

Women in Scripture



A Dictionary of
Named and Unnamed Women in the
Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books,
and the New Testament



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of the home. They may be implicitly contrasted with the “little women” (NRSV, “silly women”) of 2 Tim 3:6 who are easily deceived by false teachers, and the depiction of Eunice and Lois should be understood within the broader context of the same author’s instructions about appropriate and inappropriate behavior for women: 1 Tim 2:9–14 (the author forbids women to teach or have authority over men — presumably the instruction of children is not intended by this prohibition), 3:11 (on women deacons), and 5:2–6 (on widows).

ROSS S. KRAEMER

SEE ALSO Part I: Lois; Part II: Mother of Timothy (Acts 16:1); Women Who Profess Reverence for God (1 Tim 2:9–15); Women Deacons (1 Tim 3:11); Older and Younger Women (1 Tim 5:2).

FOR FURTHER READING: Freund, Richard A. “Naming Names: Some Observations on ‘Nameless Women’: Traditions in the MT, LXX and Hellenistic Literature.” Metzger, Bruce M. “Names for the Nameless in the New Testament: A Study in the Growth of Christian Tradition.”

Euodia

“success, prosperity,” from Greek *euodoō*, “help,” or, in the passive, “succeed”
(Phil 4:2–3)

Euodia was a coworker of both Paul and another woman named Syntyche; they are described in 4:3 as “having struggled beside me . . . with Clement and the rest of my coworkers.” The athletic image (“struggled” or “co-contested”) portrays their earlier missionary endeavors with Paul in a heroic vein. Because of their importance in founding the church at Philippi, one or the other was sometimes identified with Lydia (reinterpreted as “the Lydian”; Acts 16:11–15). Other interpreters have treated them as symbols of Jewish and Gentile communities rather than real women leaders.

In Phil 4:2, Paul formally appeals to the two women “to be of the same mind in the Lord”; the usual interpretation depicts the two women in conflict with each other, and, because of their status as leaders in the community, causing dissension in the

community in Philippi. But when Paul asks the Corinthians to be of the same mind, he means the same mind with him (1:10; compare 4:14–21). The estrangement may thus have been between the two women and Paul; his complaints about preachers who proclaim Christ out of rivalry (1:15) and his elaborate appeal for agreement (2:1–11) and obedience (2:12) may have been directed to or against them.

Euodia and Syntyche may have functioned as a missionary couple; Romans 16 includes a pair of missionary women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa (16:12), as well as female-male pairs (16:3–5, 7, 16), whose partnerships may reflect commitments to each other as well as to the mission. Perhaps Euodia and Syntyche belong on a “lesbian continuum,” a prehistory of women’s same-sex commitments.

MARY ROSE D’ANGELO

SEE ALSO Part I: Martha; Mary 2; Syntyche; Tryphaena; Tryphosa.

FOR FURTHER READING: D’Angelo, Mary Rose. “Women Partners in the New Testament.” Gillman, Florence Morgan. “Euodia.”

Eve

“living, life giver,” from the Hebrew root *hyh*, “to live”; or from another Semitic root, *hwy*, also meaning “to live”

EVE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

(Gen 2–3; 4:1–2)

The first woman, according to the biblical creation story in Genesis 2–3, Eve is perhaps the best-known female figure in the Hebrew Bible. Her prominence comes not only from her role in the Garden of Eden story itself, but also from her frequent appearance in Western art, theology, and literature. Indeed, the image of Eve, who never appears in the Hebrew Bible after the opening chapters of Genesis, may be more strongly colored by postbiblical culture than by the biblical narrative itself. For many, Eve represents sin, seduction, and the secondary nature of woman. Because such aspects of her character are not actually part of the Hebrew narrative of Gene-

sis, but have become associated with her through Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions, a discussion of Eve means first pointing out some of those views that are not intrinsic to the ancient Hebrew tale.

Although Eve is linked with the beginnings of sin in the earliest mentions of her outside the Hebrew Bible — in the Jewish noncanonical Book of Sirach, as well as in the New Testament and in other early Jewish and Christian works — she is not called a sinner in the Genesis 2–3 account. To be sure, she and Adam disobey God; but the word *sin* does not appear in the Hebrew Bible until the Cain-Abel narrative, where it explicitly refers to the ultimate social crime, fratricide. Another misconception is that Eve tempts or seduces Adam. In reality she merely takes a piece of fruit — not an apple — and hands it to him; they both had been told not to eat of it, yet they both do. Also, the story is often thought to involve God's cursing of Eve (and Adam), yet the text speaks only of cursing the serpent and the ground. And the Eden tale is frequently referred to as the "Fall" or "Fall of Man," although there is no fall in the narrative; that designation is a later Christian application of Plato's idea (in the *Phaedrus*) of the fall of heavenly beings to earth in order to express the idea of departure from divine favor or grace.

Such views are entrenched in Western notions of Eden, making it difficult to see features of Eve and her role that form part of the Hebrew tale. These features have been largely unnoticed or ignored by the interpretive tradition. This situation, and also the way in which the Genesis 2–3 story appears to sanction patriarchal notions of male dominance, has made a reconsideration of the Eden tale an important project of feminist biblical study ever since the first wave of feminist interest in biblical exegesis, which was part of the nineteenth-century suffrage movement in the United States. Contemporary feminist biblical study for the most part, but not entirely, has tended to remove negative theological overlay, to recapture positive aspects of Eve's role, and generally to understand how this famous beginnings account might have functioned in Isra-

elite culture. The literature dealing with Eve and her story is voluminous, and only a sample of the new perspectives can be discussed here.

The well-known Eden tale begins with the scene of a well-watered garden — so unlike the frequently drought-stricken highlands of the land of Canaan in which the Israelites lived. God has placed there an *'ādām*, a person formed from the "dust of the ground [*'ādāmā*]" (2:7). This wordplay evokes the notion of human beings as earth creatures. The traditional translation of *'ādām* as "man" (NRSV and most English versions) at the beginning of the Eden story can be contested. The Hebrew word *'ādām* can indeed mean a male and even be the proper name Adam; but it can also be a generic term for a mortal, or a human being. Such may be the case here, according to some current feminist readings of biblical inclusive language as well as some medieval Jewish commentaries, thus implying that the original human was androgynous and that God had to divide it into two gendered beings in order for procreation and continued human life to begin.

God tells this first being that anything in the garden may be eaten except for the fruit of a certain tree. God then decides that this person should not be alone and tries animals as companions. Creating animals serves to populate the world with living creatures but doesn't quite meet God's intentions. God then performs cosmic surgery on the first person, removing one "side" (NRSV, "rib"; 2:21) to form a second person. The essential unity of these first two humans is expressed in the well-known words (Gen 2:23) "bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh," which the "Man" (Hebrew *'iš*) says to the "Woman" (Hebrew *'iššā*). This unity is reenacted in copulation, indicating the strength of the marital bond over the natal one: "therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (2:24). The relationship between this first pair of humans is also expressed by the term *'ēzer kēnegdô*, translated "helper as his partner" by the NRSV and "helpmeet" or "help-mate" in older English versions (2:18). This unusual phrase probably indicates mutuality. The noun

helper can mean either "a" or "an expert" (superior); situational phrase, used only means "equal to," translated literally as "that no hierarchical relationship" primordial pair.

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helper can mean either “an assistant” (subordinate) or “an expert” (superior); but the modifying prepositional phrase, used only here in the Bible, apparently means “equal to.” The phrase, which might be translated literally as “an equal helper,” indicates that no hierarchical relationship exists between the primordial pair.

The serpent now enters the scene. An intelligent being, it begins a dialogue with the woman, who is thus the first human to engage in conversation (a reflection perhaps of female skill with words?). The woman is the one who appreciates the aesthetic and nutritional qualities of the forbidden tree and its fruit, as well as its potential “to make one wise” (3:6). The woman and the man both eat and ultimately are expelled from Eden for their misdeed, lest they eat of the tree of life and gain immortality along with their wisdom. Eating of the forbidden fruit has made them like God, able to know, perceive, and understand “good and bad” (3:22) — meaning everything. But they must never eat of the life tree and gain immortality too.

The riveting and controversial story of human origins can best be understood as portraying archetypal human qualities, whereby the first humans represent all humans. The woman’s name is Eve, which apparently is derived from a root meaning “to live.” The introduction of her name is followed by a folk etymology; she is “mother of all living” (3:20). Her name is rich in symbolism, characterizing her archetypal role — as the first woman, Eve represents the essential life-giving maternal function of all women. Eve is also the one who provides the first morsel of food, in a narrative in which the words for “food” and “eat” (from the same Hebrew root, *’cl*) appear repeatedly. The repetition of such words in the story of human origins reflects the Israelite concern with sustenance in the difficult environment of the Canaanite highlands. Eve’s action in handing the man some fruit may thus derive from the reality of women’s roles in food preparation rather than from a depiction of temptation or seduction.

The Eden story also serves etiological purposes. It helped ancient Israelites deal with the harsh reali-

ties of daily existence, especially in contrast with life in the more fertile and better watered areas of the ancient Near East, by providing an “explanation” for their difficult life conditions. The punitive statements addressed to the first couple prior to the expulsion from the garden depict the realities they will face. Men (Gen 3:17–19) will experience unending toil (*’iṣṣābôn*) in order to grow crops from ground that is “cursed.” And women?

This brings us to perhaps the most difficult verse in the Hebrew Bible for people concerned with human equality. Gen 3:16 seems to give men the right to dominate women. Feminists have grappled with this text in a variety of ways. One possibility is to recognize that the traditional translations have distorted its meaning and that it is best read against its social background of agrarian life. Instead of the familiar “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing,” the verse should begin “I will greatly increase your work and your pregnancies.” The word for “work,” *’iṣṣābôn*, is the same word used in God’s statement to the man; the usual translation (“pangs” or “pain”) is far less accurate. In addition, the woman will experience more pregnancies; the Hebrew word is *pregnancy*, not *childbearing*, as the NRSV and other versions have it. Women, in other words, must have large families and also work hard, which is what the next clause also proclaims. The verse is a mandate for intense productive and reproductive roles for women; it sanctions what life meant for Israelite women.

In light of this, the notion of general male dominance in the second half of the verse is a distortion. More likely, the idea of male “rule” is related to the multiple pregnancies mentioned in the first half of the verse. Women might resist repeated pregnancies because of the dangers of death in childbirth, but because of their sexual passion (“desire,” 3:16) they accede to their husbands’ sexuality. Male rule in this verse is narrowly drawn, relating only to sexuality; male interpretive traditions have extended that idea by claiming that it means general male dominance.

Eve does not disappear from the biblical story at the expulsion from the garden. In a little-noticed introduction (4:1–2a) to the ensuing Cain and Abel

Eve

narrative, Eve is said to have "created a man together with the LORD." The NRSV translation — "produced a man with the help of the LORD" — obscures highly unusual language. The word for "create" is the same as the word used in the Bible for the creative power of God (Gen 14:19, 22) and in extrabiblical texts for the creativity of Semitic mother goddesses. Women in the Bible are said to "bear children," not "create a man"; and creating a man "with" God puts female creative power alongside that of God. This view of the woman as the source of life, together with the more conventional notice of the birth of her second son, Abel (Gen 4:2a), is the last direct reference to Eve in the Hebrew Bible (although she is mentioned indirectly in Gen 4:25, where she gives birth to Seth). It follows the scene in which Adam names her, presumably signifying his power over her. Is that a male narrator's attempt to compensate for the awesomeness of female creativity, akin to God's?

CAROL MEYERS

SEE ALSO Part II: Woman (and Man) in the First Creation Story (Gen 1:26–28, etc.); Part III: Lilith.

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EVE IN THE APOCRYPHAL/DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS

(Tob 8:6; Sir 25:24; 40:1; 42:13; 4 Macc 18:7)

Eve, the first woman according to the Eden story (Genesis 2–3), is mentioned very rarely in the Apoc-

ryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. One text mentions her by name (Tob 8:6), and four others allude to her (Sir 25:24; 40:1; 42:13; 4 Macc 18:7). Only Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sira) presents the negative theological judgment that women are the source of sin.

The Book of Tobit tells the story of two families who have experienced various misfortunes. Through the marriage of Tobias, son of a father who has been blinded, and Sarah, whose first seven husbands have died on the wedding night, the two families come together and are blessed. Before Tobias and Sarah consummate their marriage, they pray (in Tob 8:5a, both pray; in Tob 8:5b, only Tobias speaks). This prayer contains one of only two named references to both Eve and Adam outside Genesis in the Hebrew Bible (the other mention of both occurs in 1 Tim 2:13). Echoing and quoting Gen 2:18, Tobias says, "You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve / as a helper and support. / From the two of them the human race has sprung. / You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; / let us make a helper for him like himself.' I now am taking this kinswoman of mine, / not because of lust, but with sincerity. / Grant that she and I may find mercy / and that we may grow old together" (Tob 8:6–7). When the prayer is finished, they both say, "Amen, Amen" (Tob 8:8). As in Genesis, the word *helper* likely signals mutuality. Tobias's addition of the word *support* further indicates his understanding of gender relations, as does his statement that *he* takes this woman. Man (not a generic human being) was created first in this interpretation, and the family is unquestionably patriarchal.

The other possible references to Eve in the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books do not refer to her by name. The most well known is in the Book of Sirach, which reads: "From a woman sin had its beginning, / and because of her we all die" (Sir 25:24). The context of this verse is a longer passage about good and evil wives (Sir 25:13–26:18). It reviles a wicked wife and reveals a very negative view of women. If Sir 25:24 is understood as a reference to Eve, it is related to the material that precedes

and follows as a generalized association of evil with women and the legitimization of harsh treatment of a disobedient wife.

Although Sirach does not name Eve, interpreters have often held that the author is referring to the Garden of Eden story (Genesis 2–3). If this view is correct, then Sir 25:24 is the earliest attribution of the origin of sin to Eve. Later developments of this idea can be found in several pseudepigraphical works (noncanonical Jewish documents that were influential in popular religious circles, especially Christian ones): the Books of Adam and Eve (chaps. 3, 5, 16, 18), the Apocalypse of Moses (24:1–3), 2 Enoch (30:16–18; 31:6), and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

Attribution of the origin of sin to Eve was not typical of Jewish interpretation at the time Sirach was written (second century B.C.E.). The common view was that sin had its beginning in the cohabitation of evil angels with human women described in Gen 6:1–4 (see the pseudepigraphical books of 1 Enoch 6:1–6; 7:1–6; 15:2–16; Jubilees 5:1–6; 10:1, 5–9, 11; the Cairo Damascus Document 11:16–18). Later, the rabbis usually traced the origin of sin and death to Adam rather than to Eve. If Ben Sira is referring to Eve in Sir 25:24, then he held an uncommon view for his time.

It is possible that Sir 25:24 does not refer to Eve, but to the evil wife who is the subject of the passage. She (and collectively all bad wives) causes her husband to sin and thus brings death to her unfortunate husband, who may have been understood as all (or almost all) men. This view is more consistent with Ben Sira's remarks on this subject found elsewhere in Sirach, with the immediate context in Sirach 25, and with the common view of the time. It is also possible that Ben Sira intended the reader to understand the primary reference as evil wives, but nevertheless was making a veiled allusion to the Genesis story of the garden.

Sir 40:1 includes another phrase that sounds like a reference to Eve: "Hard work was created for everyone, / and a heavy yoke is laid on the children of Adam, / from the day they come forth from their mother's womb / until the day they return to the

mother of all the living." In Gen 3:20, Eve is called the "mother of all living" because the Hebrew word *ḥawwā* is related to the Hebrew word for "life." In Sirach, however, it is clear that the womb from which new life emerges and to which all return is Mother Earth. As in Job 1:21, earth is both womb and tomb. The phrase "the living" in Sir 40:1 may be an addition, since it appears in the Hebrew but not the Greek. If these words are removed, then this is likely not an allusion to Eve.

A clear, though indirect, allusion to Eve is found in 4 Macc 18:7. In this verse a righteous woman says, "I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house; but I guarded the rib from which woman was made." The reference is to Gen 2:22. The following verse offers further clarification when the woman declares "no seducer corrupted me on a desert plain, nor did the destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my virginity" (4 Macc 18:8). Her words embody the ancient Jewish belief that women were in danger of seduction by evil spirits (Genesis 6; Jubilees 4, 5; Enoch 6; Testament of Reuben 5:6) who were thought to inhabit deserts. The descendants of the first union of human women and spirits (Genesis 6), the giants known as Nephilim, became demons who corrupt humanity (Jubilees 7:27) and seduce women (Enoch 15). The reference to "the destroyer, the deceitful serpent" suggests the serpent of the Garden of Eden, whose allure is here understood to have been sexual.

ALICE OGDEN BELLIS

SEE ALSO Part II: Wife (Sir 7:19, etc.); Woman as Evil (Sir 9:2, etc.).

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Gomer

Trenchard, Warren C. *Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis*.

EVE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:13-14)

In his appeal to the Corinthians to remain faithful to his message, Paul expresses his fear that "as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (11:3). So he not only identifies his (Jewish-Christian) opponents with Satan (for which the serpent is here a symbol), but he also compares his addressees, whom he accuses of submitting readily enough to false preachers (2 Cor 11:4), to Eve, who was easy prey to the devil. It would seem that the author does not (or not yet) regard Eve as the prototype of all women, but that notion will very soon be developed; it is significant that here he personifies his opponents as a woman.

The (non-Pauline) author of 1 Timothy perhaps knew this passage from 2 Corinthians, since he too emphasizes, but much more strongly than Paul did, that it was Eve who was deceived by Satan (the same Greek verb, which could also imply sexual seduction, is used again). He even states that Eve, not Adam, became a transgressor (1 Tim 2:14)! Moreover, the author stresses the fact that "Adam was formed first, [only] then Eve" (2:13) to make it abundantly clear that, in his view, Eve is inferior to Adam (according to the generally accepted principle in the ancient world that older or earlier is better). This argument is then used to justify severe strictures: women have to submit themselves to men, or wives to their husbands, and they have to keep silent in the church (2:12), that is, they are forbidden to be teachers or leaders; their only permissible role is that of wife and mother. This passage, inspired by a specific form of contemporaneous Jewish exegesis of the story of "the fall" in Genesis 3, has exerted a baneful influence in the history of the Christian church, and it still does so in certain traditional circles.

PIETER W. VAN DER HORST

Gomer

"perfection," from Hebrew *gmr*, "to accomplish, complete"; perhaps a shortened form or nickname of the theophoric name Gemariah (Jer 29:3), "YHWH has accomplished it (the child's birth)" (Hosea 1-3)

The eighth-century B.C.E. prophet Hosea's famous metaphor of God as faithful husband to Israel, his adulterous wife (Hosea 2), is juxtaposed with the story of Hosea's own disastrous marriage to Gomer, Diblaim's daughter (Hosea 1; 3). It is difficult, however, to separate historical facts about the couple's domestic problems from the theological message expressed through them.

Scholars have advanced a number of theories to reckon with historical questions about the portrayal of Gomer in Hosea 1-3. Some commentators regard Hosea and Gomer's marriage as an allegory, not meant to be taken literally. Such an interpretation would perhaps preserve Gomer's moral goodness by erasing her existence as a real woman and having her serve God's purposes. Others think that Gomer actually was a licentious woman, maybe even a prostitute, whom Hosea felt obliged to marry and whose illegitimate children Hosea adopted. A mediating position interprets the command to marry the immoral Gomer proleptically (after the fact): Gomer was chaste at the time of marriage, but subsequently became unfaithful to Hosea as an adulteress, a common harlot, or a temple prostitute. Some try to vindicate Gomer's reputation by insisting that she should not be equated with the woman in Hosea 3, another wife, whom Hosea was commanded to marry and whose promiscuity is unfairly laid upon Gomer. A variant of this position regards the blameless Gomer of Hosea 1 becoming wrongly identified with the prostitute whom Hosea hires (rather than marries) in Hosea 3. In order to preserve the sanctity of marriage, still other interpreters argue that Hosea did not actually marry Gomer. The verb *take* in 1:2 could mean "marry a wife" or "take a woman sexually." Following the latter sense, Hosea was commanded to have sex with two unchaste women: Gomer and the unnamed woman of Hosea 3. His symbolic actions are