

Interpreting Catastrophe: Biblical Foundations and Gendered Responses in Jewish Post-Holocaust Theology.

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to critically assess the themes of suffering within the Hebrew bible, with a particular focus on the books of Deuteronomy, Lamentations and finally the Book of Job, to determine the theological standpoints of male post-Holocaust Theologians and finally, establishing the missing voices of women's Holocaust experiences and feminist post-Holocaust theological viewpoints. Firstly, looking closely into the Hebrew Bible, there is a sense of plurality amongst the notions of suffering, where not one narrative can give an overall answer to the meaning of suffering in one way. While these biblical accounts reveal different themes of suffering and how suffering can be understood from a biblical narrative in comparison to present day suffering, it is important to gather the basis of the understanding of suffering from these texts in order to understand the reasoning behind the theological stances of post-Holocaust writers. From here, the discussion moves further into the themes of suffering but from a post-Holocaust discourse perspective, where the use of biblical narratives and ideas on suffering has enabled thinkers to look critically at post-Holocaust dialogues but also how these questions being raised in a modern context have also been raised through the biblical texts across history. Finally, experiences of women during the Holocaust have been largely missed or ignored due to their later publications on women-specific suffering and experiences of the Holocaust, where much has now been discussed but more is needed to add to this discussion of including all voices to post-Holocaust dialogues. This, in turn, will look further into feminist theology and feminist interpretations on life post-Holocaust and determine women's theological stances on faith, God and their religion in modern day.

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1 An Introduction:

Much can be written and debated about the aftermath of the Second World War, and in particular around the events of the Holocaust, where modern discussions today are starting to become limited from personal witness testimonies. Therefore, it is key now to continue this discussion on remembering the past in order to not repeat the past- where living witness numbers are falling drastically and we are relying solely on written testimonies, interviews, school engagement projects and wider theological interpreters and scholarly writings will be all that is left of this memory. From here, I wanted to explore and continue to highlight the atrocities of the Second World War, in particular during the Holocaust, where questions on faith, belief, suffering, unjust and undeserving punishment are all explored largely within post Holocaust dialogues when trying to have some form of understanding of why this happened. On trying to piece together a form of understanding from a religious and theological perspective of survivors of the Holocaust, it is important to firstly consider where their initial understandings of suffering have come from, and with close readings of Deuteronomy, Book of Job and Lamentations, we can see three varying forms of suffering all explored in the Hebrew Bible. When looking at Jewish religious texts and coming across the differing views on suffering, it is key to understand initially the foundations of these texts and also the theological thought that drives these discussions both in an ancient world context and modern day. From this, various questions around suffering include: why suffering occurs, whether suffering can be understood as punishment, how innocent suffering can be reconciled with divine justice, and whether God remains present within catastrophe. However, even from the scriptures, this plurality of ideas of suffering can be seen and this does not provide one simple, unified response. Even within the three texts of the Hebrew Bible I have chosen to focus on, there are varying perspectives on suffering ranging from covenant, obedience, blessing/ curse, suffering as divine justice, to other understandings of innocent suffering, a breakdown of reward and punishment theology, to finally a communal response to catastrophe, grief, destruction and suffering as a whole rather than selected individually. The scriptures look at many forms of interpreting suffering, where not all forms are interchangeable, where personal experiences and impact of suffering can vary from individuals to larger groups.

From this, Jewish theological interpretations of suffering have long had discussions on these exact questions, where modern theological interpretations have been formed from biblical understandings of individual and communal suffering to stretch into post-Holocaust dialogues in the modern era. Questions such as- how are these interpretations, then, challenged or expanded by gendered experiences and Jewish feminist theology in a post- Holocaust context? In order to fully explore this, I will be focussing on early male theological discussions on post- Holocaust theology and their interpretations of the scripture and how this has influenced their faith, belief and understanding of their personal suffering during and after the Holocaust. By looking closely at the works of Eliezer Berkovits, Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, Elie Wiesel and finally David Blumenthal, all with varying opinions on the life that must be led after the Holocaust and with varying ideas on theological stances in a post-Holocaust world. The examination of these four thinkers in particular will aim to highlight the difference in viewpoint across Judaism, where not one idea can be fully followed through due to the vast amount of loss, varying experiences of individuals, and varying amounts of testimonies that there are to consider. Their responses to the Holocaust demonstrate different possibilities for theological engagement after catastrophe, from a male focussed perspective, but are key to these early discussions of understanding faith after catastrophe. Through these voices, there are clear differences on the understanding of what post-Holocaust Jewish theology is, with this not being just a single theological position but a contested field in which faith, doubt, silence, protest and reinterpretation can coexist. But while a large focus was mainly considered on the thought of early male theological discourses, this discounted half of those who had also endured the events of the Holocaust- women. Building from initial male discourses, it is evident later that women theological thinkers and survivors were wanting to share their experiences, thoughts, analyses, and personal reflections on the Holocaust to widen this initial male-focussed field to capture as many voices as possible. From here, the inclusion of women's testimonies and theological interpretations is key to gathering the larger understanding of all who perished, suffered and lived to tell the world of the atrocities of what happened in the Holocaust. These gendered discussions are fundamental in gathering a whole experience of the Holocaust, from gender specific suffering, the role women played in the camps, and

those voices that are not nearly shared or discussed enough to fully capture the Holocaust as the suffering of an entire people.

I feel now that as the generation of Holocaust survivors reaches the end of its lifetime in the near future, the relationship between memory, testimony, and interpretation becomes increasingly significant. The eventual absence of living survivors raises an urgent question: how can the experiences and voices of those who endured the Holocaust continue to inform theological reflection when direct testimony is no longer possible? This dissertation approaches that question through the problem of suffering and the importance of keeping those memories alive long after the physical body has gone.

Chapter 2- Biblical Foundations on Suffering

2.1 Introduction

To firstly understand any aspect of suffering or what suffering can mean to the sufferer, it is crucial to consider the texts in which different ideas, understandings and portrayals of suffering through history have been both understood and interpreted. By looking closely first at the Book of Deuteronomy, this notion of suffering as divine judgement is discussed by scholars and religious leaders closely to try and determine an answer to 'why does suffering occur.' By then looking at a different form of suffering within the Hebrew Bible, in particular in the Book of Lamentations, we see this battle once more of coming to terms with suffering but this is on a communal level- where everyone is left to suffer after the destruction of the Temple and, again, in search of God for answers or for repentance. Finally, I will be focussing on the model of innocent suffering within the Hebrew Bible through the Book of Job, where this other aspect of suffering without sin is a cause for much debate, both in the biblical world and also in coming to terms with the events of the Holocaust in a post-war context. I aim to highlight how the Hebrew Bible understands different forms of suffering, and what theological responses does it offer to the suffering of both individuals and whole communities?

2.2 Divine Silence, Covenant and Obedience in the Book of Deuteronomy

By looking closely at the book of Deuteronomy, it provides us with an account on suffering as an expression of divine justice, where J Gordon McConville highlights this as "the vengeance of Yahweh against enemies is at the same time a 'judgement' of God's own people that has the character of compassion."¹ With this statement, McConville allows us to paint this theological understanding of God, through the Book of Deuteronomy, as someone who correctly judges wrongdoers, including his own people in this manner. Deuteronomy 28 highlights two important aspects of retributive theology within the Hebrew Bible- on the one hand there are 'blessings for obedience' and on the other there are 'warnings against disobedience.' (Deut.28:1-58) From this, we can clearly note the blessings where "if you only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all

¹ J. Gordon McConville, *'Retribution in Deuteronomy: Theology and Ethics'*, p.292

his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth;”² (Deut.28:1-2) From this excerpt, it is clear that the command put forward is to obey the laws and there will be some form of reward/positive outcome to be had. As John G. Gammie further adds that “retribution on this level appears as a principle according to which the faithful are assured, Yahweh will invariably operate,”³ thus agreeing with McConville on the notion that in order for there to be a positive reward from God to be received by either an individual or a community, there will inevitably need to be evidence of obedience to the laws as set out by God for his people’s. From this, we can see where this is highlighted with the proclamation that: “you shall love the Lord your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his ordinances, and his commandments always,” (Deut.11:1) where this further gives us these understandings of the commands that have been set forth and, again, this reward for obedience is once more made prominent. As McConville notes, “.... there is in principle a certain order of things which calls for just actions, implying a correspondence between act and consequence.”⁴ This further adds to the understanding of retributive theology in the context of understanding the Book of Deuteronomy, where indeed a form of understanding that all actions, whether that be good or bad, is being determined by God in order of receiving either punishment or reward also.

However, along with reward for obedience, can also be the total opposite. Deuteronomy explores this further through the understanding of the sins passed on through family lines, where is mentioned to: “remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of the Lord your God) but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness,” (Deut.11:2) where this further signifies the notion of not only the Israelites who are receiving these laws first hand but also further down the lines of generations will also encounter that their own actions will also have consequences. Gammie further adds to this, by commenting on Deut.24:16 which states that “parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their

² Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations and references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

³ John G Gammie, *‘The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy’*, p.7

⁴ J Gordon McConville, *‘Retribution in Deuteronomy: Theology and Ethics’* p.297

parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death.”⁵ This statement clearly shows the deeper understandings within the bible of reward and punishment, where this chapter defines the punishment as strictly individual- where initially the laws for obedience and punishment were given as a collective, it will evidently be down to individual behaviour upon whether a reward or punishment will be faced from God. Joel Kaminski takes his understandings of retribution further where he highlights how, at first, “... If Israel is obedient to God she is rewarded, and if Israel is disobedient, she will be punished for her sinful behaviour.”⁶ This statement seemingly aligns with other scholarly interpretations of the understanding of the Book of Deuteronomy, where this notion again of good behaviour being rewarded and bad behaviour being punished is a given for all of God’s people. Again, this repeated analogy of the suffering that will inevitably occur to all those who disobey is categorically outlined in Deut.28:15-68, which gives a large list of all of the things that will be taken away through disobedience, and also how this will affect not only the individual, but also the family, future generations, the livestock they have, the land they work on and life in all aspects will be altered to highlight this notion that there will be consequences to sin and this will be evident across all forms of life. However, he seems to change his understanding slightly in order to define the ‘why’ of this reward and punishment from God by stating that “even in texts like Deuteronomy one can see that adversity is sometimes understood not as a punishment but as serving other purposes, such as a form of training or instruction.”⁷ This further highlights a slightly different version from the other two scholars on what the question of ‘why’ this reward and punishment element takes place, where Kaminski seems to focus here on a notion that sometimes, punishment may come to those who do not necessarily deserve it, however it is seen as ‘serving a different purpose’ rather than just simply implying that ‘good people can suffer’ or ‘bad people can be rewarded.’ This statement, in essence, forms further analysis and understanding of the Book of Job and his innocent suffering, which will be explored further on in closer detail.

⁵ John Gammie, *‘The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy’* p.9

⁶ Joel Kaminski, *‘Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense’*, p.300

⁷ Joel Kaminiski, *‘Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense’*, p.303

By looking closely at Deuteronomy, although the understanding of a ‘reward and punishment’ theory based off biblical interpretations on the justice of God, there is much to understand of this initial, biblical stance in terms of historical attributes and the context in which the text was originally received verbally and then written later and how this can convey meaning when looking in modern contexts. For some, therefore, due to its historical context, a renewed reading is needed when comparing with modern contexts of atrocities and thus, can merely be used as a comparison to modern day rather than an exact answer to suffering today.

2.3 Communal Suffering, Lament and Hope in Lamentations

Moving slightly away from the retributive theology of Deuteronomy, we can also look closer at the theology and understanding of the writings in Lamentations, where this element of suffering is explored more closely than Deuteronomy on a communal level, through the suffering of the Israelites after the destruction of the Temple. Lamentations begin with this harrowing, deserted city, and states: “how lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!” (Lam.1:1) Adele Berlin comments on the Book of Lamentations with a similar viewpoint to that of the understandings of the Book of Deuteronomy, in that “the theology of destruction, in which destruction and exile are the punishment for sin,”⁸ further showing that she does not fully reject the Deuteronomistic theology but rather inherits its framework of reward and punishment in this instance also. From here, Elizabeth Boase adds to this understanding by stating how “theodic strains are identifiable in the nature of the text as prayer or address to God.... [which] brings the pain and suffering before God in the hope of a response.”⁹ This response by Boase signifies a further meaning than just theodicy within the Book of Lamentations and shows the feelings of the community as the sufferers in this situation in the hope of a reply or in some form, guidance on how things can be put back better. Lamentations goes on to further highlight the plight of the sufferers, in needing a response, when it states; “I called your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do

⁸ Adele Berlin, *‘Lamentations: A Commentary’*, p.18

⁹ Elizabeth Boase, *‘Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations’*, p.451

not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief.” (Lam.3:55-56) This sorrowful exclamation from the community is echoed throughout Lamentations where the voices crying out, reaching out for some form of answer or guidance is seemingly being ignored, and from this extract it is clear that God has seen the destruction but has chosen, by not providing an answer, to ‘close His ears’ to the pleas of the people. Boase continues with this understanding and says that “the one voice which is absent, in any form, is that of Yahweh,”¹⁰ where she stresses this understanding that although the laments are spoken by the community, those words can, unfortunately, fall on deaf ears where, again, the lost voice of God is hoped for throughout these solemn passages.

Miriam J Bier comments on the collective suffering in Lamentations as being through a measure of sin, where this connects directly back to the theological understandings within Deuteronomy on this retributive idea.¹¹ However, although she seems initially to follow along with the Deuteronomistic ideas of retributive theology, by confirming that the suffering experienced by the community was due to sin, she starts to question the voices of those speaking through Lamentations in a different way, by highlighting the repetition of “we” when it comes to Lamentations 5. She poses a distinction that is therefore needed when it comes to the community as a collective, by stating “who is subsumed, who is assumed, and who is left out?”¹² This is important in distinguishing the different theological stances that come across from Deuteronomy and Lamentations, where these previously understood theologies of Deuteronomy do not continue in the same manner for Lamentations. As F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp continues to comment on the theology of Lamentations, she highlights how “Lamentations does not have a happy ending... Lamentations is framed by a thematic inclusio involving the divine abandonment theme alone.”¹³ From this perspective, she also highlights the community voices of the final chapter in Lamentations as being of significant exploration when it comes to the theological stance of the text. The chapter even brings questions of: “why have you forgotten us completely. Why have you forsaken us these

¹⁰ Elizabeth Boase, *Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations* p.452

¹¹ Miriam J Bier, *‘Perhaps there is hope’: Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest*, p.12

¹² Miriam J Bier, *‘Perhaps there is hope’: Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest*, p.166

¹³ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in the Book of Lamentations*, p.33

many days?” (Lam.5:20) This passage, again, highlights what Bier and Dobbs-Allsopp both have reiterated in the form of divine abandonment and only hearing the lamenting, hopeful voices of the sufferers in this context. Even in the closing of the chapter, there is no answer from God as to why they have suffered in this way, only the internal understandings of Deuteronomistic theology where they feel they must have sinned to have deserved this form of punishment. Dobbs-Allsopp carries on by stating that even in the end, “Lamentations does not celebrate the triumphant return of Yahweh.... But seeks instead rhetorically to probe the fact of Yahweh’s abandonment and continued absence,”¹⁴ further signifying this entire book as being a poem of lament from the sufferers, who, eventually, are still left by the end seeking answers, guidance and any form of hope for a rebuilding of the life they once had but their cries are not heard. Although not being directly answered by God in the text itself, there is still this overarching feeling of hope, and as like Deuteronomy, this connection to the Book of Job is once again made by Berlin. She highlights that “[as in the book of Job] the assumption in this section is that knowledge of the true nature of God will bring comfort and hope to the sufferer.”¹⁵ From this, one can take some form of comfort in the constant lament throughout the book as a means of rebuilding and reconnecting to God by the people, where an answer is not directly given from God but the power of the lament itself can drive the community back to God in this way, allowing hope to prevail.

With this reading of Lamentations, the understanding of communal suffering in this text can be largely relevant to modern understandings of persecution, and across Jewish history of persecution through events such as the Holocaust, as one example of the communal suffering of a nation. To take into account the messages from Lamentations and relate this to a modern context is, as explored in Deuteronomy, a difficult notion where elements of these narratives can be used as forms of seeking answers but ultimately, due to the differing contexts in which both the book and event takes place, the need for new discourses, updated discourses and looking backwards to build forwards is essential for not only understanding catastrophe but in building a life looking forward after.

¹⁴ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in the Book of Lamentations*, p.34

¹⁵ Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, p.92

2.4 Theodicy and the Problem of Innocent Suffering

When exploring the different themes of suffering across the bible, the final example, and arguably, the most well-known, is that of the understanding of the Book of Job. The ultimate ‘innocent suffering character’ that has been debated and interpreted by many scholars. The question that Larry J Waters poses, and rightly so, asks “... Why do righteous people suffer undeservedly?”¹⁶ This question is on many scholars’ minds when it comes to trying to find an understanding of this text. As we know of Job who is described as being “...blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil,” (Job.1:1) therefore from this first statement of what is written of Job in the bible, we assume that he has done good and is an upstanding individual. Therefore, when reading the text further and discovering his immense suffering, it is very hard to reconcile that such a respectful and sinless individual could ever have expected to have suffered the way that he did. (Job.1:13-22, 2:1-9) Kaminski highlights here how, “in turn, when scholars look to the book of Job, they frequently see Job as a revolutionary book that overturned this older biblical view of retribution,”¹⁷ where this statement alone counteracts with both the Deuteronomistic Retributive theology and the theology of Lamentations simultaneously, highlighting the significance of not only this text in trying to understand the differing theologies but also in finding answers to theology too. Kaminski goes on to add that”.... In as much as Job’s friends slavishly represent this theological stance but ultimately lose their argument with Job,”¹⁸ further adding to the way in which the characters of Job’s supposed ‘friends’ have also stuck with the traditional theological understandings of ‘obedience is good, disobedience is bad’ rhetoric to try and explain Job’s suffering in this way, which he refutes. On speaking of the three friends that attempt to help Job understand why he is suffering, Waters add that “Job’s three counsellors perpetuated the same satanic false doctrine of retribution/ recompense [as seen in Deuteronomy and Lamentations]. They held that the righteous never suffer and the unrighteous always do.”¹⁹ From this perspective, then, we can see

¹⁶ Larry J Waters, *Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job*, p.436

¹⁷ Joel Kaminski, *Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense*, pp.300-301

¹⁸ Joel Kaminski, *Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense*, pp.300-301

¹⁹ Larry J Waters, *Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job*, p.442

once more how the biblical stance of divine retribution was even upheld by the friends of Job, each stating that for him to have experienced all of this loss, that he must have sinned in some way to have warranted this. John J Collins highlights this debate well by saying that it is “the dispute between Job and his friends [is in] large part a conflict between tradition and experience,”²⁰ and from this statement, it is evident that Collins has rightly identified the main dilemma that is faced between Job’s friends’ historical understandings on suffering, and Job’s actual lived experience of being without sin and still suffering. From this, then, what is the purpose of Job’s suffering? As a way of divine punishment for sin, as explained in Deuteronomy or Lamentations, or something different?

The ending of the Book of Job is quite ambiguous for the readers in understanding the reasoning for God’s interaction with Job and his seemingly ‘reverted to normal’ life again. Waters highlights how the ending of the Book of Job that “God did not tell Job to repent so that his pain would be explained, or that he would be vindicated, or that his prosperity would be restored,”²¹ where this shows that even though Job’s friends all suggested this of him, he wanted to have a meeting with God in order to discuss his case and fight for his unjust suffering to end and to eventually receive an answer to his suffering. Job himself finds an answer for God by saying how: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job.42:5-6) This statement from Job alone declares all of what Job had thought he knew, but all he did know was that he needed an answer to his suffering, however this interaction with God further intensified Job’s longing for an answer by finally receiving the truth of God for himself, which was what was needed all along. Kaminski also comments on the ending of the Book of Job, in a seemingly reminiscent note, where he states that “while many today find the ending of Job unsatisfying because it seems false to experience, it actually captures the real-life trajectory of certain survivors of the Shoah,”²² this adds further to the notion of how the book of Job is interpreted in modern day scenarios and in coming to terms with personal suffering as

²⁰ John J Collins, *The Friends of Job and the Task of Biblical Theology*, p.292

²¹ Larry J Waters, *Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job*, p.447

²² Joel Kaminski, *Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense*, p.309

experienced during times of suffering and despair. He goes on to add how “survivors who lost everything and then lived lives filled with new blessings,”²³ and, much like Job, although the lives lost and families broken could not be restored, this began an awakening of a new chapter- where new life could begin and the hope of the future, however still living with the memories of their past trauma and suffering while trying to focus on the future at the same time.

Much of the suffering of Job has been paralleled with the innocent suffering of people across history, and, in more recent years, during the events of the Holocaust in World War 2. Dan Mathewson states that: “Job’s appeal to post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers seems obvious enough: Job is the biblical archetype of unwarranted, senseless suffering,”²⁴ where this statement is evident across multiple scholars when discussing the events of the Holocaust with biblical narratives and for Holocaust thinkers in trying to find meaning or an understanding of God’s justice during this time. From this, Berlin further comments on the similarity between Lamentations and Job’s endings, where “as in the Book of Job, the assumption [in Lamentations] is that knowledge of the true nature of God will bring comfort and hope to the suffer.”²⁵ Both endings seem to not give direct answers to either the group of people in Lamentations or a direct answer to Job either, but rather, the knowledge of God and His nature seems sufficient enough in gaining this new found understanding of suffering without needing to know the answer to the ‘why’. Kaminski comments further on this initial understanding of Deuteronomistic beliefs on retributive theology, where he states that “the Shoah.... [has led to] a growing sense that one must reject the central biblical theological belief that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished,”²⁶ which is seen as quite problematic when it comes to the comparison of the Book of Job to those who both suffered and survived suffering in the Holocaust, and the need to reinterpret scriptures original understanding of retributive theology was much needed after these events.

²³ Joel Kaminski, ‘Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense’, p.309

²⁴ Dan Mathewson, ‘Between Testimony and Interpretation: The Book of Job in Post-Holocaust Jewish Theological Reflection’, p.17

²⁵ Adele Berlin, ‘Lamentations: A Commentary’, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) p.92

²⁶ Joel Kaminski, ‘Would you impugn My Justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible’s Theology of Divine Recompense’, p.302

Mathewson comments on Elie Wiesel's claim that "Job, rather, has become the voice of the survivor of trauma,"²⁷ further highlighting not only the importance of getting an understanding of the tribulations of Job but also in finding solace and comfort in the scripture and with God in reconciling with faith and belief while overcoming extreme adversity and suffering in the modern world.

When looking at this book, and indeed considering the events of the Holocaust, it is very difficult to understand or even to come to terms with what the true meaning of suffering and loss truly is. Both explained through biblical narratives and in looking from a modern perspective, such understandings are challenging. Not only because of the biblical foundations of suffering and their meanings, but in trying to find answers from God on the importance of suffering, and especially in a post-Holocaust context, where does this line need to be drawn to comprehend either the full power of God or the challenges that have and will, historically, be placed on the Jewish people time and time again. This brings about some elements of understanding but ultimately also brings more questions on 'why' such atrocities can occur and what is the ultimate purpose of such atrocities.

2.5 Conclusion

When it comes to looking closer at the biblical texts in order to find understandings of suffering from different biblical perspectives, it is evident from the three texts explored that there can be, and will always be, varying understandings and interpretations on what the texts can mean for the modern reader, when trying to compare this to the ancient reader- with vastly different contexts to consider. By looking into these texts, it is clear that elements of biblical history can be present across all three where the initial laws of understanding were in place through Deuteronomy, however, in light of later occurrences such as the destruction of the temple and later again, during the Holocaust, it is important then to reconsider and reevaluate these initial theologies and understanding of suffering in light of catastrophic events that have occurred across history. Something that can be concluded on the understanding of suffering within the

²⁷ Dan Mathewson, 'Between Testimony and Interpretation: The Book of Job in Post-Holocaust Jewish Theological Reflection', p.36

Hebrew Bible is how it does not resolve the problem of suffering through one theologically correct answer. Instead of this, it preserves these competing voices and theologies where suffering can be understood as divine judgement, inexplicable injustice on character, or even endured communal catastrophe. Yet, across these differences, the texts further bring back the notion that suffering need not result in the abandonment of the relationship with God. Rather, through obedience, protest, lament and hope, suffering becomes a site of continuing theological engagement across time.

This has become even more so of a factor when it comes to modern theological thinkers and their interactions with the biblical texts on searching for meaning and hope after the Holocaust too. While looking closely at the biblical narratives, these also aim to shed some light on post-Holocaust dialogues when looking at early interactions not only with the biblical texts but also with survivor testimonies and initial theological explorations of the 'why' that was so desperately needed and searched for by survivors. By understanding, firstly, the significance and knowledge of suffering in the biblical narratives, this can then be used as foundations for basing the understanding of theologians during the post-Holocaust discussions on the themes of suffering, God's justice (or injustice) and thus building conversation for debate, analysis and re-evaluation of the meaning of suffering in a modern context.

Chapter 3- Post-Holocaust Theology- Male Discourses

3.1 Introduction

When it comes to understanding the perspectives of different theologians in a post-holocaust context, it is important to acknowledge the differing opinions that have emerged throughout this discussion. These can include differences on understandings of God; the concept of divine absence, hiddenness, death or that God was self-limited during the Holocaust. All of these ideas have been largely discussed in a post-Holocaust context, with thinkers including Eliezer Berkovits, Richard Rubenstein, David Blumenthal, Elie Wiesel and Emil Fackenheim, to name a few I will be looking closer at during this section. By understanding the perspectives of these male theologians when it comes to understandings of God after the Holocaust, it is important to analyse their arguments and get a full understanding of what opinions were considered during this time. Although many theologians and post-Holocaust discussions have debated largely on the ways in which God was interpreted during this time of suffering, it is evident that even by these 5 theologians alone, many differing stances have been debated and discussed since Berkovits' initial thoughts on the matter were published. From her, and even up to modern day suffering, understanding the role of God and searching for some form of answers is the only way, for many, to have that sense of belonging, hope and faith to remain with them. However, this is not the case for all where times of immense suffering challenge even the most faithful to remain with their faith or even to comprehend how an all-loving God can allow such tragedy to occur. This is where theological responses to the Holocaust have caused large divides with faith and belief.

Much of these discussions did not initially come straight from the aftermath of World War Two, where processing grief, loss, displacement, and battles with faith and understanding were to be dealt with before theological debate and thought was began years later. As there was, rightly, large discussions needed where different theologians all aimed to understand why the Holocaust happened and wanted deeper answers, this is what began these discussions to understand God's role (or lack thereof) both during and after the Holocaust. Although, with time like this, it allowed for these ideas to slowly develop and grow into the theological responses that we have today, even from different religions and cultures, exploring the ways in which the events of Holocaust has affected

not only survivors and post-war thinkers, but in how modern thought analyses suffering in the world today and these questions still remain deeply rooted in the theologies of modern thinkers too. I will aim to explore the differing viewpoints of the above-mentioned theologians during this section, where it will highlight the key themes of understanding God's role during and after the Holocaust: whether God was absent, hidden, dead or self-limited, to a point where an answer to immense human suffering was being sought out after the Holocaust. These discussions did not come easily at the time, where it is more important than ever, today, to be continuing these discourses and highlighting the memory of the past to comprehend the past to ensure that the future does not repeat itself.

3.2 Post- Holocaust Dialogues: Rubenstein, Wiesel and Blumenthal

With the differences in views in a post-Holocaust context, it is important to consider these opinions that emerged earliest in the discussions on Holocaust Theology, including that of Richard Rubenstein. His stance highlights a battle for post-war and modern Jewry across the world, where he highlights that "God is regarded as uniquely involved in the history and destiny of Israel..... there is absolutely no way of avoiding the exceedingly painful conclusion that He is the ultimate author of all that has happened to the people of Israel, including the Holocaust."²⁸ This quote highlights deeply this sense of how active Rubenstein feels God has been clearly active across Jewish history in many different ways, including during the Holocaust. This sentiment can be felt massively where Rubenstein emulates this idea that it is difficult to understand or even accept a loving God. Elizabeth Pinder-Ashden further states that "the Shoah challenges all who accept the concept of a loving, providential God- and those who do not,"²⁹ further pushing this challenge of where Jewish thought and understandings of God now rest after such suffering, with some facing challenges of keeping faith and others challenging their faith in God. Steven T Katz adds to Rubenstein's theology of God by stating that "Rubenstein becomes an atheist because he cannot and will not accept

²⁸ Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism* (2nd Ed.), p.157

²⁹ Elizabeth Pinder-Ashden, 'How Jewish Thinkers come to terms with the Holocaust and why it matters for this generation: A Selected Survey and Comment', p.132

God as having been present in any sense at Auschwitz,”³⁰ showing further Rubenstein’s stance on how his faith could not continue knowing about a loving God and his personal struggles with this. Rubenstein takes his viewpoint further by becoming well known after the Holocaust as the ‘Death of God’ theologian, this once more highlights how his pre-Holocaust understanding of God has shifted now in the aftermath of the Holocaust and how this had ultimately changed the way he views God and faith looking forward after such suffering. Jocelyn Hellig also adds that “[Rubenstein] was forced to conclude that God was dead and he mourns God’s death with a ‘cry of agony.’”³¹ This statement further adds to this notion of how Rubenstein was dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust, in particular with his understanding of God during this time too. This also highlights key ideas of many in a post-Holocaust context where this uncertainty and questioning has led many to feel abandoned, forgotten or left to deal with the aftermath of the Holocaust in such drastically different ways as each other.

Along with the theology of Rubenstein, another prominent theologian to mention is David Blumenthal, who had also developed key themes of understanding of God after the Holocaust. Blumenthal holds the understanding that “God is, indeed, present and responsible even in moments of great evil. God is, indeed, partly responsible for the Shoah.”³² With this viewpoint, it is clear to see the way that Blumenthal argues on the matter that God was partly responsible for what happened with the Holocaust, through toleration rather than action. Blumenthal continues to highlight this once trusting and loving God is now not reachable for him, as he says: “I cannot forget or forgive what it felt like to be abandoned by my shepherd,”³³ going from a strong, religious faith pre-Holocaust to a totally different stance in light of extreme suffering and persecution and feeling abandoned. Jennifer L Rike comments further on the understandings of Blumenthal, through his work ‘Facing the Abusing God,’ highlighting that “If God is omnipotent and so could have prevented the Holocaust but did not, how can we avoid the conclusion that God destroys the innocent and so is abusive?”³⁴ This strongly shows

³⁰ Steven T katz, ‘*Post Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*’, p. 151

³¹ Jocelyn Hellig, ‘Richard L. Rubenstein: Theologian of the Holocaust’, p.53

³² David Blumenthal, ‘Despair and Hope in post-Shoah Jewish Life’ (location: publisher, p.122, quoted in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (University of Exeter Press, 2002) p.241

³³ David Blumenthal, ‘*Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*’, p.232

³⁴ Jennifer L Rike, ‘Review: Facing the Abusing God’, p.206

further in the understanding of Blumenthal's theology after the Holocaust in how he or anyone can comprehend the notion of a 'loving God' after the Holocaust. This further adds depth to Blumenthal's theology of protest, in particular, a protest with both God and with his faith, in trying to understand why the Holocaust was allowed to happen without any form of intervention earlier. Rike further adds that "[Blumenthal] seems impervious to the implications of distinguishing between causing evil and allowing it to occur and clings to the conviction that if God is God, God will be wholly omnipotent and so responsible for all evil, regardless of the implications of God's having created humanity free, for good or ill."³⁵ Rike adds this aspect of Blumenthal's understanding of God after the Holocaust in a very negative light, in this case, as being one of continuous debate with God and with Blumenthal's eventual stance on omnipotence. From this statement alone, it is evident that Blumenthal felt that, on the one hand, he understood humanity have been given free will and are rightfully allowed to use this in a way they deem fit, but on the other hand, God's omnipotence should have intervened in some way in order to prevent the Holocaust or even to prevent further destruction and chaos than what had already occurred.

Along with Blumenthal and Rubenstein, holding some similar beliefs in God in a post-Holocaust context, is Elie Wiesel who struggles with his faith after his own experience in a camp in the Holocaust. Although differing slightly to the previous two theologians, Wiesel, rather than at a total loss with God, is however torn with his faith. Dan Cohn-Sherbok makes a statement on this, that "the Holocaust has made questions about God's theodicy all the more urgent. Wiesel the survivor refuses to let God go, but he is at odds with him,"³⁶ further demonstrating that Wiesel is on the border of wanting to abandon his faith completely due to the experiences he faced while in a concentration camp, but also in keeping his faith as a testimony of feeling lost and abandoned but maintaining his entire identity through his faith. Speaking further through his memoir 'Night', it is evident of Wiesel's struggles with keeping his faith and understanding the realities of what happened during the Holocaust. He goes through feelings of being alone and forgotten by God, where he says that "never shall I forget those flames which

³⁵ Jennifer L Rike, 'Review: Facing the Abusing God', p.208

³⁶ Dan Cohn-Sherbok 'God and the Holocaust', p.101

consumed my faith forever,”³⁷ adding to this feeling of despair that was felt within the camps, and of Wiesel’s own personal suffering and questioning. Even with everything that he experienced in the camps during the Holocaust, Wiesel still refuses to totally abandon his faith and beliefs. He goes on to explain how, “as for me, I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice.”³⁸ This statement from Wiesel himself adds this sense of wanting to believe in the justice of God, even when directly faced with persecution and extreme suffering, but there is still a sense of justice that was not felt by Wiesel. This further shows how, although aspects of life were changed irreparably for Wiesel both during the Holocaust and the aftermath, his questioning was a major part of his understanding of what he went through during those years. Paul Bartrop and Steven Jacobs comment on Wiesel’s experiences as written in his memoir ‘Night’ by adding; “[in the book ‘Night’, Elie Wiesel] witnesses the death of his innocence, and the death of his belief in God. Recurring themes are his increasing disgust with mankind and his loss of faith.”³⁹ This statement further adds to this discussion of Wiesel’s sentiments both during and after the Holocaust, that his struggles were very clear in the sense that he had to grapple between his own experiences of suffering with his feelings of faith and life of belief that was before the Holocaust. This, in turn, is a major aspect in many discussions on the understandings of God both during and after the Holocaust.

3.3 Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Berkovits and Fackenheim

After looking closely at the thoughts and understandings of three prominent theologians, it is important to also look at the works of both Eliezer Berkovits and Emil Fackenheim during this time also. From Berkovits’ theologies, these are some of the first understandings post-Holocaust to come to light in the discussions of theodicy. Getting the understanding of two further theologians adds more depth to what was being discussed in a post-Holocaust context. Berkovits argued that different to the death of God, “religious belief is possible after the nightmare of the Crematoria,”⁴⁰ where this

³⁷ Elie Wiesel, ‘*Night*,’ trans. By Marion Wiesel, p.34

³⁸ Wiesel, ‘*Night*,’ p.45

³⁹ Paul Bartrop and Steven Jacobs, ‘*Fifty Key Thinkers on the Holocaust and Genocide*,’ p.295

⁴⁰ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ‘*God and the Holocaust*,’ p.56

stance is clearly very different to what has been previously discussed, shining a different light on thoughts and views after the Holocaust. From this, Berkovits takes this further where he highlights how “the ‘reasoning’ with God is a need of faith, it issues from the very heart of faith,”⁴¹ where this also highlights that Berkovits agrees with a form of questioning and reasoning to develop understanding, where this is a part of the wider picture of belief in his understanding of this. Cohn Sherbok brings back this notion of faith holding Judaism together in the face of evil and suffering directly, where “thousands of Jews proclaimed their love of God in the dark hour when it seemed as though He had abandoned them.”⁴² From this, we can see clearly where Berkovits has noted on the significance of keeping faith during times of suffering, where this idea is almost completely refuted by the previous theologians in some way. Berkovits builds his theology on trying to understand the importance of faith and in understanding further what this now means for Judaism as a religion to move into the 21st century after persecution.

Berkovits’ theology also highlights another key aspect of understanding the role of God with an understanding of divine silence. For Berkovits, Cohn Sherbok comments that: “in biblical terminology, this concept of divine silence is expressed by the Hebrew phrase *Hester Panim* (the hiding of the face): when suffering occurs, God hides his face from human suffering.”⁴³ This idea, that God was present however could not intervene within human history, gives many the sense of comfort after the reality of suffering during the Holocaust, knowing that although immense suffering and loss occurred in the Holocaust, that their God did not fully turn his back away in their time of need. Exploring this idea of the ‘hiddenness of God’ or hiding his face in light of the suffering of His people, this is explored by Berkovits as a way of understanding not only the role of God but also in finding an explanation to suffering that allows faith to be continued. This brings the discussion further onto the part that other humans have played during the Holocaust, where Berkovits even questions God’s silence by asking; “does all this justify God’s silence during the European Holocaust of the Jewish people, or does it even

⁴¹ Eliezer Berkovits, ‘*Faith After the Holocaust*’, p.68

⁴² Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ‘*God and the Holocaust*’, p.57

⁴³ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ‘*God and the Holocaust*’, p.59

explain it?”⁴⁴ This question is not only directed towards Jewish followers but also makes the rest of humanity question their role either during or after the Holocaust too. For Berkovits, there is also a need to understand the lengths to what humanity can go to in this sense, where the catastrophes of the Holocaust need to be explored both through the lens of faith and a lens of understanding humanities actions. He goes on to highlight that “God is responsible for having created a world in which man is free to make history.”⁴⁵ This argues further the understanding of Berkovits and his idea of dealing with the role of God during the Holocaust, where he places the blame on humanity rather than the lack of response by God. In this way, although God gave humanity free will, this further allowed humanity to create their own histories without the intervention of God in any way. This gives Berkovits the positivity to feel that, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, through this less cynical lens compared with the previous theologians, that there is much to be blamed on the actions of humanity for the events that occurred, where this role of God almost seems that of an unwilling onlooker throughout the Holocaust.

Along a similar theology to Berkovits is the understandings of Emil Fackenheim, who takes a similarly positive outlook towards the post-war sentiments to the belief in God and perseverance of faith after the Holocaust. Steven T Katz highlights how “..... he contends the Jew must still affirm the continued proximity of God in Jewish history..... and he must reaffirm the present reality of the people’s ‘root experiences’ of a commanding God (of Sinai), now commanding Israel from within the Holocaust itself.”⁴⁶ This statement is regarded as the changing point within Fackenheim’s own theology and that of the understanding of the Holocaust for many in a post-war context. From this, it is clear to see that Fackenheim regards this ‘commanding voice’ from the Holocaust pushing survivors to continue in the path of their faith in order to maintain the Jewish faith. This began from a question that Fackenheim wanted to find an answer to, stating that “the imperative that drove Fackenheim’s thought was the search for an answer to the vexing question, ‘where was God at Auschwitz?’”⁴⁷ This question was definitely at the forefront of many theologians during the aftermath of the Holocaust, and also for

⁴⁴ Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, p.128

⁴⁵ Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, p.136

⁴⁶ Steven.T Katz, *Post Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, p.154

⁴⁷ Paul Bartrop and Steven Jacobs, *Fifty Key Thinkers on the Holocaust and Genocide*, p.106

survivors. This further adds to Fackenheim's theology where it is not as much a complete disregard of God and the feeling of total abandonment, as seen in previous theologians works, however a question about God's presence was still needed to be asked in order to discuss answers. This theology is not one of negativity or bitterness towards God, but rather of what must now be done in light of the Holocaust as Fackenheim states that "[when] faced with the radical threat of extinction, they were stubbornly defying it, committing themselves, if to nothing more, to the survival of themselves and their children as Jews."⁴⁸ This statement stands out clearly in Fackenheim's theology on the understanding of what must happen now, after the Holocaust and what is essentially the next key aspect of faith- this belief and commitment to the faith of the past and to survival is key to the survival of Judaism as a religion.

With this, Fackenheim's main understanding and explanation for this stems from his own understanding of why survival is essential for Judaism. For this, he argued that "Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish..... Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish."⁴⁹ This statement is the basis of Fackenheim's theology- to ensure that Judaism survives after the Holocaust, is to ensure the continuity of the religion in the face of persecution. Without the continuation of the faith, this would, for Fackenheim, mean that Hitler has won and achieved what the 'Final Solution' intended to achieve, therefore this statement is key to the survival of the faith as a whole for modern Jewry. He continues this further through the creation of a 614th commandment: "to deny Hitler the posthumous victory of destroying this faith was a moral- religious commandment,"⁵⁰ where this also directs Fackenheim's theology as such to ensure that no matter what was to happen after the end of the Second World War, that the faith was to be continued in any way. Katz also highlights how "involved in and affected by the Nazi onslaught, Fackenheim, like most of his generation, felt the

⁴⁸ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *'God and the Holocaust'*, p.43

⁴⁹ Emil Fackenheim., *'God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections'*, p.45

⁵⁰ Emil Fackenheim., *'To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought'*, p.xix

need to reappraise the nature and status of Judaism,”⁵¹ where this expands on Fackenheim’s theological understanding and efforts to ensure the continuation of the Jewish faith is what will beat Hitler in the end. These further highlights what is key for Jewish thought in a post-Holocaust world where differing opinions and thoughts have battled each other over the years since the Holocaust, however Fackenheim’s theology puts a clearer focus on the continuation of the faith rather of the direct questioning of God because of what had happened.

3.4 Conclusion

After exploring the differing opinions surrounding post-Holocaust thought, it is evident that many thinkers of the time could see that with suffering that was experienced in the Holocaust, that these discussions were needed to process and determine belief in faith once more. This was the groundwork for the need to maintain faith- the commanding voice that powered from the camps and into this new world post war for survivors to survive. This was the boost of faith from this point to ensure that the eradication of a nation was going to be unsuccessful and that faith after tragedy can grow larger when overcoming this. However, it can also be seen that arguments for the lack of faith and turning away from religion or even from God can also have a huge impact on an individual or group of people. From this, the questions arise asking ‘how can we believe’ after suffering and ‘why’ These questions remain deeply rooted amongst theologians to fully comprehend why the Holocaust happened and how can a religion return to its pre-war beliefs now. With the Holocaust causing many theories and debates regarding the nature of God or even God’s involvement or lack of during the war, it is clear to see through these 5 theologians that much can be said about engagement with these ideas were crucial during these early days of post-Holocaust theology. This is still being debated today where modern perspectives come into play, from Holocaust survivors’ children who are now coming to terms with their families past and are exploring how modern Jewry are responding even now to Holocaust theology and memories. These opinions have grown vastly since the early post-Holocaust discussions of the 1980’s

⁵¹ Steven T Katz, *Post Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, p.151

and have included previously unheard-of voices; those of women theologians and women Holocaust survivors speaking of their experiences during the Holocaust.

Chapter 4: Women's Voices and Feminist Theology in post-Holocaust Discourse

4.1 Introduction

When looking closely at the male theological perspectives of not only the Holocaust but also post-Holocaust theological discussions, it is evident that although those experiences are largely valid to be needed for discussion, half of the discussion is actually missing- women's perspectives/ voices. From this, since around the 1970s, women's discussions have started to become more acknowledged and included within the broader Holocaust discussion, which seeks to include all voices of persecution where women have written about, spoken about and shared their views and experiences with the world. From here, it is significant, then, to highlight firstly the gendered analysis of the Holocaust from women's personal experiences of concentration camps, in particular of Auschwitz, and also by looking closely into the understanding of Jewish feminist theology in order to highlight these missing narratives from earlier discussions, to bring light into the broader spectrum of Jewish experience. I will intend to highlight the differences of gendered experiences that women experienced in the Holocaust and look further at theological stances towards feminism and the inclusion of this much-needed aspect of Judaism. This by no means aims to eliminate or change the experiences of men during the Holocaust but rather adds the voices of women to an already growing discussion.

4.2 Women's Experiences of the Holocaust

When looking closer at the events of the Holocaust, and on the writings of Holocaust survivors, it is important to consider the broader picture of what individual experiences were like. From this, I will be using the writings of different Holocaust survivors, including Olga Lengyel, Gisella Perl, Eva Schloss, Krystyna Żywulska and a compilation of women's narratives from the work of Joy Erlichman Miller, in order to establish gender-specific persecution, with the aim of bringing these specific experiences to light, and allowing the experiences of women to be further explored.

4.2.1 Gendered experiences of persecution, bodily vulnerability and violence

All of the women mentioned above write about their initial arrival at Auschwitz concentration camp, whereby just being a woman was picked up on instantly. We can see from Judith Tydor Baumel's insight that "women who were pregnant, or carrying small children, were automatically condemned to death while men of the same age- usually between twenty and thirty- had the best chances of surviving a selection."⁵² This was selection upon arrival at Auschwitz, where the chances of women to survive or even to attempt to work to try and survive were instantly taken away from them, as Olga Lengyel writes; "children and old people were told off automatically, 'to the left!'"⁵³ Where this instant decision was made, many women, unable to leave their children with a stranger or not willing to go apart, who could have survived the selection process, chose to stay with their young children instead and were made to go 'to the left' and ultimately to their unknowing death. However, the unimaginable experiences that women had to endure, even only at this initial stage of arrival at the camps, "forced women to choose between survival and their role as mothers, some women abandoned maternal responsibilities,"⁵⁴ Zoë Waxman highlights here a very difficult and obviously challenging part of the selection process. Where a mother has this choice is not one that any mother would ever want to make in their life, it was a decision upon learning such a fate for oneself which, under such circumstances, what does one do? This initial target of women and children is explained by Joy Miller as to the reasons for 'why' women and children were to 'go left' instantly: "this intentional 'Final Solution' was only made possible by targeting Jewish women specifically as women, for they were the child bearers, the only ones able to ensure the continuity of Jewish life."⁵⁵ With this statement, the chances that women had on even a small hope of surviving even the initial selection was quite clearly much less than compared to that of the men, even

⁵² Judith Tydor Baumel, 'You Said the Words You Wanted Me to Hear but I Heard The Words you Couldn't Bring Yourself to Say: Women's First-Person Accounts of the Holocaust', p.50

⁵³ Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivors True Story of Auschwitz*, p.23

⁵⁴ Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History*, first eds., p.87

⁵⁵ Joy Miller, *Love Carried Me Home: Women Surviving Auschwitz*, p.185

though this selection process did not guarantee life for anyone involved- with the ultimate aim of annihilating all Jews.

Women Holocaust survivors have also spoken on bodily vulnerability upon passing selection, women have discussed largely about this next phase of dehumanization along a long and dark process. Gisella Perl describes her experience similar to a 'beauty parlour' when thinking back to her home town and going to the salon for a hair cut or just to feel feminine in this way, but she continues by saying; "but its purpose was the exact opposite of that of an American beauty parlour; its purpose was to deprive its unwilling clients of even their last remnants of beauty, freshness, and human appearance."⁵⁶ This experience being compared to a previous life of femineity, positivity and peace, now can only be explained as the complete opposite. Many women have highlighted this feeling of 'losing their femininity' during this aspect of the selection process, where Krystyna Żywulska says that "we all looked alike. I never imagined that hair added so much personality,"⁵⁷ where the aspect of visual femininity, not just for Jewish women but women globally, includes that of their hair and how they looked. Lengyel comments on the moment that she finally saw her husband after enduring the cutting, tattooing and eventual showers, upon entering the camp she explains: "certainly, I did not look like the woman who had been his wife and companion in happier days,"⁵⁸ where this concern of hers was even more upsetting, that, faced with the horrors and terrors of what she had already been through, on losing her mother and her son upon entering the selection, that she could only think about how she no longer looked or felt like a woman anymore.⁵⁹

Violence, both physical and sexual, has been documented by many women Holocaust survivors where, for the purpose of this essay, I will not go into the full details of the experiences of such violence due to the nature of it, however it is just as important to illustrate the full female experience of the Holocaust through their testimonies and insights. From this stems a seemingly important element for discussion on female menstruation, another topic that would not have affected men during the Holocaust.

⁵⁶ Gisella Perl, *'I was a Doctor in Auschwitz'*, p.41

⁵⁷ Krystyna Żywulska, *'I Survived Auschwitz'*, p.22

⁵⁸ Lengyel, *'Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivors True Story of Auschwitz'*, p.43

⁵⁹ Lengyel, *'Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivors True Story of Auschwitz'*, pp.24-29

Not just experiencing physical violence but mental torture, as Waxman notes, “for many women, the loss of the menstrual cycle which they experienced was deeply traumatic and a further blow to their psyches as they worried about their potential to be mothers and wives [in the future].”⁶⁰ Although this aspect seems to highlight the worries of women and their anguish at their potential futures, this loss of ultimate womanhood felt, to many, as a total loss of their identity and meaning of being a woman entirely. Accounts of women suffering from sexual advances from SS guards and other men during the Holocaust is touched on by some survivors, where such details are excluded also due to the authors choice and wanting to not relive such experiences too. However, Eva Schloss highlights how “a small mercy, I suppose, was that none of the women in Birkenau had their periods after the first week they arrived,”⁶¹ where this was not so much a worry of not being able to be a mother once the war had ended or fulfilling the duty of a Jewish woman, but more of a target to sexual advances due to no longer menstruating was to cause many women. Even still, some women testimonies have highlighted how the use of the terms ‘bleeding’ or ‘blood’ when being approached by men trying to take advantage of them also protected some women from such advances, seemingly to help them to escape a potential abuse.

4.2.2 Juxtaposition of Motherhood and Caregiving, networks of support and familial bonds

Upon looking at the ways in which women survivors have written their testimonies on their experience of the Holocaust, it is important to consider also this odd juxtaposition of the terms ‘motherhood’ and ‘caregiving,’ in some respects seemingly interconnected but in others, totally the opposite. Perl highlights this as a battle of whose life was more important to preserve- where “it was up to me to save the life of the mothers, if there was no other way, then by destroying the life of their unborn children.”⁶² This heartbreaking reality that many women had to endure was in this way, the need to at least preserve one life (that of the mother) in the hope that, upon being found pregnant,

⁶⁰ Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History*, p.93

⁶¹ Eva Schloss, *‘After Auschwitz: The Breathtaking True Story of Heartbreak and Survival by the Step Sister of Anne Frank’*, p.127

⁶² Perl, *‘I was a Doctor in Auschwitz’*, p.80

both would surely have been killed in that instance. Myrna Goldenberg also comments on this aspect of 'motherhood' within the camps where she states that "childbirth was a particularly difficult experience for Jewish women in the concentration camps. It was an acutely complex and ironic experience, 'turning mothers into murderers.'" ⁶³ With this is a very difficult matter of attempting to preserve at least one life during this process on the account of losing two lives. Joan Ringelheim also highlights this aspect of 'motherhood' experienced within the camps and how the choices of women, mothers and expectant mothers were beyond any rational choice that would be made in a modern context. Ringelheim highlights this as a 'mental anguish,' for women must face an unending list of possibilities of keeping their child and causing death to themselves and their child, potential death to other inmates, choosing to abort and preserve at least one life, choosing to die with their child/ren, killing a baby due to not wanting to jeopardize the other inmates; all such choices which male survivors never wrote about or had to experience in the camps. ⁶⁴ With all of this considered, the unimaginable mental suffering alone when facing these impossible scenarios clearly took a toll on women's experiences of the concentration camps.

In other aspects however, we also see some glimmers of hope, of solidarity, of bonding, and of women coming together during times of trauma and anguish of the Holocaust that do not diminish the brutality of the Holocaust in any way, but rather show the bonds that women built in order to survive together. Baumel highlights that "virtually all of the women's memoirs written during this early period emphasised the role of female self-help and mutual assistance in their author's survival," ⁶⁵ where the countless narratives from Holocaust survivors all highlight this togetherness that was, for them, a form of trying to survive to warn others of what happened and to present the true case of history. Some women experienced this guiding help from family, from strangers and even through building connections with other lonely women within the camps. Schloss highlights the support from her mother as her guide to survival, as she says that "there was little the women of Birkenau could really do for each other- but Mutti [her mother]

⁶³ Myrna Goldenberg, 'Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remember the Holocaust', in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, ed. By Roger S. Gottlieb, p.86

⁶⁴ Joan Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research', pp.745-746

⁶⁵ Baumel, 'You Said the Words You Wanted Me to Hear but I Heard The Words you Couldn't Bring Yourself to Say: Women's First-Person Accounts of the Holocaust', p.29

did everything she could to help me,”⁶⁶ where she described of the unending support from her mother during her time in Auschwitz as one of the main reasons for her survival. Other women speak of familial bonds in this way, as two sisters experiencing Auschwitz together as explained by Miller about the experience of Helen G and her sister: “determined to live and support each other, the two faced each day in an effort to survive.”⁶⁷ These familial bonds have been described by other Holocaust survivors including Perl and Lengyel, where these relationships were key to ensuring and hoping for the survival of each other through such close bonds.

Female bonds of solidarity through non-familial instances were also documented, as Nina K. explained in Millers book- “people did care for each other. People did give each other moral support,”⁶⁸ with other survivors also highlighting the importance of such bonds of sisterhood with the camps as forming aspects of their survival. Lengyel mentions of women supporting other women through offering spare clothes, shoes, underwear etc, where such items were valuable in keeping women warm through the winter and preserving some form of dignity.⁶⁹ Miller even highlights women’s solidarity and assistance throughout camp life with the narrative of Mady D. where “... the women in the roll-call lines assisted each other to create an illusion that they were strong enough to continue through the day,”⁷⁰ further showing the connections being built amongst women to create these bonds of mutual survival under extreme and shared trauma. Goldenberg highlights how “although all respected Holocaust sources by survivors and scholars emphasise that... survival... was random.... [women’s memoirs] implicitly or explicitly credit survival to some manner of women’s friendships and collaboration.”⁷¹ This further emanates with the ways in which women’s attempts at getting through this suffering was through their connections and bonds with each other and highlighting this as a form of path towards their survival. This bond was particularly highlighted by Margarete Myers Feinstein as “... mothering is associated not only with

⁶⁶ Schloss, ‘*After Auschwitz: The Breathtaking True Story of Heartbreak and Survival by the Step Sister of Anne Frank*’, p.129

⁶⁷ Miller, ‘*Love Carried Me Home: Women Surviving Auschwitz*’, p.57

⁶⁸ Miller, ‘*Love Carried Me Home: Women Surviving Auschwitz*’, p.35

⁶⁹ Lengyel, ‘*Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivors True Story of Auschwitz*’, p.133

⁷⁰ Miller, ‘*Love Carried Me Home: Women Surviving Auschwitz*’, p.6

⁷¹ Goldenberg, ‘Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remember the Holocaust’, in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, p.86

the affection for others, but with a leadership role in providing for the physical and emotional care of one's charges,"⁷² showing once again how this role of 'mothering' was not simply by being a mother but by emanating such care, thought, emotion and kindness towards other women, towards other human beings while trying to just survive another day of torture in Auschwitz, brought many women together through such circumstances.

Much of what can be said about women's experiences and in a strong differentiation to the experiences of men during the Holocaust, this does not fully cover the scope of trauma and suffering encountered by women. This leads on to the question of post-Holocaust theology, where women's personal experiences in some ways differed from men's experiences, therefore, how were/ are women's theological insights in a post-Holocaust context viewed?

4.3 Feminist responses in dialogue with Holocaust Theology

Feminist Jewish thinkers have long waited to join the discourse not just on Jewish theology but specifically on Feminist theology, looking closer at female seclusion, limitations and the changes that could be brought to light in a modern context of women in Judaism as a whole. These discussions are still ongoing and are still aiming to provide change within a deeply patriarchal- rooted faith, where the inclusion of these thoughts bring feminism to the front of change in modern day Judaism.

4.3.1 Feminist Thinkers

When looking into Jewish feminist theologians and theories, it is crucial to highlight the groundbreaking works of Melissa Raphael, Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler, Marion Kaplan and Joan Ringelheim, to highlight just a few key names within this every growing discussion.

Many feminist thinkers take their discussions to the Hebrew Bible itself, where Plaskow asks not only herself but Jewish women the following question: "How, then, might the

⁷² Margarete Myers Feinstein, 'Absent Voices: Women in Holocaust Studies', *Nashim: A Journal of Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, 13 (2007), p.169

central Jewish categories of Torah, Israel, and God change as women appropriate them through the lens of our experience?”⁷³ This question is called upon for the ways in which the inclusion of women, both biblically and in modern contexts, will now need to view Judaism as a whole through a newer, inclusive lens to include all Jews. Adler follows on from Plaskow’s need to include feminist thought in Judaism by highlighting how “if law, ritual and study are the constitutive activities of Judaism, women cannot be other than peripheral Jews until they are full participants in these activities,”⁷⁴ whose argument moves from not just women wanting to be seen and heard more clearly but to be physically included in much of what makes Judaism, Judaism, as a spiritual connection to their God. Adler battles, however, with this inclusion as she questions: “... if feminists reject the categories and content of the tradition, how can they claim that what they create in its place is authentically Jewish?”⁷⁵ From this stance, it is clear that there is a fine line that Jewish feminists need to take in order to both preserve the authentic Judaism of their ancestors but also to change this practice for inclusion just enough to not skew any form of authenticity, a seemingly huge task. Plaskow goes on to argue how “it is not enough for men in power to yield some of their power to women; ... the structures of Jewish communal and family life will have to change to make it possible for women and men to assume new tasks.”⁷⁶ This basis comes from her understanding that it is simply not just a matter of men deciding what women can do differently, this must come from women’s active decision for involvement, to be seen, to be heard, and importantly to be active members in their religion. Heschel explores this further where “the result is an identification of women with physical work- childbearing, cooking, cleaning- while men are identified with spiritual activities- prayer, study, rituals,”⁷⁷ where this adds further to this discussion of women’s immediate exclusion from what constitutes Judaism- for men to have this personal, achievable relationship with God through prayer and study, where women are relegated to merely just mothers, cleaners of the home and sustainers of family life. These roles are not regarded as the same,

⁷³ Judith Plaskow, *‘Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective’*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p.vii

⁷⁴ Rachel Adler, *‘Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics’*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), p.xix

⁷⁵ Adler, *‘Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics’*, pp.xix-xx

⁷⁶ Plaskow, *‘Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective’*, p.228

⁷⁷ Susannah Heschel, *‘On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader’*, p.4

bringing back the notion of women being just ‘peripheral Jews’ and not having the full access to learn, study or be members of their community. Plaskow reiterates this notion that women’s role within Judaism lies largely with their biological contributions, nothing more, nothing less, by stating that “without women, it is impossible that any community could continue. Yet, as normative Jewish texts are concerned, women are perceived largely in terms of the need for biological continuity.”⁷⁸ From this, therefore, the significance of women’s biology alone should count as a meaningful impact and contribution to Judaism, yet the true meaning of Judaism, for many feminists, is not just by being mothers and allowing the faith to continue in this sense, but to be included in prayer, worship, study of Torah and Halakhah (Jewish Law); for women to be seen by not only their community but by their God as active, religious Jews not just ‘peripheral Jews.’

This, in turn, brings about the notion of feminist discussions on the Holocaust, especially when looking closer at the initial feminist discussion on Judaism in general, but this raises the question of where women’s experiences and theological discussions on the Holocaust connect with their wider understanding of Judaism now. Melissa Raphael, a prominent theologian on Holocaust discourse, has written extensively on this matter. She highlights a new way of ‘seeing’ God through the Holocaust, that “... by means of mutual care, these women summoned *Shekinah* (the traditional female image of the Holy presence of God) into the very abyss of profanity.”⁷⁹ This understanding of the female presence of God being present in the Holocaust is widely seen by feminist Holocaust scholars through the testimonies and writings of women survivors, in their sharing, caregiving and bonds with one another, proves to them that an element of the *Shekinah* was present during the Holocaust amongst women. Plaskow further adds to the discussion of *Shekinah*, by noting that it is “... precisely that aspect of God with which we can be in relation, and it is experienced in joint study, community gatherings, lovemaking, and other moments of common and intimate human connection.”⁸⁰ This feminine aspect of God makes this whole notion seem somewhat knowable, as opposed to the unknowable aspects of God that are only permissible by men, and in

⁷⁸ Plaskow, ‘Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective’, pp. 82-83

⁷⁹ Melissa Raphael, ‘When God Beheld God: Notes towards a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust’, p.54

⁸⁰ Plaskow, ‘Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective’, pp.139-140

some cases, certain men too, opening up the connection to the God of Israel to the people of Israel, not a selection of men alone. Alana M Vincent takes this discussion further on the presence of God in the Holocaust where she highlights the importance to “... both acknowledge God’s suffering presence within the Holocaust and to seek redress from God for permitting the Holocaust to happen,”⁸¹ showing again here the duality of theological understandings in terms of both acknowledging God’s presence and inaction within the Holocaust together. Raphael takes this point further by noting how “... post-Holocaust theology is distinctive in granting antitheodic traditions a normative status; God, far more than the victims, is blamed for Jewish suffering,”⁸² where this adds to the need for changing, initially the biblical stance on Jewish suffering was due to sin (Deuteronomy) to now use a broader lens in capturing a deeper, theological post-Holocaust stance on the understanding of suffering in light of modernity. Sara Litchfield adds her understanding that the Holocaust was not just a feminist issue but an issue for humanity and goes on to state that “after the Shoah, Jewish feminist theologians (whose very presence is a post-Holocaust phenomenon) have also called for a reformulation of their own faith,”⁸³ further pushing this imperative need for new discourse, inclusion of women’s voices and the need to keep adding to this discussion on post-Holocaust theology.

4.3.2 In Dialogue with male Holocaust Theologians

By initially gathering the discourses from feminist theologians and post-Holocaust theologians, the conversation naturally reverts to those of the male discourses, as explored in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, where feminist theological stances can intertwine, challenge and reiterate those of the earlier male theologies. This will not be a repetition of previously argued theological ideas but rather a reflection of feminist theological ideas in response to the initial male-centred ideologies.

Raphael contends with many of the male thinkers in not trying to disprove their theologies but rather to be in discussion with them, by stating that “a God whose

⁸¹ Alana M Vincent, ‘Seeking the Female Face of God: A Feminist Liturgical Reading’, p.16

⁸² Melissa Raphael, ‘Is Patriarchal Theology Still Patriarchal?’, p.107

⁸³ Sara Litchfield, ‘Feminist Theology and the Holocaust’, pp.332, 337

presence is a mothering one is not that of Emil Fackenheim whose God is the 'commanding voice of Auschwitz' pronouncing a 614th commandment,"⁸⁴ showing this male perspective from Fackenheim's theological stance as being commanding rather than Raphael's more 'feminine', internal emanation of God. She goes on to argue against Eliezer Berkovits' theological paradox on God's presence in His absence, by stating that "... the God of the Orthodox theologian Eliezer Berkovits who, in order to protect human free will, must hide his face; must turn away."⁸⁵ This adds further to Raphael's plight in pushing for women's theological discussions to come to light, in particular after the Holocaust, in order to attempt a preservation of the ideas of God and in allowing her discussion on 'the Female Face of God' to offer an approach similar to Berkovits but with a caring and feminine aspect of God to come to the discourse rather than simply agreeing with divine hiddenness in this respect. Raphael explores this anger that is felt amongst survivors and generations after the Second World War, especially in light of the poignant works of Elie Wiesel, where this battle of wanting to keep faith, wanting to preserve what little hope there is after liberation, but also contending with anger and unresolved feelings of being abandoned during the Holocaust which Wiesel and Raphael both contend with. Raphael highlights how "such a protest... is patriarchal insofar as it consists in anger at God's failure to be patriarchal enough,"⁸⁶ and she goes on to add how Israel was "impossibly, both the victim of history and the standard bearer of its omnipotent Lord."⁸⁷ Both statements bear a battle that was felt by both men and women survivors of the Holocaust, where this seemingly strong sense of faith is echoed across survivor testimony but, ultimately, questions of 'why' will still remain as partially unresolved due this conflict of keeping faith and anger at what has happened to Jewish men and women during the Holocaust.

Katherina von Kellenbach adds further to this discussion by highlighting the Jewish need for resistance, "... to the Nazi assault on the Jewish body and the Jewish family... becomes the site of women's revelation of God's presence in the midst of desolation and profanization."⁸⁸ This falls in line with David Blumenthal's discussions, to some

⁸⁴ Raphael, 'When God Beheld God: Notes towards a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust', p.65

⁸⁵ Raphael, 'When God Beheld God: Notes towards a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust', p.66

⁸⁶ Raphael, 'Is Patriarchal Theology Still Patriarchal?', p.111

⁸⁷ Raphael, 'Is Patriarchal Theology Still Patriarchal?', p.112

⁸⁸ Katherina von Kellenbach, 'Constructing a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust', p.172

extent, on the differing ways of protest that could be seen both within the camps and after liberation. This form of protest does not necessarily need to be against God or the religion itself, but rather a protest, for von Kellenbach, of the revelation of God's presence through protest which enabled many survivors to keep their faith in the face of immense trauma, where Blumenthal, although argues on an 'abusive God' in this sense, still sees the importance of protest for keeping faith while challenging the aftermath of suffering. Raphael and Alexandra Wright both speak with Richard Rubenstein on his notion of the 'death of God' but rather than implying this as strictly as he does, Raphael rejects this notion entirely by stating that the "... assertion that the Holocaust dealt a death blow to the biblical God,"⁸⁹ is utterly impossible to contend with due to the need to continue both Jewish faith and belief in God in order to preserve Judaism. Wright goes on to add how Rubenstein was right in the sense of, not believing in the 'death of God,' but rather that the aftermath of the Holocaust has "opened up an entirely new dimension of spiritual creativity and thought that can only have a regenerative and renewing influence on Judaism."⁹⁰ From this, a slightly more positive outlook on a renewal of faith rather the death of the faith entirely, where historical and biblical understandings on the nature of God must now be renewed in light of the Holocaust and new paths must now be generated in order to return to any form of 'traditional' Judaism that was once before.

Much can be said on both the similar and differing theologies of men and women theologians after a time of extreme destruction for Judaism as a religion, as a whole, where it is important to see these discussions not only to be taken as 'male and female opinions' separately but in conversation with each other, as a suffered nation, as one peoples of a religion coming to terms with the realities of their immediate past and looking now at rebuilding their futures, together.

4.4 Conclusion

Where it has been important to highlight and include the specific voices of women Holocaust survivors for this piece, it has brought about a much-needed dialogue with male survivors as much as a needed dialogue with male theologians on both coming to

⁸⁹ Raphael, 'Is Patriarchal Theology Still Patriarchal?', p.109

⁹⁰ Alexandra Wright, 'An Approach to Jewish Feminist Theology', p.109

terms with the aftermath of the Holocaust and also in rebuilding their faith, as a nation, together rather than in competition with one another. The importance, therefore, of this inclusion of the often missed women's experiences and theological input can and will have a profound impact on future theological discussions, not just on the Holocaust, but on how Judaism as a whole can become more inclusive, can reexamine the lost voices of women and girls, and recover these narratives to build a more inclusive, complete Judaism for the future generations of Judaism as a whole.

5 Concluding Remarks

The themes of suffering in a biblical context can be quite difficult to comprehend from a modern perspective, however, looking at the texts using a modern lens but seeing through the text of its own time, it is certain that such discussions on suffering were relevant and were needed to be initially understood through biblical texts. From this, themes of suffering, as pointed in chapter 2, cannot be reduced simply to one fundamental understanding of suffering in general as even within the biblical narratives explored, there is a plurality of understandings, theories and stories that all aim to highlight aspects of suffering but in different ways. Rather than offering a single explanation, as both the Hebrew Bible and history has seen, therefore allows for the interpretation of different forms of suffering across time to be seen, analysed and learnt from in many ways. This is not to highlight that the most significant comparison of suffering from a modern perspective in comparison with biblical literature, is obviously with that of Job and the Holocaust, much can still be gleamed on not only understanding the initial meaning of the biblical text but also in how this can be used in a post-Holocaust context to deal with the reality of suffering of the Jewish people and everyone who suffered greatly during the Holocaust. By looking back into the Hebrew Bible, there can be elements of hope, of faith, of reconnection that guides survivors into this newfound relationship with their faith and with their God. By exploring different themes of suffering within the biblical texts, this gives a basis to the thoughts and decisions that many theologians and survivors came to their individual conclusions on faith after the Holocaust and in rebuilding their lives after catastrophe.

Holocaust theology has been a keen interest of mine since first learning of the Holocaust back in school. From this, the want to further explore not only the events of the Holocaust but also deeper theological discussions and ideas on theology in a post war context too forms the basis of the ways in which Judaism moves forwards considering the Second World War. Rather than creating new theological debates and problems, these discussions open personal testimonies from survivors in both surviving the camps to learning how to live in freedom. Largely discussed by male theologians, the first to consider even writing or telling of their stories of the past, male scholars initially sought answers for many questions: most importantly that of suffering,

persecution, where was God, why us and so on. Many questions that, either personally or spiritually, have either been answered or been ignored, forms the basis for further Holocaust theological discussions to continue. By developing these conversations further, this also includes recently established women's discourses that have been added into the discussion, where previously missing, now enables both male and female theological discussions to be analysed, refuted, challenged, agreed upon and debated to include a fuller picture of the vast scholarly debate that involves both the Holocaust history and theological implications.

When researching the women's particular experiences of the Holocaust from survivor testimonies, it was quickly becoming evident that gender did play a huge role in both women's experiences of the Holocaust and eventual deaths upon entrance to Auschwitz in particular. Although detail of men's Holocaust experiences has not been covered within this dissertation, I felt it important to retrieve and present the often missed and often overlooked voices of women's history during this time. Where many of the experiences of Holocaust survivors seem to compile together to form one voice, I felt it important, now more than ever, to begin to unscramble these merged voices to portray a clearer, unique picture of the true atrocities endured by women during the Holocaust. Taking into account feminist theology has broadened my own research further by not coming into argument with male theologians but by utilising their initial concepts to bring about newer, modern concepts in relation to women on the Holocaust. This in no way replaces previous, male dialogues but rather enhances initial thought and reframes key theological discussions for a more balanced, whole approach to theological interpretations from Judaism. Although discussions on Holocaust theology are vastly important, regardless of gender, it is imperative now to keep these voices heard, within scholarly debate and within the media in order to preserve not only the memories of Holocaust survivors but remember the past in order for it to not be repeated again. As we move further away from 1945 in our current timeline, I find it imperative to carry on this conversation of the Holocaust through personal testimonies, school visits, Holocaust educational groups, visits to Auschwitz, and more, that can be a constant reminder that, one day the survivors will all have passed away and our only way of learning from the past is through reading, studying, generating their voices and

experiences through different means in order to preserve this memory for the world to continue to learn from.

The question that has guided me through this dissertation has been: what happens when the last survivor is gone? The disappearance of living witnesses does not mean the end of testimony or theological dialogue. This responsibility shifts from survivor to listener to survivor, family, scholar, theologian, and the future generations. The death of the last survivor need not mean the death of the Holocaust memory, but it will change the responsibility of those who inherit that memory in order to continue these dialogues, debates, and most importantly, in preserving the past in order to never repeat the same mistakes for the future.

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