

Preface

This book is intended to be a supplement to standard introductions to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, highlighting key issues of interpretation from feminist and intersectional perspectives that have arisen particularly during the last fifty-five years. They include sociohistorical, literary, and interdisciplinary analyses of the Bible, viewed through the interconnected lenses of gender, race/ethnicity, class, the so-called third world, and colonial status, which are often absent from these introductions.

This book is intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in seminaries and universities, as well as interested lay readers. Six female biblical scholars, who have years of experience teaching introductory courses to the Bible under their belt, contribute to this volume. As the editor of the volume, I will begin by familiarizing the reader with feminist, intersectional scholarship in general, and then will highlight some of the feminist and intersectional analyses of important feminist biblical scholars and the interpretive methods they use. In part 1, Carolyn J. Sharp will undertake the study of the first five books of the Bible, the Torah/Pentateuch. Vanessa Lovelace will devote her chapter to the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua—Kings) in part 2. Part 3, Prophecy, will be in the able hands of Corrine Carvalho. Finally, two scholars, Melody D. Knowles and Judy Fentress-Williams, will share the investigation of the Writings in part 4.

Each of the four chapters dealing with the Hebrew Bible contains an overview that addresses feminist and intersectional contributions raised in its specific division. The chapters are meant to be introductory and not exhaustive, raising the students' consciousness of the issues and directing them to where they can learn more. The

following are some of the questions and comments that have actually been raised by our students:

- Why is God always male?
- What does it mean when God said, “Let US make THEM in OUR own image”?
- Why are there historical tales of queens and empresses often from other cultures, while the main characters in the Hebrew Bible are predominantly men?
- What is the woman’s version of the Hebrew Bible? Would women have told these stories from the same slant?
- What happened to Bathsheba sounds like stalking, peeping-tom stuff, coupled with sexual assault and murder. Is it?
- We read all kinds of violence in the Hebrew Bible, and the violence against women is especially distressing. Why don’t we hear about these stories in our churches?
- Esther is in a threatening situation with Ahasuerus, and according to the book of Esther, that’s all part of God’s larger plan. So, are we saying that God purposefully puts women at risk of sexual violation or death? That’s theologically very problematic.
- So often women of color are portrayed as evil or immoral in white culture. How can we know that Jezebel actually was evil? What if the Bible’s picture of Jezebel was just as distorted as some of the news coverage we see about black people today?
- Why do the prophets always blame women for what happens?
- When feminists critique the androcentrism in the Latter Prophets, does that make feminists into “false prophets”? It’s not fair that, in order to resist what is harmful in the prophets, we have to stand against God’s word. The dilemma is maddening.
- What do I do with this information? Now that I know how misogynistic biblical authors could be, and now that I am repulsed by some of the things I read, how did this book ever become Sacred Scripture? Why should I read it now? Who could “believe” in this stuff?

This volume will not answer all of your students' feminist and intersectional questions. More important in the learning process are the students' questions themselves and their lively "wrestling" with the difficult issues that they encounter in their reading.¹ The Bible has been a foundational text for prescribing various beliefs on many social relations of power: male/female, master/slave, rich/poor, colonizer/colonized, native/immigrant, white/nonwhite, heterosexual/homosexual, believer/unbeliever, and so forth. Its views were often oppressive for subordinate populations, negating the *shalom* that the Scriptures themselves promised. We hope that this volume will help your students learn how feminist and intersectional biblical scholarship has engaged these questions to assist them in their own "wrestling" with these issues.

1. Carolyn J. Sharp, *Wrestling the Word: The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Believer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010).