

Assessment One

Textual Analysis of Two Biblical Texts

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The Hebrew Bible is a vast collection of historical theological accounts spanning a timeline from creation and the following four thousand years. Written during approximately one and a half thousand years ago, its morality, justifications, political and socio-economic structures and familial dynamics were not based upon an egalitarian principle. Translated many times over, the patriarchal authority which dominated during these periods remains evident. Many attempts of contemporary interpretation have been conducted over time, with the culture of the time playing a part in the outcome. Also, the accepted belief systems of various religions have a significant bearing on its aim to contemporise. The following account will be based upon a Western, Christian perspective, with occasional reference to other religious beliefs and cultural acceptances. It will objectively examine two biblical texts for their portrayal of female versus male significance, and the presence or absence of fluidity of both.

In a generalised understanding of religious texts, it would be misguided to not consider the presence of a bias, whether consciously or unconsciously, in relation to how the Bible has been presented to us with a male oriented supremacy. Whether it is felt to be right or not, it seems to have become ingrained, accepted by most, and inseparable in an overall understanding of religion. In the UK for example, you would have not been greeted by a female taking service when attending church on Sunday morning until the early 1990s; and even then, they were very few.¹ If you got married, christened or confirmed, the likelihood was, that it would be a male conducting the ceremony. This has been the experience of religion for so long, that it is difficult for some to accept any change in that understanding.

Genesis 1-3

The first distinction seen in terms of male and female in the bible is in Genesis 2, with the introduction of Adam and Eve, however, there is that (currently) awkward acknowledgement of ‘man’ as opposed to ‘woman’ or ‘humankind’ in the beginning of Genesis when we read about the creation. When reading ‘man’ from the Bible, there has to be a consideration of a number of things. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that what we read today has been subject to many translations, and translations of translations. Secondly, we need to establish the origins of the word ‘man’. Thirdly, attention should be paid to the context of when ‘man’ is being used.

The first translation of the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew, was the Septuagint (LXX). This was a Greek translation of its time, spreading the texts to a larger demographic, including Egypt, which had a Greek speaking influence.² William Loader discusses the variations of the translation in the LXX of ‘man’, and suggests that the Hebrew version of ‘earth creature’, which would hold no distinction between sexes, and portray a generic form, is lost in the translations. Two other translations he includes for the word are ‘humankind’ and

¹ Barbara Bagilhole, Prospects for Change? Structural, Cultural and Action Dimensions of the Careers of Pioneer Women Priests in the Church of England, *Gender, Work & Organisation*: Vol 10, Issue 3, <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1111/1468-0432.00200>> [accessed 25 November 2025].

² Lucio Del Corso, Antonio Ricciardetto, eds., *Greek Culture in Hellenistic Egypt*, (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2024).

‘husband’. It is also worth noting that the translation for ‘earth/ground’ is *adamah*.³ In Gen 2:7, it describes how God created man from the dust of the ground; this seems to mark a distinction between the genders, as man or ‘adamah’ was made from the earth, whereas ‘woman’, as described in Gen 2:21-24 was created from Adam’s rib.⁴ God does not say that Adam’s companion was made in God’s image as he does with Adam, which poses a different question in relation to genders; was God portraying ‘himself’ as male?⁵ As a point of note, Chaim Bentorah discusses the misinterpretation of the word ‘rib’, and instead, indicates that the frequency of ‘rib’ is nominal compared to the more frequent ‘side’ or ‘side chamber’, suggesting man was split in half to create two beings.⁶ The term ‘side chamber’ may also suggest that it was ‘outside’ of Adam. The Hebrew bible, in Gen 3 also suggests a distinction by God, between man and woman, when explaining that upon death, man shall return to the earth, whereas woman will return to her origin and serve him. This is discussion of literal translation, but we also need to consider conceptual translation and composition of texts, which can rely upon many factors. An understanding of ‘where the author was coming from’, or ‘what was the author’s aim’, is a simplified way of describing the understanding of composition; the *why* of what was included, when it was included, what was not included, and what the original author’s sources were. Emanuel Tov cites Postgate as saying, ‘The aim of the ‘textual critic’ may then be defined as the restoration of the text, as far as possible, to its original form, if by ‘original form’ we understand the form intended by its author’⁷

Even today, the use of the word ‘man’ is used both individually and collectively, as is the case on many occasions within the Bible. So why is this the case? If we look at the Old English meaning of the word, we see that it is described as a *human being* or *person*, of either sex.⁸ Edward Simmons describes the supposition of abstract terms, and the determination of the individual versus the collective understanding.⁹ ‘Man’ is a perfect example of when we put aside the individual identity of the word, and instead use as an abstract collective term. This does not however, answer the question of why we use ‘man/mankind’ as opposed to ‘woman/womankind’. If we were to use the term ‘womankind’, an automatic conclusion is drawn in relation to the female sex, whereas ‘mankind’ considers both.

Before Eve’s transgression in the garden of Eden, which seems to be the origin of ‘sin’, Chaim Bentorah describes another possible distinction between male and female when stating,

You see the completion of the good, the *tov* or harmony with God was not with the

³ William R.G. Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality And The New Testament: Casse Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament*, (Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

⁴ Aurelius Augustine (of Hippo), *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Vol.2, trans. By John Hammond Taylor, in *Ancient Christian Writers: St. Augustine*, (New York: The Newman Press, 1982).

⁵ Christin E. Bøsterud, ‘Women in the Bible: What can they teach us about gender equality?’, *In die Skriflig* 55(1), a2754., (2021), <<https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i1.2754>> [accessed 23 November 2025].

⁶ Chaim Bentorah, Woman-‘Isah, *Hebrew Word Study*, 2024, <<https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2024/08/hebrew-word-study-woman-isah/>> [accessed 17 November 2025].

⁷ Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research: Third Edition Completely Revised and Expanded*, (Indiana: Eisenbrauns Inc., 2015).

⁸ Etymonline, *online etymology dictionary*, (2001-2025), Douglas Harper, <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=man>> [accessed 24 November 2025].

⁹ Edward D. Simmons, *The Scientific Art of Logic: An Introduction to the Principles of Formal and Material Logic*, (Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2022).

creation of the human being or man, but with the creation of woman. Woman was the last of God's creation and it was that creation that created the good or harmony with God.¹⁰

It cannot be denied that women both in the Bible, and historically since, have not been treated equally to men, resulting in a woman adopting a subservient role. Susan Haddox explains the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to describe the association between masculinity and power, and its prevalence within societies and political arenas.¹¹ There have been of course, exceptions, women who have stood up to male authority, had their voice heard, and even held major roles in their endeavours; sadly, this has often left the woman being branded as 'brazen' or 'ungodly'. June Sturrock describes Teresa of Avila, a nun, mystic and writer, who was a prominent figure in the counter-reformation. She highlights how Teresa's opine account of Martha and Mary demonstrates the complexities of women, and the important role they play.¹² Terese had her share of opposition and criticism from men within the church, but fortunately, she also had respect and support from the Papacy and from the King at the time, demonstrating that with conviction, a woman can play an integral role within religion.

Terese's wonderful work seems to have been forgotten (or ignored) by many. L Dean Allen describes how many churches in the early twentieth century, went to great lengths to discourage female leadership within the church. He examples Billy Sunday, an Evangelist who not only preached against female religious authority, but also took it further by saying that only 'manly' men should have a role in leadership.¹³ This possibly indicates a misunderstanding of the concepts present within translations, as Luise Schottroff et al., explains that 'man' could be understood in the context of gender as opposed to humankind, and that philosophy has historically concentrated upon the rationality of men, in contrast to the sensual nature of women, resulting in statements such as, 'Religion is about a father-god, whom the spiritual fathers represent on earth',¹⁴ this androcentric view has only served to minimise the contributions of women within religion.

How do we suppose this lowly view of women came about? Do we look to Eve's transgression in the garden of Eden? Has the text that paints Eve as temptress been translated correctly? What path would 'humankind' have taken if she had not eaten of the fruit from the forbidden tree, and would women still be viewed lesser than men? Marie Theres-Wacker discusses the 'hermeneutic of rejection', 'In this perspective, the Bible can have no authority for women anymore, because the history of what the Bible has led to has to be seen throughout as a history

¹⁰ Chaim Bentorah, Woman-'Isah, *Hebrew Word Study*, (2024), <<https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2024/08/hebrew-word-study-woman-isah/>> [accessed 20 November].

¹¹ Susan E. Haddox, Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades, *Currents in Biblical Research*, (2016), Vol. 14(2) 176 –206, <[sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](https://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav) DOI: 10.1177/1476993X15575496>, [accessed 20 November 2025].

¹² June Sturrock, Martha and Mary Re-Imagined, *Christianity and Literature*, Vol 65, No.64 (2016), <<https://www.jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/26196842?sid=primo&seq=1>> [accessed 30 November 2025].

¹³ L.Dean Allen, *Rise Up, O Men of God: The Men and Religion Forward Movement and Promise Keepers*, (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, Marie Theres-Wacker, *Feminist Interpretation : The Bible in Women's Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p.50.

of patriarchy'.¹⁵ Mathilde Frey describes Eve's story as being '...burdened by an extensive history of Jewish and Christian interpretations depicting Eve as a dangerous temptress for man, the cause of humanity's fall into sin, thus justifying male domination over women and the institution of patriarchy'.¹⁶ What appears to remain, is a view, regardless of culture or religion, of male dominance.

1 Samuel 18:1-9

The significance of this text takes a closer look at a contemporary view of male sexuality as opposed to male versus female roles, and how this does, or doesn't modify the general acceptance of a proposed interpretation.

One theme present within this text is the relationship between David and Saul's son Johnathan. There appears to be a vast number of conflicting opinions upon the true meaning of the relationship, which may or may not have been adapted to fit a particular narrative within specific interpretations. When read from the Septuagint 1 Kings XX. 17, it seems that Jonathan's love for David was a spiritual love, 'And Jonathan swore yet again to David, because he loved the soul of him that loved him'.¹⁷ This would seem to indicate that Jonathan's love for David was because of the Lord's love for David, and by association, Jonathan's love for David. Another example from The Septuagint in 1 Kings XX 41 is, '...they kissed each other and wept...', which in the context of the traditional practices of the locality, time, and situation, again does not indicate homosexuality.¹⁸

Other translations, point to a more sexual nature to their relationship. Dirk von der Horst describes how some translations suggest that the text describes a sexual act, but adds that as the act was non-penetrative, it could, as would be considered of the time in ancient Israel, been viewed as a statement of friendship and heterosexual love.¹⁹

Interpretations can be subject to a number of influences such as cognitive or confirmation bias,²⁰ Orthodox corruption,²¹ contamination, coherence, and philosophical reflection.²² When interpretations are vehemently directed in a particular direction, resistance and objection slowly

¹⁵Ibid., p.39.

¹⁶ Mathilde Frey, *Reframing Genesis 3:16: Eve's Creation Memoir*, *Religions*, (2024), <<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/15/9/1115>> p.1, [accessed 15 November 2025].

¹⁷ *The Septuagint Version Of The Old Testament , With An English Translation; And With Various Readings And Critical Notes*, (London: Samuel Bagster And Sons, 1879), Digitised copy (1992), p.384. <https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Septuagint_version_of_the_Old_Testam/ma7YAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=david+and+jonathan+in+the+septuagint&pg=PA401&printsec=frontcover> [accessed 13 November 2025].

¹⁸ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Dirk von der Horst, *Jonathan's Loves, David's Laments: Gay Theology, Musical Desires, and Historical Difference*, Foreword by Rosemary Radford Ruether, (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017).

²⁰ Richards J. Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, (Virginia: Novinka Books, 2008).

²¹ Hyeon Woo Shin, *Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem in Historical Jesus Research The Search for Valid Criteria*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

²² Sidnie White Crawford, Tommy Wasserman, Eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Textual Criticism of the Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

start to emerge. David and Jonathan's story, although not relevant to male versus female, examines gender and choice. On one hand, if it is read to be an accepted homosexual relationship of the time, then the question of sexual orientation does not appear to influence leadership, power and command, as they were both successful in this; Billy Sunday take note! On the other hand, if the relationship was hidden out of fear of acceptance, then problems, such as LGBTQ+ Christians not always being permitted to marry, and being denied ordination, become a present day reflection of historical issues.²³ Although supporting the fact that the extent of their relationship can never be truly known, Kittredge Cherry describes their story as, 'the deep love between two men without any condemnation, making them some of history's first queer religious role models', further explaining that, 'The modern idea of sexual orientation didn't exist in Biblical times, but the powerful love story of David and Jonathan in 1 and 2 Samuel suggests that God supports same-sex couples.'²⁴

Both the texts examined appear to have the presence of ambiguity, due to the variance in translations. The transmission of the text seems to also vary throughout different religious disciplines. Maintaining an understanding that there are many elements to consider when deciding which translation best represents the original text, seems necessary in order to pay regard to the different interpretations and inferences. Biblical texts have been continually scrutinised throughout time, offering meanings, perspectives and relevance, changing and growing in order to adapt to contemporary issues and experiences. There is beauty in the unsurety, as it provides a continuous exploration in understanding God's message.

²³ Jarel Robinson-Brown, *Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer: The Church and the Famine of Grace*, (London: SCM Press, 2021).

²⁴ Kittredge Cherry, David and Jonathan: Same-sex love between men in the Bible, *QSpirit*, (2025), < <https://qspirit.net/david-jonathan-same-sex-love/> > [accessed 26 November 2025].

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