved sister. Barrenness is the quality that negates practically all other aspects of self for an ancient Israelite woman, and the introduction the biblical authors give Rachel and Leah demonstrates that point. Once Rachel and Leah are established characters and the tension of fertility is introduced, their narrative sets forth and the literary pattern that takes place in Sarah's story surfaces in Rachel and Leah's tale.

While the dual duty originally expressed itself through Sarah's suffering, Rachel and Leah's linked stories will both adopt and adapt the responsibilities Sarah faced in both similar and nuanced fashions. The first responsibility Sarah faces persists for both Rachel and Leah in their narrative. The previous chapter outlined Moss and Baden's various reasons why women of ancient Israel were supposed to have children, and that same analysis extends into this chapter.

Moss and Baden reiterate, "[t]he emphasis on offspring was felt from the individual through the familial all the way to the communal and even national level, on fronts economic, social, and religious, extending from the present into the indefinite eschatological future."[47] Their analysis emphasizes that on countless fronts fertility was essential for nation building, and motherhood was necessary to sustain that nation. An example of how this pressure exists in the biblical text is when Laban gives Leah to Jacob before he gives away Rachel (Gen. 29:23-26). Instead of Rachel and Leah directly confronting the pressure to be mothers, Laban acts in response to the need for childbirth through manipulation. Laban is aware of Jacob's love for Rachel and his intention to take her as his wife. He knows that no matter what, Jacob will be with Rachel and will father her children.[48] At the same time, Laban is so worried about his older daughter, and the pressure that will surely fall on her if her younger sister is married first, that he seeks to upend the potentially troublesome situation unfolding before him in a problematic and painfully ineffective way. Therefore, he deduces that if he marries Leah to Jacob first, Jacob will inevitably also seek to be with Rachel. Laban's fears that his eldest daughter will not marry and bear children is assuaged through his plan.

Laban's decision to trick his daughters and Jacob is manipulative and demonstrative of how women were treated in ancient Israel as pawns to pass between men. Additionally, Laban's deceit illustrates the emphasis ancient Israelite society placed on childbearing. Even fathers of ancient Israelite women felt the intense pressure. This scene exhibits the expectations Rachel and Leah must feel as women of their time, and it is why, when Rachel finds out she is barren, she suffers tremendously.

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[47] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 34.

[48] It is not yet known that Rachel is barren, so it is fair to assume that Laban thinks Rachel and Jacob will have children together.

Rachel and Leah's story follows the same literary pattern as Sarah's narrative in that they understand and are challenged by the fact that women are to be mothers; however, where Sarah's second duty is clearly dominated by her status as the wife of the chosen man by God, Rachel and Leah's secondary responsibility is not as obvious. Unlike Sarah, neither Rachel nor Jacob is explicitly told that Rachel is to be the mother of Jacob's nation. Genesis 28 outlines the promise Jacob receives when "the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord… the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and your offspring" (Gen. 28:13-14). Here, Jacob is told by God a promise similar to that of Abraham's, but God never recognizes Rachel to be the intended mother of that blessed nation. Since Rachel is picked first by Jacob and is designated the loved wife over Leah, then perhaps her chosenness can be inferred in this promise. If we do conclude that Rachel is part of the promise and is the envisioned mother of God's people, then her second duty does align with Sarah's. At the same time, the tension introduced in the start of Rachel and Leah's story is neither about promise nor chosenness like it is in Sarah's story. Instead, a different instigator, that has been lingering since Rachel's introduction, can also be considered the second perpetrator of Rachel's desire for children.

In Rachel and Leah's introduction, the biblical authors establish a comparative tone between the sisters that grows into a rivalry by Genesis 30; it is this sense of rivalry that is the second, not necessarily duty but instead motivator that pushes Rachel to need a child. After their (in)fertility statuses are stated, the authors track the numerous children Leah births to Jacob over time, all the while Rachel watches idly from the side and is not mentioned at all for a few lines. Finally Rachel is brought back into the scene, and "[w]hen Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no

children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!'" (Gen. 30:1). Rachel's statement is one of incredible pain. She wishes so desperately to have children that if she must go without them, she would rather not live. Her cry to Jacob demonstrates the pressure she feels as a woman of her time in that her existence and will to live is contingent upon having a child. As Westermann says, Rachel's "was a pain unto death; the childless wife had no future—such is the despair voiced in this outburst."[49] More so, this exclamation indicates the second reason why Rachel feels the need to be a mother.

Before Rachel speaks to Jacob, the biblical authors explain that Rachel envies her sister's ability to have children, which is her main motivator. From the start of their narrative, the biblical authors pit Rachel and Leah against one another through their characterizations, and their fertility is their most juxtaposed quality. So it is in this moment that the rivalry that Laban kickstarted now reaches a sort of climax. Although she is beautiful and loved, Rachel is barren. And, in comparison to her unloved, average, and fertile sister, Rachel feels she is nothing. She envies her sister's fertility because fertility is the only factor that matters for an ancient Israelite woman. Moss and Baden explain that the pain of the responsibility of motherhood "is highlighted by the cultural and literary custom of polygyny such that Sarah and Rachel… all live in the same home, literally face to face, with the living embodiment of their anguish."[50] Not only do the biblical authors place Rachel and Leah's fertility statuses next to one another on the page of their story, but Laban and Jacob also position them physically within each other's world, which intensifies in reality their already literary rivalry. Each day, Rachel knows that she must be a mother yet cannot. Additionally, in her grief, Rachel must face her sister who is able to

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[49] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 474.
[50] Moss and Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility*, 39.

achieve that which she cannot with her own husband. So, to assuage her pain, Rachel follows in the footsteps of the matriarch.

Like Sarah, Rachel seeks motherhood through the common and enduring practice of using another woman's womb to birth her own child. After Jacob questions Rachel's accusation about his ability to give her children when God is in control of the womb, Rachel then proposes a solution (Gen. 30:2). Rachel suggests, "'Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.' So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son" (Gen. 30:3-5). Rachel exclaims, "'God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son'" (Gen. 30:6). Yet, her success is questionable, because although Rachel believes the son to be hers, the child is not designated Rachel's but Jacob's by the biblical authors. Furthermore, Rachel's pain does not seem to be appeased, as she chooses to use Bilhah again. Rachel says, "'[w]ith mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and they have prevailed; so she named him Naphtali" (Gen. 30:8). Rachel admits that out of rivalry with Leah, she uses Bilhah to bear another son. Both her first duty as a woman in ancient Israel and her second motivator of jealousy of Leah are present in Rachel's actions with Bilhah.

Where I critiqued Von Rad in chapter one for failing to draw lines of continuity from Sarah to Rachel's stories, Westermann does identify the point of connection I alluded to at the start of the previous paragraph. Westermann says, "[b]ut in her helpless despair in which not even the husband she loves can help her, Rachel finds a way out, the same that Sarah found."[51] While Westermann recognizes the overlap between Sarah and Rachel's actions, he does not identify that where Sarah's plan failed to solve the issues her dual duties presented, so too does

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[51] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 474.

Rachel's plan not lead to success. Despite that Sarah believes her plan has succeeded, neither her responsibility nor rivalry are satisfied through the birth of Bilhah's son. Just as having a child through Hagar failed to either alleviate Sarah's pain or satisfy God's divine promise, Rachel's suffering and jealousy persist.

Analyzing the dual responsibilities of Rachel and comparing and contrasting them to Sarah's illuminates the lines of similarity and moments of nuance that both tie their stories together and make them unique. Amidst any differences between the two stories, the largest thematic trait that keeps them in close relationship is their theme of motherhood, and that shared theme is closely linked with the rivalry that exists in both Sarah and Rachel's stories. Fuchs discusses how the biblical authors set up female competition as a literary mode to keep stories of women centered around male ideals. She writes, "[t]he motif of motherhood in the biblical narrative seems to be closely associated with the motif of female rivalry … It is rare to find a biblical narrative presenting mutually supportive mothers … By perpetuating the theme of women's mutual rivalry, especially in a reproductive context, the narrative implies that sisterhood is a precarious alternative to the patriarchal system."[52] Fuchs asserts that in the biblical stories that emphasize motherhood, the stories also underline rivalry between women. Since the theme of motherhood is used as a literary technique to uphold patriarchal ideals in the ancient world, so too does rivalry feed into that same androcentrism. Not only are Sarah and Rachel's stories centered on their need to have children in order to satisfy external patriarchal pressures, but they are also forced to battle with the other women who are navigating the same source of suffering. By pitting Sarah and Hagar and Rachel and Leah against each other, the biblical authors further exert control over women's lives by ostracizing them from the people

[52] Fuchs, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 135-136.

that most deeply understand their struggle. Doing so then pushes the women to desire children in order to alleviate the heightened pain they face and buries them even deeper into the soil of a male dominated society.

Westermann touches on the rivalry between Rachel and Leah in his commentary when he argues for the separation between the following ideas: the competition amongst Rachel and Leah and the existence of the women's story within Jacob's narrative. Although his assertions allow for a more detailed analysis of Rachel and Leah's stories, Westermann still fails to recognize how divorcing parts of their narrative and embedding the motif within Jacob's story diminishes the biblical women. He writes,

> [t]he dispute between the wives, Gen. 29:31-30.24, has been inserted into the dispute between Jacob and Laban; in its present form, it is not a narrative but rather like a genealogy after which it has been constructed. It is a report of the birth and naming of Jacob's 12 children… with some narrative interpolations. What is peculiar to this genealogy is that it is stamped throughout the rivalry between Jacob's two wives, a narrative motif which forms a separate block within [chapters] 29-30. The problem here is to understand the combination of the genealogy of Jacob's 12 children with the narrative of the rivalry between the women and how it arose. The narrative and the genealogical parts have to each be considered separately."[53]

Westermann's analysis is layered. He understands the rivalry between Rachel and Leah to include the genealogy of Jacob's sons, and that the entire section is rooted within the larger plot surrounding Jacob and Laban. In addition, he believes that the rivalry and the genealogy are to be analyzed individually. I appreciate that Westermann believes the rivalry between Rachel and Leah is worth examining so closely that different parts should be analyzed in isolation as to receive greater attention. Separating the naming of the sons from the rivalry highlights the remarkable nature of the birthing of the children amidst the tenuous relationship at play. At the same time, through divorcing the genealogy from the rivalry, Westermann neglects to recognize

[53] Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 471.

what the genealogy actually is. Westermann understands the genealogical portion of the scene to be about the naming of Jacob's sons, and superficially that is what happens. However, the names all stem from the relationship that the mother is having either with her rival or with Jacob. To separate the genealogy from the rivalry is to hide the fact that the children are born out of the mother's feelings of responsibility, neglect, and jealousy. Furthermore, Westermann believes that both the genealogy and the rivalry scenes are tucked within Jacob and Laban's larger narrative. His assertion proves problematic because it diminishes Rachel and Leah's tale down to but a detail in the overarching story. Finally, by arguing that Rachel and Leah's story only lives within Jacob's narrative is yet another example of women only being thought to exist within their relationship to a man. However, Westermann is not the only scholar to make interesting yet troubling assertions about the rivalry component of Rachel and Leah's story.

Von Rad addresses what Westermann considers the genealogical aspect of the rivalry section and how it is not about factual ancestry but about men and family relationships. He writes, "[t]he narrative is not about tribes, not even personified tribes, but about men. It tells about women and their struggle for husband and for descendants. The interpretations of the names have no tribal or historical significance at all… Rather, they develop completely from the mother's personal, human situation and refer primarily to her relationship at the moment to Jacob."[54] Here, Von Rad is referring to when, for example, Bilhah, in lieu of Rachel, gives birth to Jacob's son. Rachel says, "'God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son;' therefore she named him Dan" (Gen. 30:6). Rachel names the boy Dan to reflect God's judgement of her, thus exposing her relationship in the moment with Jacob and God. I appreciate that Von Rad recognizes the intimacy of the naming with Rachel and Leah's situation

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[54] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 292.

with Jacob because in doing so he demonstrates he understands the strife the mothers endure. He sees that the names of the children are representative of the experiences of Rachel and Leah and that the babies' lives arise out of a challenging marital situation. However, Von Rad explicitly states that the narrative is about men and about Jacob. He fails to recognize that the men that are so important only exist because of the women who birthed them and that those women's stories did not only revolve around Jacob but around the relationship Rachel and Leah have with one another as well as with the women they use to give them children. Their assertions attempt to be expansive, and while on the one hand they are in that they help examine the impact female competition had on male characters, on the other hand their arguments limit the influence of the women's stories. Von Rad and Westermann's arguments keep the stories of Rachel and Leah embedded in a narrative about Jacob when in reality they are the movers of the plot.

Westermann and Von Rad discuss this theme of rivalry within Rachel and Leah's narrative and Fuchs explores how the motif extends into Sarah's story as well. There are lines of conscious continuity from Sarah and Hagar's story into Rachel and Leah's, but there are also differences in how the rivals are treated. Where Hagar is given practically no attention and is relegated to the periphery, even more so than Sarah, Leah has a slightly more central role in her narrative.

Leah is introduced as less than Rachel in every aspect other than her reproductive abilities. Her fertility keeps her as a central character in the story and provides her the literary space to reveal her own set of dual motivations. Leah's first duty remains the same as both Rachel and Sarah's: she is a woman of ancient Israel who is expected to bear children for her husband. Her second motivation, however, is different from both Sarah and Rachel. While the narrative focuses on Rachel's strife surrounding her infertility and consequential jealousy, Leah's

story of successful fertility happens simultaneously. What Rachel fails to recognize, and what the biblical authors barely emphasize, is that amidst giving birth to numerous children, Leah is completely unloved by her husband. Leah gives birth to her first son, “and she named him Reuben; for she said, ‘because the lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.’” (Gen. 29:32). On the one hand, the biblical authors illustrate Leah, through her statement, as a desperate woman seeking appreciation from a man. They make Leah’s character out to adhere to and uphold male desires and expectations. On the other hand, while I see how the biblical authors set Leah up to promote ancient patriarchal ideals, I also recognize the honesty of Leah’s pain. She is married to a man who does not love her, and that reality is heartbreaking.

Leah is rejected by readers since the biblical authors set her up to be the rival to Rachel; she is hated by Rachel because she is her competitor; and she is unloved by Jacob, the very person who is supposed to love her most. She explicitly states her suffering and hopes that Jacob will finally love her now that she has given him a son. Yet, her pain is repeated line after line as she gives birth to new sons, each named after her desire to be loved and her recognition that she is despised. After giving birth to Simeon she says, “‘[b]ecause the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also’” (Gen. 29:33). And then after birthing Levi she states, “‘[n]ow this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons’” (Gen. 29:34). Leah appeases the expectations from her surrounding world and therefore satiates her first duty through physically giving birth. However, her second motivation—to have a child so that she can be loved—proves to go unsatisfied. Child after child her efforts appear futile. Leah remains unloved.

The Rachel and Leah narrative closes almost completely when God remembers Rachel and she gives birth to Joseph. God remembered her and "heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach;' and she named him Joseph, saying, 'May the Lord add to me another son!'" (Gen. 30:22-24). Rachel's two motivations to have a child are finally satisfied with the birth of Joseph; she is now a mother in ancient Israel and is no longer the beautiful, loved, but infertile wife of Jacob. Although her dual motivations are satiated, the biblical authors still have Rachel ask for another son. This request keeps her within the realm of patriarchal desire, and it is that confinement that eventually leads to her death.

In Genesis 35, Rachel endures a challenging labor, gives birth to Benjamin, and then dies, and it is within this scene that the patriarchal value of motherhood overtakes the value of the mother. As Rachel and her family travel from Bethel, "Rachel was in childbirth, and she had a hard labor. When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, 'Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.' As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin" (Gen. 35:16-18). The first detail to notice is the midwife's emphasis on the importance of birthing a son into the world. While the midwife superficially attempts to console a most likely terrified and pained Rachel, the biblical authors' message comes through instead; the life of the baby boy is of greater value than that of his mother's.

In addition, the second element of note in this scene is the renaming of the son from the name Rachel gives him to the name Jacob decides upon. Rachel names her baby Ben-oni, which means 'son of my sorrow,' thus reflecting her continued suffering even after giving birth to sons she hoped would bring her peace. Jacob, however, chooses the name Benjamin, 'son of the right hand/south,' which illustrates the purpose Benjamin serves to Jacob as the new descendent of

God's nation. Jacob's decision to pick the name himself demonstrates his disregard for his own wife's desires and emotions even while on her deathbed. Furthermore, the biblical authors' inclusion of the switching of the child's name indicates their belief that the mother's voice is of no importance when compared to the father's. Even as the matriarch of God's great nation lies dying, her opinion has no weight. Rachel becomes just a vessel through which the descendants of Jacob are born. After Rachel's death, the rest of Genesis continues forth without her, and it is this foreword movement beyond the stories of Rachel and Leah that demonstrates how the biblical authors value the stories of women.

After Rachel gives birth to Joseph and Leah gives birth to Dinah in Genesis 30, both women almost disappear completely from the central plot of the story, and their relegation to the periphery illustrates the singular role the biblical author's felt women played in the literary work. While the main perpetrator of Rachel's suffering is placated through the birth of Joseph, so too is the role Rachel plays satisfied. According to the craft of the story, the biblical authors show that because Rachel has fulfilled her responsibility, she no longer has a purpose in the narrative and can become a secondary character. As a result, the plot of the story re-revolves around Jacob and the other male characters. Scholz writes about the de-emphasizing of the biblical women in their narratives. She says, "[t]he literary situation is thus complicated. On the one hand, biblical narratives acknowledge the importance of mothers for Israel's future as they are essential for the continuation of male Israel's lineage. On the other hand, biblical narratives characterize mothers as women who are 'mean-spirited, deceptive, and untrustworthy' and ultimately 'dangerous.'"[55] Through Scholz's analysis, we can understand that the biblical authors give women such a central role in parts of the Bible because they recognize they are essential characters; however,

[55] Scholz, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 77.

they are essential because women are needed to uphold the patriarchal lineage. The biblical authors did not include the tales of motherhood and suffering to highlight the harrowing experiences of ancient Israelite women and how they found resolution through pain. Instead, they only wrote about women's pain in relation to the story of the patriarchy. They were included only as a means to an end.

While the biblical women exist in the stories for the purpose of giving birth to the next heir of God's great nation, and therefore their role in the story is constrained to one narrow lane, it is important to acknowledge that attention is paid to the female characters. The literary pattern of the dual duty indicates a consciousness and intentionality from the biblical authors about the women about which they write. The powerful repetition of the multiple duties starting in Sarah's story and extending through both Rachel and Leah's illustrates that the biblical authors did consider these women and their status within their narratives. While biblical scholars have failed to identify this pattern and the centrality of the female characters, this thesis argues that the women's stories are significant and primary, and the intentionality and duplication of the pattern demonstrates just that. However, the pattern of the dual duty, despite that it emphasizes the essential role these biblical women play, does also show the limiting light under which the women are allowed to stand. The biblical authors included this pattern as a way of continually and consistently demonstrating that women's lives were meant to revolve around childbearing and motherhood. The dual duty demonstrates that these women existed in a male dominated space. Nonetheless, the pattern this thesis has identified has also hopefully shown that surrounding the responsibilities and motivations of motherhood, are the biblical women's feelings and abilities that raise them from their two-dimensional role in the text and instead help

them emerge as three-dimensional women through which we can honor by giving voice to the complexity of their lives.

Conclusion

The Sarah and Rachel stories begin by introducing Sarah and Rachel to the readers of the Hebrew Bible. Sarah is defined as the wife of Abraham and as a barren and childless woman. Rachel is beautiful, loved, and barren, and is placed in juxtaposition to Leah who has nice eyes, who is unloved, and who is fertile. These descriptions immediately characterize the women, and they situate readers with the qualities and tensions that are to come in their stories. While they are defined by traits that are true to their tales, the qualities they are given by the biblical authors are limiting. Readers are presented a specific understanding of these women, which makes the female characters flat and malleable for the biblical authors to manipulate throughout the stories. In addition, their qualities only engage the concepts of physical beauty, fertility, rivalry, and motherhood, thus relegating Sarah and Rachel to one specific realm in which they are to function throughout the narrative. These narrow descriptions allow the biblical authors able to portray women through their own male understanding of women's purposes and desires in a patriarchal society. The biblical authors associate womanhood with motherhood, so they define Sarah and Rachel by their reproductive (in)abilities; Sarah and Rachel function primarily as closed and empty vessels waiting to be opened and filled so that the patrilineal, chosen line of God can continue.

Despite the biblical authors conflating women with mothers, and therefore illustrating Sarah and Rachel as yearning for motherhood throughout their stories, this thesis has demonstrated that their need to be mothers has nothing to do with motherhood at all. Instead, the desire for motherhood that the biblical authors project onto Sarah and Rachel only demonstrates the androcentric society's desire for women to be mothers in order to uphold their own patriarchal ideals. However, by examining more closely and by peeling away the male imposed

wants on Sarah and Rachel, the women's own needs become clear. What appears to be a desire for motherhood from the women is still a desire for motherhood, but as a solution to a larger issue at hand, which is that of the dual duty.

The dual duty is the literary pattern that exists across Sarah and Rachel's stories, and it highlights the double responsibilities and motivations that cause Sarah and Rachel to both suffer and drive them to seek motherhood. The women share the same first duty: ancient Israelite women are responsible for bearing children so that their husbands can have descendants and so their family can prosper. This first duty is an expectation for all women of their time and is not exclusive to Sarah and Rachel. While they feel societal pressure to have a child, this pressure is put on every ancient Israelite woman. I do not state this fact as a way of dismissing the suffering of these women but instead offer it as an illustration of the male dominated pressures that existed at the time and that they were present in the biblical tales.

The second responsibility Sarah and Rachel face sets them apart from each other and from other ancient Israelite women. For Sarah, she is proclaimed the chosen wife of the chosen husband by God, and therefore she is expected to give birth to the son that will continue God's great nation. Rachel is motivated to give birth so that her jealousy towards her fertile sister will be alleviated. Leah, too, has her own set of dual motivations, the first following that of Sarah and Rachel. Her second motivation to have a child, however, is fueled by her desire for Jacob to love her, and she believes that bearing his children will make the love requited. For all three women, this second duty exacerbates their pain, tightens the tension in their stories, and makes it even harder for their suffering to be alleviated because it becomes doubly hard to appease.

While I have discovered and analyzed the intricate pattern of the dual duty in this thesis, the pattern's fascinating and detailed qualities do not make it challenging to notice within the

text. They instead cause it to stand out when reading across Genesis. Von Rad articulates the importance of continuous reading across the Hexateuch, and as I applied that same reading technique to Genesis, I found this profound yet clear and present repetition that has not tended to receive much attention in scholarship.[56] Sarah and Rachel's stories include many of the same themes of fertility, motherhood, and rivalry, and I noticed how those themes were often doubly applied to the women's stories yet rarely discussed in biblical commentary. As a result, I articulated the dual duty, how it both continues and changes across Sarah and Rachel's stories, and why the pattern is worth including in scholarly discussions.

In addition to recognizing the common and enduring pattern in Sarah and Rachel's stories, I also discovered a secondary pattern that has helped me realize two important facts about authorship and scholarship. Analyzing the literary decisions in Sarah and Rachel's stories has illuminated the intentional choices the biblical authors made that helped them write a text that reflects ancient Israelite men's ideologies and caters towards male desires and ideals. The biblical authors characterized Sarah and Rachel with heavy focus on the womens' reproductive abilities as a way of promoting motherhood in order to maintain the importance of patriarchal descent. Furthermore, they position Sarah and Hagar and Rachel and Leah against one another so that they appear obsessed with childbearing and so the authors could constrict their stories' tension to only revolve around the theme of motherhood. The pattern of the dual duty shows a consciousness of the biblical authors to consistently write stories that deal with maintaining and

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[56] In the Literature Review of this thesis, I explained that Von Rad argues for a continuous reading across the Hexateuch. He believes that Genesis is often read in isolation, as opposed to in conjunction with the other five books of the Hexateuch. I have adopted and adapted this concept of continuous reading across the Hexateuch and have applied it to the narratives in Genesis. I argue that the stories of the female characters in Genesis would benefit from a reading that examines for longitudinal patterns across the text to identify repetitions such as the dual duty. Recognizing these patterns helps illuminate themes and tropes that demonstrate authorial influence and ancient Israelite female experiences.

promoting God's chosen nation. Patterns indicate intentionality, and the pattern of the dual duty indicates the intention to keep women in particular roles that uphold patriarchal ideals.

As the biblical authors included stories of women as a method of keeping them in a confined role that endorses androcentric values, biblical scholarship, too, has relegated the stories of women to the position of the secondary narrative. While the pattern of the dual duty practically presented itself to me, modern biblical scholars have yet to comment on this repetition in their work. While modern biblical criticism brings focus to a wide range of issues—from authorship to provenance, dating to theology—its male dominated concerns continue to prevent it from bringing sustained and close reflection on the literary design and deeper meaning of the women characters in Genesis. Additionally, even as numerous intelligent female scholars have entered the conversation, as seen in this thesis, their voices are often overshadowed by the longstanding tradition of men controlling the field.

The male dominated conversation is reflected in how the biblical stories are understood and commented on. Their commentaries consider the women's stories to be secondary to that of the men's tales. Male scholars think of Sarah and Rachel's stories as interpolations within a larger narrative revolving around their husbands and not as primary stories that chart the path for the future generations of the chosen nation. Deciding whether biblical scholars failed to properly attend to the women's stories or neglected to recognize them as having essential themes that carry throughout Genesis is not the crux of my argument. The critical point to take from this is that the androcentrism that existed in the time in which the biblical authors wrote persists today and continues to appear in biblical scholarship.

Since modern biblical scholarship has not touched on the dual duty, I want to suggest where the pattern can be expanded upon so that the conversation about biblical women's

suffering because of barrenness does not stop with this thesis but continues to be discussed in the future. This thesis considers the pattern of the dual duty, women being defined by fertility and motherhood, and the institution of rivalry between women as a way of confining them to male expectations. Inn addition to considering these themes in the stories of Sarah and Rachel, I want to offer paths for pushing these themes further. There are numerous other stories both in and outside of Genesis that also navigate these topics. Rebekah, in Genesis, is momentarily declared barren before God helps her conceive, and once pregnant, she has concerns about the pregnancy itself. Furthermore, Rebekah is passed between male figures similar to how Rachel and Leah are moved between Laban and Jacob. While Rebekah's story does not illustrate a struggle with barrenness, her narrative is another example of how pregnancy and motherhood are the dominant themes the biblical authors impose upon a woman's story. In Judges, the unnamed woman married to Manoah is declared barren but is promised a son by God. Her situation reflects that of Sarah's, for she feels both the dual duty to give birth as an ancient Israelite woman and now as a woman chosen by God to bear the next leader of God's nation. Finally, in I Samuel, Hannah is loved by her husband Elkanah, but she is also barren and is ridiculed by her fertile co-wife Peninnah. Tropes from the Rachel and Leah narrative carry into Hannah's story, as both stories share themes of female rivalry, a desire to be loved, and a need for motherhood as a solution to end suffering.

The stories of Rebekah, Samuel's mother, and Hannah are examples of other places in the Hebrew Bible where themes of barrenness, motherhood, and rivalry can be found, and the pattern of the dual duty can be investigated in those stories as well. These women's narratives are great potential points of exploration into the dual duty. However, the stories are merely springboards from which a larger form of biblical analysis can take place. I have used a textual

and feminist approach through this thesis as I have considered these stories of women and the pattern of the dual duty, and this lens is one that I have found incredibly effective and would recommend using for further inquiry.

This thesis uses a textual approach because much of the suffering portrayed in Sarah and Rachel's stories comes from the rhetoric in the text. The biblical authors' specific word choice, descriptions, and sentence placement paints a particular image of these women to their intended male audience.[57] Both Sarah and Rachel's barrenness is stated early on in their introduction to their narrative, which indicates what the biblical authors deem most important about their characters and what they want to be on their readers minds as they enter into the story. They institute themes of rivalry by positioning certain aspects of Sarah and Hagar and Rachel and Leah next to each other so that readers intuitively compare and contrast the women. Finally, I took a textual approach when reading these stories because through examining the language and styles used to portray women's tales, I was able to recognize the male influences at play and how they impact powerful narratives about women. Through this approach, I learned we cannot take the text as an accurate representation of biblical women's lives because what men believed to be true about women's experiences, especially in relation to barrenness and fertility, does not reflect women's actual feelings of suffering and desire.

I also use a feminist approach while analyzing Sarah and Rachel's stories as their stories are women's narratives dealing with issues unique to womanhood, making it necessary to have

[57] My thesis uses a textual and feminist approach similar to that of Phyllis Trible's method in *Texts of Terror*. She explains the combination of ways in which she will attend to her analysis: "One approach documents the case against women. It cites and evaluates long neglected data that show the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel and the early church. By contrast, a second approach discerns within the Bible critiques of patriarchy. It upholds forgotten texts and reinterprets familiar ones to shape a remnant theology that challenges sexism of scripture. Yet a third approach incorporates the other two. It recounts tales of terror *in memorium* to offer sympathetic readings of abused women" (Trible, 3). Trible's methodology inspired the approach I took when examining Sarah and Rachel's texts because it considers the portrayals of women's experiences within a patriarchal setting.

women's interests and experiences at the forefront of my thinking. The biblical authors are men writing for men and about men. As a result, the female characters were not afforded adequate contemplation. Therefore, it is essential that I consider how the biblical authors relegated the women's stories beneath the men's biblical stories and how to give them the attention they deserve.

We so often think of Genesis 12-50 as the Patriarchal History since the biblical authors wrote the stories with men as the primary characters, and biblical scholars have perpetuated that same male-focus in their commentaries and conversations. This thesis has proven that the Hebrew Bible does not accurately portray women's experiences because of male authorial influence, and modern scholarship has not appropriately nor thoroughly considered the stories of biblical women through a feminist lens. Sarah and Rachel are the women who give birth to the sons that perpetuate the chosen people. Sarah and Rachel are the ones who create biblical history. Sarah and Rachel are the mothers of God's nation, and, thus, Sarah and Rachel need to be considered as the primary characters, primary movers, and the primary women of the Matriarchal History.

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