

## THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS IN TODAY'S CHURCH

ADELEYE Abayomi Olumide; ADEIWA, Lawrence Adelaja and ADEBAYO, Michael Olawale

Department of Christian Religious Studies,  
Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology, Omu-Ajose

### Abstract

*The question of women's role in society has been a significant topic of debate for many years. Feminist theorists and their supporters have engaged in ongoing discussions regarding women's position in the natural world. This debate continues to this day due to the controversy surrounding the issue. This paper does not aim to challenge or support feminist views, but rather seeks to explore and highlight the role of women in the socio-economic and political survey of the Old Testament in relation to the present roles of women in the contemporary church. The paper also attempts to discuss how women played a very pivotal roles in the present church. The researcher explored Johann Gabler's approach method it is based on biblical analysis of text, and historical application. This is to enable the researcher to examine the historical roles of women in the ancient Israel and consider how it can be appropriated to the pivotal roles or place of women in the Hebrew scripture. This research concluded God has a reason for the creation of women at the beginning and the society should not underrate their capacities irrespective of where they belong in the contemporary society and as they did well to contribute to the socio-political and economic landscape of the ancient Israel.*

**Keywords:** Women, Role, Old Testament, Creation.

### Introduction

#### The Role of Women at the Beginning

According to Genesis 1:27, both man and woman are part of God's creation. Brevard suggests that God created men and women as covenant partners, designed to reflect God's image together, co-manage creation, and share in God's abundance provided by the earth. Despite their distinct features, the differences between men and women were intended to bring mutual enjoyment, assistance, and enrichment to each other. The covenant partnership. At creation, there was no mention of the man having any form of dominion over the woman; the account of Gen 1:27 states that "so God created man in His own image; in the image of God He

created him; male and female He created them." From this passage, it implies that at creation, man and woman are seen as one by God; despite the physiological differences. These two creatures equally share God's image and together exercise dominion over the creation, God designed them differently in order to accomplish His mandate. (Camp 2000)

The second account of creation in Gen 2: 18-24 is an elaborate narration of the creation of woman. The narration linked the existential value of a woman to the man. This account regards the woman as a helper that is comparable to a man. Moreover, the Lord God said, "it is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:18 NKJV). In this passage, God did not

specify a superior/subordinate kind of relationship along the gender line; there is no devaluation or competition in the union; instead, the man delights in the woman as the bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and together they began the venture for which God created them.

### **Objective of the Study**

This research work tends to examine the place and roles of women in the Hebrew scripture and in relation to the women's participation in today's church and society.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **1 Purpose of the Woman at the Beginning**

The creation of woman, as described in both the first and second accounts, emphasizes that women are not a result of chance but a purposeful part of God's design. When God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone," He highlighted man's need for a companion, indicating that man was incomplete without someone to complement him in fulfilling his purpose. This suggests that the reason for woman's creation was to work alongside man in carrying out God's plan. The position of woman from the outset reflects her intended purpose at creation. Woman was not created to compete with man but to address his shortcomings. As an individual, man cannot accomplish the tasks of populating the earth and exercising dominion over it. God designed the human race to be interdependent, and man's survival depends on the rest of God's creation, which is why God created all other creatures before man. After creating man, God created woman to be his partner in maintaining and stewarding the universe, meant to work together with him in fulfilling God's purpose.

#### **2 The Woman after the Fall**

The account in Genesis 3:1-20 adds another perspective to the issue of women in the Old Testament. The introduction of sin into the world brought imperfection, leading to man's domination over woman, her subordination, and the distortion of their roles as stewards and reproducers. Due to sin and God's subsequent judgment, the relationship between man and woman became troubled, transforming what was once a harmonious bond into a series of power struggles. Verse 16 highlights this tension, placing women in a secondary role: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (NIV). The Hebrew word *mashal* in this context means to rule, dominate, or reign. The implication of this judgment is that man will seek to dominate woman. Adam further emphasized his dominance over Eve by naming her, just as he named all the other creatures God brought to him.

#### **3 Patriarchal Structure**

In the Old Testament, the family structure follows a patriarchal model, where women were seen as living in the background, rather than in the forefront of life. Initially, a woman was under the authority of her father, then her husband after marriage, and if her husband died, her brother-in-law would take on the role of her protector. This subordination was symbolized by the absence of a physical sign of belonging to the covenant, as women were not circumcised like men. The woman's identity and purpose were largely defined by her role as a companion to man.

#### 4 Fundamental Equality

At the same time, the Genesis account clearly presents women as equal to men, as both are created in the "Image of God." Jewett notes that the creation of humanity in God's image is inherently linked to the creation of male and female, with the latter representing an expansion of the former. Sexuality is not only about reproduction but also an essential aspect of being like the Creator. Some might even argue that since woman was created last (Gen 2:21-25), she represents the "crowning act" of creation. However, the fall of mankind (Gen 3:16) altered this equality, placing man in a dominant role. The rest of the Old Testament reflects this shift, with women being subordinate to men after the fall.

#### Women in the Ancient near East

Compared to other ancient Near Eastern societies, women in Hebrew society generally had a better position, as evidenced by a study of Semitic laws. Hebrew laws aimed to uphold the highest ideals of womanhood, and women enjoyed a relatively favorable status within both family and religious contexts. Although these aspects show that Hebrew society was somewhat more progressive than other ancient nations in Old Testament times, it still fell short of God's ideal. Specific examples of women's roles in Israelite society will now be explored in more detail. (Dever, 2008).

#### Perception of Women in the Old Testament Society

The Old Testament was written within the cultural context of the people of God, making it difficult to separate the prevailing societal norms from its writings. This section examines some of

the perceptions of women in Old Testament society. (Meyers, 2000) One argument of feminists is that the Bible is androcentric, meaning it centers a male perspective in its worldview, culture, and history, thereby marginalizing femininity. Many feminists assume that if the Bible were interpreted without its male-centered biases, its true meaning would support women's claims for equality. While this argument undermines the belief in the Bible's inerrancy, the Old Testament's teachings on the relationship between men and women must be understood in light of the social realities of the ancient Near East. (Bauman 2001)

Israel, as a nation, shares many traditional characteristics with its ancient Near Eastern neighbours, who often exploited women in various ways. From the biblical account, one might be inclined to conclude that women are seen as inferior to men. This article highlights some of the biblical instances that support this view.

In Genesis 4:1-2, the account of the first birth in the Bible revolves around Cain and Abel. There is no mention of female children born to Adam and Eve, yet the human race continues to grow. This omission may suggest that either God or the writer of Genesis did not consider women significant in this narrative. In verse 17, the account of Cain's marriage to an unnamed woman further emphasizes her anonymity, possibly implying that women at this time held little importance. In verse 19, Lamech, a descendant of Cain, is the first polygamist, taking two wives. This action seems to reflect the prevailing attitude toward women at that time. Genesis 5:4 recounts that after Seth was born, Adam lived 800 more years and had other sons and daughters, yet the identities of these daughters were not recorded in the

Bible, which seems to further marginalize their significance (Black, 1961).

From the beginning, the Bible is patriarchal. The narrative from Genesis 1-5 focuses primarily on God's dealings with men, from Adam to Noah. Every major event in creation, aside from those involving Eve, revolves around men. God's interactions with humanity, from creation onward, are centered on His relationship with men. At creation, God related to Adam as the progenitor through whom His purpose would be fulfilled. When it came time to save the world, God chose Noah as the instrument of redemption. Genesis 7 recounts how God used Noah to carry out His plan to preserve the world. In this account, the names of Noah and his three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—are prominently mentioned, while the names of Noah's wife and the wives of his sons are left out (Genesis 7:13). This omission highlights the central role these three men played in God's redemptive plan. This should not be taken to diminish the importance of women in God's plan, but rather underscores their role as partners created to assist men in fulfilling God's purpose. The three sons of Noah were the means through which God's plan was realized. God completed the work of redemption by blessing Noah and his sons, a blessing that echoes the one given to Adam at creation, as recorded in Genesis 1. This reaffirmation of blessing on men emphasizes their central role in God's plan for the world.

*"God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, and populate the earth. The fear and terror of you will come upon all the animals on the earth, all the birds of the sky, every creature that moves on the ground, and*

*all the fish in the sea; they are placed under your control. Every living thing that moves will be food for you. Just as I provided you with green plants, now I give you everything". (Genesis 9:1-3, NIV).*

The selection of the Semitic people, specifically through the call of Abraham, demonstrates that God's plan to work with humanity in fulfilling His purpose was intentional and carefully devised. From Noah's lineage, through his son Shem, came a man named Abram. In His desire for a lasting relationship, God entered into a covenant with Abraham, which was marked by the circumcision of all male descendants. This act symbolized God's covenant with Abraham, with no mention of women being included in this particular sign.

Throughout the Old Testament, God consistently executed His plan for humanity by entrusting men with key responsibilities. Women, however, played crucial roles in ensuring the fulfillment of these divine missions. Sarah's involvement in Abraham's journey and the realization of God's promise cannot be overstated.

After establishing His covenant with Abraham, God continued His promise through Isaac, the child of the covenant, and further solidified it through Jacob, from whom the twelve tribes of Israel arose. Jacob's daughter, Dinah, did not receive an inheritance because she was female, further illustrating that God's plan for His people focused on the twelve sons of Jacob. (Connell, 2000)

Moses, a Levite, was another key figure chosen by God to lead His people from Egypt to the Promised Land. Despite the pivotal role Miriam, his older

sister, played in ensuring his survival, God chose Moses, not Miriam, to lead the mission. During the Passover, God commanded the consecration of every firstborn male among the Israelites, saying, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal'" (Exodus 13:1-2, NIV). This command further reflects the emphasis God placed on men in His plan, which would have been different if both male and female firstborns had been included.

In Exodus chapters 28 and 29, God appointed Aaron and his sons to the priestly office, which was reserved exclusively for male descendants in Aaron's lineage. Female children in the family were not allowed to serve as priests. In Leviticus 22:12-13, a priest's daughter who marries someone other than a priest is prohibited from eating the sacred offerings, even if her husband is a fellow Jew.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are multiple instances where God placed a distinction between the value of males and females. One example is found in Leviticus 12:1-5, where a woman who gives birth to a male child remains unclean for seven days, but if she gives birth to a female, she remains unclean for fourteen days before she is purified.

Another example is in Leviticus 27:1-8, where the conditions for making a vow of dedication differ for males and females, indicating a preference for males over females.

*The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and tell them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate a person to the Lord by giving an equivalent value, the value for a male between the ages of twenty and sixty is fifty*

*shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. For a female, set the value at thirty shekels. For a person aged five to twenty, the value for a male is twenty shekels, and for a female, ten shekels. For a person between one month and five years old, set the value of a male at five shekels of silver, and a female at three shekels of silver. For a person aged sixty or older, the value of a male is fifteen shekels, and of a female, ten shekels".*

Another instance was the command to count the Israelites in the desert of Sinai. God specifically instructed Moses to number the men, excluding the women. Men were also appointed as leaders of each clan in Israel to assist Moses in the process of the enumeration.

*The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month, in the second year after the Israelites left Egypt. He said, "Take a census of the entire Israelite community, listing each man by name, clan by clan and family by family. You and Aaron are to count all the men in Israel who are twenty years old or older and able to serve in the army. One man from each tribe, the head of his family, is to assist you." (Numbers 1:1-4, NIV)*

In Numbers 30:1-16, God instructed Moses on the vows made by women. Any vow made by a woman could be annulled by either her father or her husband, depending on her situation. This highlights the biblical view of men as the heads of women, with women's



decisions—whether unmarried and living under their father's roof or married—subject to the authority of men. Implicitly, this shows that women were not considered equals to men, whose decisions were primarily their own prerogative.

As mentioned earlier, the Bible was written in the context of Near Eastern culture and traditions, which are reflected in many biblical accounts. For example, in Genesis 19:8, Lot offers his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah to protect his male guests, demonstrating a profound disregard for women. (Gupta, 2015). The idea of offering young, vulnerable girls to violent men to safeguard male visitors is a stark example of how women were devalued. Another instance is found in Genesis 20:24, where Nahor, Abraham's brother, has a concubine who bears him sons, reflecting a cultural practice that marginalized the feelings of women at the time. Additionally, in Genesis 38:1-26, Judah's actions towards Tamar, where he quickly condemned her as a prostitute while being guilty of similar behavior, further highlights the subjugation of women.

Pharaoh's decision to order the killing of all male Hebrew children, while sparing the females, underscores the high value placed on male children in the preservation of a family line. His strategy to weaken and oppress the Israelites by eliminating their male offspring emphasizes how little value society at that time placed on female children.

The cultural practices of the Persians and Medes are evident in the advice given by the king's advisor to depose Queen Vashti after her refusal to appear before the king. Her actions were seen as setting a bad example by the men of the land. Memucan's statement suggests that, prior to this, women were

generally expected to be submissive to their husbands and male relatives to maintain the social order. The men's motivation for removing Vashti was not driven by loyalty to King Xerxes, but rather by a desire to assert their authority, instill fear in women, and force them to respect their husbands.

*He asked, "What does the law say should be done to Queen Vashti? She has disobeyed the command that King Xerxes sent through the eunuchs." Memucan then spoke up in the presence of the king and his nobles, saying, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the nobles and the people of every province in King Xerxes' realm. Her actions will be known to all women, and they will look down on their husbands, saying, 'King Xerxes ordered Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she refused.' Today, the noble women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen's behavior will act in the same way toward all the king's nobles. There will be no end to disrespect and discord. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree, to be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be altered, that Vashti is never again to appear before King Xerxes. Let the king give her royal position to someone else who is more worthy. When this decree is made known throughout the king's vast kingdom, all women will honor their husbands, from the least to the greatest." (Esther 1:15-20, NIV)*

The response given to the king in this narrative did not directly address the question about the law's stance on Queen Vashti's actions. Instead, it revealed the men's concern with maintaining their authority over women. The men were eager to establish a new law that would force women to revere their husbands unconditionally, reinforcing male dominance.

### **Notable Women in the Old Testament**

Having considered God's attitude toward women and the cultural influences of neighboring nations on the Jewish people, it is important to recognize that God is impartial and not swayed by sentiment. Every action He takes has a purpose, and He is not accountable to anyone for His decisions or inactions. At this point, it is necessary to look at the women in the Old Testament who positively contributed to God's plan for humanity. (Herzberg, 2006)

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was the first woman in the Bible recorded as a prophetess in Exodus 15. God chose her for His service alongside her brothers. Her selection by God highlights His dynamic approach to choosing individuals for His purposes. Miriam's resourcefulness and care were instrumental in saving her Brother Moses' life during a critical time.

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, served as a judge in Israel during a period when many men had failed in their duties. She held court under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, where both men and women came to her for judgment. The Bible also describes her as a prophetess who received guidance directly from God. At the time, there were no men to lead the people, and even Barak, the commander of the

army, was unaware of God's plan until Deborah called upon him. Even then, he was reluctant to go to war without her presence. Ultimately, Deborah, a courageous and distinguished prophetess, led Israel into battle, and God delivered victory through the hands of a woman.

God also used Jael, the wife of Heber, a non-Israelite woman, to defeat Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army. She offered him refuge after their defeat, and while he was asleep, she killed him, fulfilling God's will.

Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, was another woman through whom God fulfilled a specific purpose. Although she was barren and subjected to harsh taunts by her rival, Peninnah, Hannah remained steadfast in prayer and made a vow to God. As a result, she gave birth to Samuel, the greatest prophet in Israel's history, and dedicated him to the service of the Lord. Hannah's actions demonstrate her deep commitment and resolve to serve God.

Ruth, a Moabite, also played a crucial role in God's plan. Driven by love for her mother-in-law Naomi and devotion to the God of Israel, Ruth left her homeland of Moab to follow Naomi to Israel, despite the uncertainties and hardships they faced. There, Ruth met Boaz, a relative of her deceased husband, who eventually married her. Ruth's marriage to Boaz established a lineage that led to King David and ultimately to Jesus Christ. God used this foreign woman to accomplish His redemptive plan for humanity.

Similarly, Rahab, a prostitute in the city of Jericho, played a pivotal role in Israel's conquest of the city, as recorded in Joshua 2:1-24. She hid the Israelite spies and, in return, was promised safety for her family when the city was attacked. Rahab later married an

Israelite and became part of the ancestral line leading to King David and Jesus Christ. Through her actions, Rahab became one of the great women in the Bible, chosen by God to fulfill His purpose.

While many women in the Old Testament contributed to the fulfillment of God's plan, there were also women whose actions had negative consequences. Two notable examples are Delilah and Jezebel, whose actions illustrate the potential dangers of a woman's influence when used for harmful purposes. (Pal, 2004) Both women demonstrate the power and impact an individual can have, for better or worse, in history.

Delilah, the Philistine woman, played a key role in the downfall of Samson, a judge of Israel. Samson fell in love with her, leading him to stray from God's purpose for his life. Delilah used her influence to entice Samson and ultimately betrayed him, enabling the Philistines to capture and subdue him. As a result, Samson, once a formidable threat to the Philistine dominance in the region, was overpowered and handed over to them.

Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel, was another woman whose actions left a lasting impact in the Old Testament. A non-Israelite, Jezebel did not worship Jehovah but instead led Israel into the worship of Baal, the Canaanite god. Her influence over King Ahab was so strong that she nearly eradicated the worship of God in the land. The incident involving the death of Naboth and the seizure of his vineyard, as detailed in 1 Kings 21:1-16, illustrates her manipulative and wicked nature. In her efforts to preserve Baal worship, Jezebel even threatened the prophet Elijah to the point where he fled in fear. Her power was such that whatever she

desired seemed to come to fruition. In 1 Kings 19:1, her words reveal the extent of her influence and the fear she commanded.

### **Socio-Economic Role of Women in the Ancient Israel Marriage**

For an Israelite woman, marriage was essential for a fulfilling life. A proverb in Proverbs 30:23 suggests that a woman without the love of a husband is incomplete. However, marriage arrangements were typically made by the father, who had significant authority over his children, or by a negotiation between the bride's and groom's fathers (Judge 14:1-2). Though the woman was consulted (Gen 24:5, 8; Num 36:6), marriage was not merely a transfer of property but a transfer of authority over her from one man to another. In cases where both parties were adults and independent from parental control, the man generally initiated the process (2 Sam 11:2-3), though in some cases, like Ruth's (Ruth 3:8ff.), the woman played a more proactive role due to the levirate law. Despite these arranged marriages, love between husband and wife was not uncommon, as seen in several biblical passages (Gen 24:67; 29:20; 1 Sam 1:5), and it's evident that women had personal influence over their husbands (Gen 16:2; 1 Sam 25; 2 Kgs 4:8-10; Job 2:9-10). Although marriages varied in quality, many Israelite homes had deep, loving relationships between spouses. Malachi hints at this when he mourns the unfaithfulness of men to the wives of their youth with whom they had made a covenant (Mal 2:14). The Hebrew terms for wife (*habereth*) and covenant (*berith*) suggest a potential closeness between husbands and wives.

To the Hebrew woman, marriage also meant being "possessed" by her



husband, who was referred to as her "Lord" (Gen 18:12) or "master" (Exod 21:22). This subordination appears in various forms throughout the Old Testament, such as in Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 4:1) or Jeremiah's prediction (Jer 31:22), where traditional roles are reversed. Polygamy contributed to this subordination, as seen in the treatment of women in Esther's Persian harem, where women were treated as property of the king, or in the story of Judges 19:22-30, where women were seen as expendable. While Judges condemns such behavior (Judg 21:10-25), polygamy did not alleviate the subordination of women. (Dever, 2008)

For Hebrew women, the ability to bear children was of paramount importance, as it was the primary purpose of marriage. Children were valued highly, and the psalmist describes the ideal Hebrew family as one where the wife is like a fruitful vine, and the children are like olive shoots around the table (Ps 128:3). Sons were particularly desired over daughters (Gen 29:34; 30:20; Lev 12:2-5). The mother was responsible for the upbringing and education of her children (1 Sam 1:23-24, 2:19; Prov 1:8; 6:20), which also included domestic duties such as cooking, washing, and making clothes (Gen 27:9, 14; Prov 31:10-31), and sometimes drawing water (Gen 24:11, 13-16). Daughters also helped with tasks like tending to the flocks, as seen with Rachel and Jethro's daughters (Gen 29:9-10; Exod 2:16; 3:1). Childlessness was viewed as a curse (Gen 29:32-30:1-23; 1 Sam 1:5), and the wife's dedication to her family earned her respect in society.

### **Women as Religious and Political Leaders**

Women also appear as religious leaders in the Old Testament. One of the

most notable examples is Miriam, who leads the song of praise following the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, a pivotal moment in Israel's history. As recorded in Exodus 15:21, she sings, "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea." This song follows a similar one sung by Moses and the Israelites (Exod 15:1), but it is Miriam who is identified as the leader of the song. Her leadership continues as she plays an important role in the wilderness community.

Eventually, however, tensions arise among the leaders. Miriam and Aaron question Moses' leadership, with the immediate cause being his choice of a wife, though their real concern appears to be his exclusive role as a prophet. They ask, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't He also spoken through us?" (Num 12:2). In response, God reaffirms Moses' supreme leadership, establishing him as the primary leader of His people. While Miriam's leadership is legitimate, her challenge to Moses results in punishment, though it is not because she is a woman; others who opposed Moses, such as Korah and his followers, face even harsher consequences (Num 16). God's response emphasizes Moses' unique relationship with Him, stating, "With him I speak face to face" (Num 12:6-8), while acknowledging that other prophets exist. Thus, Moses remains the central leader, with all others secondary to him. (Dever, 2008)

Several centuries later, during the time of the judges, Deborah emerges as both a prophet and a judge (Judg 4:4). The judges of this period served as both religious and political leaders, often leading military efforts to liberate the people from their oppressors. At the time of Deborah, the Israelites were under the

oppression of Jabin, king of Hazor. Deborah called upon Barak, appointing him as the army general to confront Sisera, Jabin's commander. However, Barak refused to go without Deborah's presence. Not only did Deborah accompany him, but she also determined the time and place of the battle. While Barak was successful, it was Jael, the wife of Heber, who ultimately killed Sisera.

Deborah's role as a judge parallels that of other major judges, like Jephthah and Gideon. Although she did not directly lead the military campaign, she appointed the general and made crucial military decisions. Additionally, she fulfilled a role similar to Samuel's, serving as a prophet and resolving disputes, as "the Israelites came to her for judgment" (Judg 4:5). Both Miriam and Deborah held religious leadership roles, but their positions differed. Miriam served as a secondary leader, with her authority under Moses, while Deborah was the primary leader, with Barak answering to her. There is no inherent preference for one structure over the other; rather, the situation determined the leadership arrangement.

### **The Old Testament and Contemporary Women**

According to Brevard (1996), the modern women's liberation movement has prompted the church, which holds the Old Testament as part of its doctrinal foundation, to reassess the role of women in its activities. As women are increasingly qualified for leadership positions in ministry and other fields, it is crucial for the church to address the Old Testament's perspective on women. Since the New Testament view on women aligns closely with the Old Testament, it seems the sacred witness covers the entire biblical canon. This raises questions: Should women today

be seen as subordinate to men because they were in biblical times? Should they hold secondary positions in church leadership and administration because of their historical roles? These questions are difficult, and the reflections offered here are meant to provoke further thought.

It is essential to differentiate between the specific advice given to ancient societies and how those principles apply to modern Christians. To understand what a passage meant to its original audience, we must consider its historical, grammatical, syntactical, literary, and sociological contexts. After this, we can extract the underlying principles and apply them to contemporary life. This approach allows ancient texts to speak with relevance to the church today. Both the implicit and explicit aspects of these texts must be considered in this interpretive process, ensuring no evidence is overlooked. The divine nature of Scripture should also be upheld, as often neglected by contemporary historical-critical approaches.

The Old Testament was addressed to people living in a patriarchal society, and the message was shaped to be heard by them within that social structure. This does not mean the message is compromised, but it does imply that the exact social context of Old Testament times cannot be directly transferred to modern society without adaptation. Scripture itself should guide this adaptation. An example of a misapplication of Old Testament sociological context is the historical use of the Bible to justify slavery. In the past, it was argued that blacks were inherently inferior to whites due to the curse supposedly placed on Ham (though it was actually on Canaan) and that the Bible supported slavery.

Similarly, some modern-day Mormons use Old Testament examples to justify polygamy. However, contemporary Christians reject these interpretations, recognizing that God spoke to people in their historical context and aimed to raise them to a higher ideal (Herzberg 2001)

The same reasoning can be applied to the biblical role of women. Even within the Old Testament, one can hear higher and nobler principles concerning women. Eichrodt emphasizes the original equality of man and woman as the *Imago Dei* in Genesis, which removes any justification for regarding women as inferior or closer to animals. Beer also highlights that while Christ's work broke down the subjugation of women (Gal 3:28), the Old Testament already pointed to a future freedom for all, including women, as seen in Joel 2:28. The new covenant promise in Jeremiah speaks of a new freedom for everyone, including women, and Christianity offers a clearer guide to navigating modern questions about women's roles.

The books of Ruth and Esther also contribute to this evolving understanding of women in the Old Testament. Ruth, for instance, features a female protagonist who is also a Gentile. If the Hebrew people had embraced the message of this book, they might have avoided the later national exclusivism that characterized their history. The story also demonstrates that Yahweh cares for women and their place in His community, regardless of their nationality. Similarly, in the book of Esther, the main character is a woman who fits the traditional image of womanhood—beautiful, subordinate, and objectified—but transcends it. Through her submission to the king, she

brings deliverance to the Jewish people, emerging as a "total woman".

While there are still ongoing questions regarding the complementarities of ministries, equality in assignments, and laity response, these should not hinder the church from embracing the "advance word" about women found in the Old Testament and fully utilizing the talents of women in the community of God, as modeled by Christ in the New Testament.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This paper has explored the role of women as intended by God in the Old Testament, as well as their status within the cultural practices of the Near East. Women have always been vital instruments in God's hands, from creation through the Old Testament period. Remarkably, the women who have made a lasting impact in history are often those who were "good" women—though not always conventional, they were honorable, loving, courageous, and generous. Women have shown that, although created as helpers, they possess all the qualities needed to be key players in fulfilling God's plans in the socio-economic and political will of any church ministries, communities, and the entire nation at large. They have played significant roles in the realization of God's purposes throughout history, therefore the same roles or beyond should be endow unto them. It is important to recognize that women are special and integral to God's plan. The idea of equating men and women has no foundation in God's design; instead, the focus should be on understanding God's purpose and diligently working towards its fulfillment.

This research recommended that the church heads, communities, and political leaders should emulate the Old

Testament leaders by ascribing and engage our women with imperative roles that would bring developments in all sects.

## References

- Achebe, Chinua Achebe, (1958) *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann. *Acu Press*, 49
- Arruzza, C., (2013). *Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism*. Pontypool: Merlin Press.
- Bauman, Z. & May, T., (2001). *Thinking Sociologically*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Black, M., (1961). *The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons: A critical examination*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Brevard S. Childs, (1986) *Old Testament Theology in a canonical context*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Carneades Cyrene, (2018). What is Feminism? (Political, Philosophical, and Methodological). [Sound Recording] (Youtube).
- Connell, R. W., (2002). *Gender: Short Introductions*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W., (2005). *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Camphell, Anthony F. and Flanagan, James W. (1995). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Ed., Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy. Theological Publication in India, 1995.
- GOV.UK, (2018). *Glen Dimplex Home Appliances Limited: Gender pay gap report*. Available at: <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Employer/FqkAYQxb/2018> [Accessed 4 December 2019]
- GOV.UK, (2018). *Moy Park Limited: Gender pay gap report*. Available at: <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Employer/A2DLNV9/2018> [Accessed 4 December 2019].
- Gupta, S., (2015). *Mother's Little Helper: A brief history of benzodiazepines*. Available at: <https://mosaicscience.com/story/mothers-little-helper-brief-history-benzodiazepines/> [Accessed 4 December 2019].
- Haralambos, M., Holborn, M., Chapman, S. & Moore, S., (2013). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. 8th ed. London: Collins.
- Herzberg, D., (2006). *The Pill You Love Can Turn on You": Feminism, Tranquilizers, and the Valium Panic of the 1970s*. *American Quarterly*, 58(1), pp. 79-103.
- Hislop, D., (2013). *The Objectivist Perspective on Knowledge*. In: *Knowledge Management in Organisations: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17-30.
- Holmes, M., (2007). *What is Gender? Sociological Approaches*. London: Sage.
- Huppatz, K., (2012). *Gender Capital at Work: Intersections of Femininity, Masculinity, Class and Occupation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leeuwen Mary Stewart Van (Ed), After Eden: (1993). *Facing the Challenge of Gender reconciliation*, (Grand Rapids,

- Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing,
- Meyers C, (2000), women in scripture, *Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing*,
- Mitchell, J., (1974). *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. London: Allen Lane.
- National Statistics, (2019). *Police Workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2019: Second Edition*, London: Home Office.
- Oakley, A., (1974). *House Wife: High Value – Low Cost*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Pal, S., (2004). How Much of the Gender Difference in Child School Enrolment Can Be Explained? *Evidence from Rural India*. *Bulletin of Economic Research*, 56(2), pp.133-158.
- Whitman Ardis, *The unforgettable woman, the marriage affair*, Allan J. Patterson (Ed.), Wheaton, Illinois: Coverdale House Publishers.
- Women in the Bible  
<https://www.jw.org/www.religioustolerance.org>
- Polanyi, M. & Sen, A., (2009). *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Poya, M., (1999). Women's Responses to Patriarchy. In: *Women, Work and Islamism: Ideology & Resistance in Iran*. Zed Books: London, pp. 122-156.