AN EXAMINATION OF THE BARREN MOTHER STORIES OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

by

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(Under the Direction of Richard Elliott Friedman)

ABSTRACT

Using source criticism and analyzing the text as a whole, I explore the differences in the way the sources J, E, and P address the three barren mother stories of Genesis. I then look at all five barren mother stories (including the accounts in Judges 13 and 1 Samuel 1, 2) as a complete narrative. Though the sources differ, there are elements of the barren mother stories that cross sources. The main theme presented in the barren mother stories is the shift of the roles of the human beings in their interactions with God concerning their children. Across the five stories, there is a transition from the human beings being passive to the human beings becoming more active when they enter into agreements with God. I will also analyze the J source separately and look at the further developments from passive male parent to active female parent that this source presents.

INDEX WORDS: Barren mother, Vow, Covenant, Hebrew Bible, J source, E source, P source, Barrenness, Genesis, Judges, 1 Samuel, Biblical women

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the Hebrew Bible, there are five stories that are about barren women who become mothers. These women are presented originally as childless and then receive children after their barrenness is removed. The removal of the women's barren state comes in a variety of ways, but God is always involved in some way. These stories appear in Genesis, Judges, and 1 Samuel. The women who are barren mothers are Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's unnamed wife, and Hannah. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel's stories appear in Genesis, across multiple sources. Manoah's wife and Hannah's stories appear in Judges and 1 Samuel, respectively. Remarkably, these stories, though they have multiple authors, have similarities that are present through all of the sources. Sarah, the first barren mother who appears in the text, is the wife of Abraham and becomes the mother of Isaac. Her story begins in Genesis 11 and continues through Genesis 23. Her son Isaac marries Rebekah, another barren woman who becomes a mother. Rebekah's first biblical appearance is in Genesis 24. Rebekah and Isaac have two children, Jacob and Esau. The theme of barrenness continues with Isaac and Rebekah's younger son, Jacob. Jacob marries two sisters, and the younger sister, Rachel, is barren. Rachel's barrenness is presented in Gen 29:31 and is removed in Gen 30:22, after which she gives birth to Joseph.

The barren mother stories that appear in Genesis have aspects that appear in different sources. The three sources that mention the women in Genesis are the E source, J source, and P source. Though each woman's barrenness is not specifically addressed by all three sources, each source makes a critical point about at least one of the women's stories. Therefore it is important to analyze all sources when examining these stories.

In Judges 13, Manoah and his wife are introduced, and the author describes the wife as barren. In 1 Samuel 1, Elkanah and his wife Hannah are introduced, and the author expresses that Hannah is in a barren state. These two stories, though they appear outside of the Torah, have also been connected to the author of the J source. The story of Jephthah in Judges 11, which is also connected to the author of the J source, is important to note due to its ties to the stories of Hannah and Manoah's wife and the insights that can be gained by comparing these three stories.

CHAPTER 2

COMMONALITIES AND WHAT THEY INDICATE

Through the stories of the barren women of the Hebrew Bible, we detect an essential development. By examining these stories, beginning with Abraham and Sarah and continuing through the Hebrew Bible to the story of Elkanah and Hannah, it appears that the human beings begin as inactive recipients of God's promise of children; then they begin to have their own components of the promise that the human beings have to fulfill; and finally they begin to seek children from God. To substantiate this hypothesis, it is important to analyze how each of the biblical sources J, E, and P addresses the stories individually and then how the combination of the sources affects the presentation of the stories. By analyzing the barren mothers' stories in this way, it is possible to determine whether or not the overall development of the human beings' involvement in their interactions with God is source specific. It appears that all of the sources involved contribute to the overall fluidity of the theme of the human beings' gaining more control in their interactions with God. However, it is possible to detect a further development of this theme when the texts attributed to the author of the J source are examined separately. When the barren mother stories of the author of the J source are read separately, not only is there a theme of human beings gaining more control in the interactions with God, but there is also the idea that interactions with God shift from the men to the women. However, when examining the main theme of human interaction with God as an overall

development throughout all of the barren mother stories, it becomes necessary to consider all of the sources.

To understand the connection of these stories to the sources it is important to examine the commonalities, elements that occur in multiple stories. For example, in the stories of Isaac, Rachel, and Hannah there are requests made for children by the parents. In the stories of Abraham and Manoah's wife, there is no need for a request to be made because in both of these stories, God sends a promise to the parents that they will have a child. The similarities do not concern only the aspects of agreements surrounding the child's birth; there are also elements of the parents' life situations that are similar among some of the barren mother stories. An example of this includes the presence of the rival wife concept in the stories of Hannah and Rachel. These women's husbands have second wives who have children while Rachel and Hannah remain barren. Both of these women take it upon themselves to make requests for children, but they make their requests quite differently.

Another element that appears in these stories and that has similar complications within the family structure is one in which the wife gives her maid to her husband so that she can have children through her maid. The stories that include this element are those of Abraham and Sarah and Jacob and his two wives, Rachel and Leah. A similarly problematic theme appears when the favored wife is infertile and the less favored wife is fertile, as in the story of Rachel and Jacob, in which Rachel's sister Leah is fertile and not favored by Jacob, and in the story of Hannah and Elkanah, in which Elkanah favors Hannah over his other wife Peninnah. All of these similarities are important to note

because they highlight the interconnectedness of these stories and draw attention to the fact that the stories can be analyzed as a whole rather than as separate and unrelated.

In the story of Manoah and his wife, the way in which they receive the promise of a child is reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah's promise reception. Both of these scenes include a messenger coming to a parent to inform him or her of imminent parenthood. In contrast, in three of the stories, parents make requests for their children. The first parent to request a child is Isaac; he makes his request to God on behalf of his barren wife Rebekah.[1] Likewise, in the last of the barren mother stories, Hannah makes a request for herself, asking God to remove her barrenness.[2] Another story that includes a request is Jacob and Rachel. This story combines an element of both of these stories and comes third in the five barren mother stories. When Isaac requests his child from God, he simply asks God for a child for his barren wife and God grants his request. Hannah requests her child from God on her own behalf and follows her request with a promise of responsibilities that she can complete in response to God granting her request. Unlike Manoah's wife, Hannah gives herself the responsibilities when she requests her child rather than being told what she will need to do by a messenger. Rachel's request is reminiscent of Isaac's and Hannah's, but there is a major difference: Rachel asks her husband, not God. Like Hannah, the barren woman is making the request on her own behalf; however, she asks a fellow human being to give her a child. Also, like Hannah, Rachel follows her request with a declaration of her own: that she will die if she does not conceive a child. Her husband, Jacob, understands that children come from God and tells

[1] Gen 25:21.
[2] 1 Sam 1:11.

her that he cannot give her a child in God's place.[3] The fact that Rachel asks Jacob for a child instead of making her request to God presents the idea that her character does not recognize, as Hannah does, that the responsibilities for children are divided between God and human beings.

In certain stories, there are components that appear in every source that presents the story. One such component is the inclusion of laughter in the story of Sarah and Abraham. Reference to laughter occurs in the E source in Gen 21:6, in the P source in Gen 17:17, and in the J source in Gen 18:15. Also, Sarah is associated with barrenness in all three sources, though not always her own. In the E source her presence causes barrenness to come upon the women of Abimelek's house.[4] In the P and J sources, Sarah's own barrenness is highlighted.[5] In the P source account of Sarah, the first occurrence of the Hebrew word עקרה, meaning barren, appears.[6] This word is not included in the J source account of Sarah, but it occurs in all of the J source accounts of the other barren women. Another element that is in all three sources appears in the story of Rachel and Jacob. Their story contains the idea that Jacob had children with Bilhah, his wife's maid, in all three sources.[7]

The main fact that pervades these sources is that the human beings are taking on progressively more active roles in their reception of children. In the first barren mother story, the human beings do not take on an active role in their promise of children. Abraham passively receives God's promise that he will be the father of nations. In all three sources, his role is that of an inactive recipient of God's promise. The development

[3] Gen 30:2.
[4] Gen 20:18.
[5] Gen 11:30; 16:1.
[6] Gen 11:30.
[7] Gen 30:3; 30:4; 35:25.

in the second story is that Isaac takes on a partially active role in the interactions with God about his child. Isaac takes it upon himself to request a child on behalf of his barren wife. This request is a development from Abraham's passive reception of God's promise, but Isaac is only partially active in that he requests a child but does not enter into any agreement with God following the request. He does not offer anything to God in return.

The story of Rachel and Jacob is placed in a transitional role as the third of the five barren mother stories. In this story, Rachel requests a child for herself in conjunction with a statement of what will happen if she does not receive a child. However, it seems that she oversteps the boundaries of human beings in these stories because she requests that another human being—her husband, Jacob—gives her a child rather than asking God. After Rachel makes her request, she also includes her own declaration. Rachel says that she will die without children.[8] Rachel's request is errant because, while all the families in the barren mother stories include interactions with God, Rachel makes her request of her fellow human being. Rachel's declaration is what will happen if her request is not met. Furthermore, her request being directed at Jacob instead of God presents the idea that she is neglecting the necessity to include God in her request.

In the story of Manoah and his wife, Manoah's wife has a partially active role in the promise scene. When the messenger visits Manoah's wife, she is not only told that she will have a son but also that she has requirements to complete in regard to the promise of her son. Manoah's wife has to fulfill a part of the agreement because her son is to be a Nazirite from conception. Her role in the promise immediately follows the messenger's promise that her barrenness will be removed. The author's placement of

[8] Gen 30:1.

Manoah's wife's component of the promise, right after God's part, emphasizes that her role of the agreement is as important as God's. Manoah's wife's part of the promise is immediately presented and is critical to the story of Samson, her son. God's promise is the reason for his life, but his mother's promise shapes his life and his status in society.

Hannah is a character who is more active than any other parent in her agreement with God. She makes a request for her barrenness to be removed, reminding us of Isaac's request on behalf of Rebekah. Also, like Isaac, Hannah makes her request to God directly. Further evidence of Hannah's active role appears following her request, when she makes a dedication to God to give her son to His service. Hannah's story is an example of a human being taking on a completely active role in a promise scene. Hannah is the culmination, within the barren mother stories, of control over her own life because of her trust that God will fulfill her request.

In all of these stories, covenant or vow becomes an important theme. In the first barren mother story, an element of covenant arises. The story of Abraham and Sarah is centered on a covenant between God and Abraham that promises that he will have a child through Sarah, an idea that appears in all three sources.[9] The subsequent stories concerning barren women appear to contain elements of covenant as well. Isaac and Rebekah's story contains a promise similar to the one that was given to his parents, Abraham and Sarah.[10] However, God's promise to Isaac appears following the birth of his and Rebekah's sons rather than preceding their birth, as was the case in the previous story. Isaac makes a request prior to his sons' birth, but God's promise does not

[9] Gen 17:16; 18:10; 21:6.
[10] Gen 26:2-5.

immediately follow the request.[11] God's promise, which was first revealed to Abraham, occurs for a third time when God reveals the agreement to Jacob, one of Isaac and Rebekah's sons. The promise precedes Jacob's children's birth.[12] This same type of promise appears in all three stories of the barren mothers in Genesis. The fact that this promise pervades all of the Genesis stories is significant in that it may be an indication that this element may not be solely confined to these three stories and may appear in all of the barren mother stories to some extent. There is evidence, which will be presented in chapter 4, that suggests that this element is present in the remaining two stories. The three occurrences of this agreement in separate stories in Genesis are all attributable to the one author, the author of the J source. The two remaining stories are also attributed to the author of the J source. It seems reasonable to expect to find elements of the promise component in the stories of Manoah and his wife and Elkanah and his wife, Hannah.

When analyzing the barren women's stories, it is helpful to compare their interactions with God to different covenant models that appear in the Hebrew Bible. Their stories compare to the covenants God made with Abraham, as well as Noah and David. This covenant style is referred to as a "royal grant."[13] When the formula for these grants is analyzed, similarities arise that can be laid out and examined in the depictions of Hannah and Manoah's wife. In the case of Abraham and David, the promises that are expressed involve their later generations. Their children are the main element to the grant. Abraham is promised to have many descendants and David is promised descendants who will always rule Judah.

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[11] Gen 25:21.
[12] Gen 28:13.
[13] Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the ancient Near East," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the ancient Near East* (ed. Frederick E Greenspahn; New York: New York University Press, 1991), 69.

When analyzing the idea of covenant and applying it to the stories of Manoah's wife and Hannah, it becomes clear that the agreements made between God and these two women are reminiscent of God's agreement with Abraham. The presence of these agreements is critical to the human beings taking on more control of their lives in relationship to their children and, in these stories, the human beings eventually become the constructors of the covenant.

Another critical component in the development of the human beings in these stories taking on more active roles is their recognition of God's role in giving them children. This idea is critical to the concept of the covenantal agreements. The authors of the book of Ruth, the E source, and 1 Samuel all include indications that God is responsible for procreation.[14] Furthermore, in Gen 4:1b, which is included in the J source, Eve says, "I've created a man with YHWH"[15] / "I have added a life with the help of YHWH."[16] This text suggests that the author of the J source (to whom Friedman attributes portions of 1 Samuel—including the story of Hannah) also places a component of procreation in the hands of God.[17] The fact that this idea appears in multiple texts attributed to different authors would suggest that God being responsible for human beings receiving children was understood by multiple biblical authors.

When we apply the idea that God's involvement is necessary to the interpretation of Hannah's actions, it becomes clear that Hannah is requesting God's action where He has not acted previously. Hannah's actions lead to an agreement with God that she is to

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[14] Michael Carasik, "Why Did Hannah Ask For 'Seed of Men,'" *JBL* 129, 3 (2010): 435. Ruth 4:13, Gen 30:2, 1 Sam 1:11.
[15]Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 38.
[16] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis, Anchor Bible*,(Garden City, New York: Doubleday,1964), 29.
[17] Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible* (New York NY: HarperCollins, 1999) 193.

uphold in response to God's granting her request for a child. This agreement seems reminiscent of agreements that appear in Manoah's wife's story and the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not instructed to meet any stipulations to acquire their children. Manoah's wife is given stipulations following her promise received from God. However, a woman, whose acknowledgement of God's power compels her to act, places the requirement upon herself to give up her son, who is to be dedicated to God's service for life. Abraham is asked to give up his son in the E source account of his story, but it is not a requirement for him to receive his son. Like Hannah, Manoah's wife is given rules to follow in order to receive her son. Manoah's wife is directly contacted by a messenger of God and informed that she will have a son. They involve barren mothers giving birth to children promised by God. The people in Genesis who are promised children have no rules that they are required to follow to obtain their children, while Hannah and Manoah's wife have requirements to meet in response to God giving them children.

The relationships that are like partnerships, those that Hannah and Manoah's wife have with God, have an impact on the lives of the next generation. The sons that result from these interactions become powerful men. Samson has great physical strength as long as he retains his commitment to his Nazirite vow. Similarly, Samuel becomes a powerful man in the community; his life is affected by the vow that his mother makes declaring that he will be a Nazirite. It could be concluded that this reciprocal promise between their mothers and God allows these men to become powerful judges and the only Nazirites presented in biblical texts.

CHAPTER 3

THE BARREN MOTHERS AND THE SOURCES

The first source to mention Sarah or barrenness is the P source, which in Gen 11:30 presents the idea that Sarah is barren using the Hebrew word עקרה. Later, in Genesis 17, God appears to Abraham and establishes a covenant with him. The verses indicate that Abraham will become a nation through his wife Sarah, who is ninety and has yet to have children.[18] In the text, emphasis is placed on the fact that God will establish His covenant with Isaac, who will be Sarah's son, but Ishmael, Abraham's son with Sarah's maid Hagar, will not be forgotten.[19] In fact, God's requirement that all males be circumcised also applies to Ishmael.[20] The inclusion of Ishmael's need to be circumcised indicates that this is a separate part of God's covenant with Abraham because Ishmael is not a part of the covenant about Isaac. This part of the covenant does not appear to be a stipulation to the promise, as is the case in the later barren mother stories. God also gives Abraham a time to expect his promised son and the name of his son. By examining the way this text presents this covenant and the birth of Isaac, it appears that full control is in God's power and Abraham and Sarah are passive recipients of their son, other than conceiving him.

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[18] Gen 17:15-18.
[19] Gen 17:20.
[20] Gen 17:25.

Abraham and Sarah's story is also present in the text of the J source. In Genesis 15, God promises that Abraham will have many descendants.[21] The text that follows this promise includes the statement that Abraham trusted God, a statement that differs from the reaction of Abraham in the P source, in which Abraham laughs at the prospect of parenthood.[22] In the J source, the word עקרה, Hebrew for barren, is present in all of the stories with the exception of Abraham and Sarah's. In the story of Sarah, the first barren woman mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the J source refers to her as childless using the Hebrew word עקרה.[23] Following the pronouncement of Sarah's childless state, the author describes her attempt to gain a child through her maid Hagar.[24] However, this action has unexpected results. Following the conception of Abraham and Hagar's child, animosity grows between Sarah and her maid Hagar, which results in Hagar eventually being driven away.[25] In Genesis 18, Abraham is again visited by God and is again given a promise that he will have a child.[26] This promise differs from the previous one in that it states that Sarah will be the mother of this child.[27] In this version of the promise revelation, Sarah laughs at the prospect of having a child because of her own and Abraham's advanced age.[28] In Genesis 21, God grants Sarah a child, and she gives birth to a son for Abraham.[29] In this source, Abraham and Sarah again appear as passive recipients of their son, apart from conceiving him, as they did in the P source. Even though Sarah takes the initiative to have a child through her maid, when she and Abraham are promised a son,

[21] Gen 15:5.
[22] Gen 15:6; 17:17.
[23] Gen 16:2.
[24] Gen 16:1-2.
[25] Gen 16:4-6.
[26] Gen 18:1-13.
[27] Gen 18:10.
[28] Gen 18:12-13.
[29] Gen 21:1a; 21:2a.

the text does not indicate any action either on her part or Abraham's their part in response to God's promise or preceding the promise.

In the E source components of Abraham and Sarah's story, Sarah's barrenness is not mentioned. However, barrenness appears again as a plot element in the story. When Sarah is in Abimelek's house in Genesis 20, her presence causes God to withhold children from the women around her.[30] God removes the barrenness from Abimelek's house after Abraham prays to God.[31] The E source also includes the idea that Abraham has a son with Hagar and that this causes trouble among the two women, Sarah and Hagar, as well as their sons.[32] This trouble results in Hagar and Ishmael being sent away as was the case in the J source.[33] Similar to the P source, God promises Abraham that Ishmael will not be forgotten because he is a son of Abraham.[34] In the E source there is no promise of Isaac's birth prior to his conception. However, a promise does appear later in Genesis 22 following God's testing of Abraham.[35] In the E source, there is no indication that the promise is applicable to Isaac.

In the case of Isaac and Rebekah's story, the E source does not include significant mention of the couple. Similarly, the P source mentions little detail about Rebekah's pregnancy and there is no indication in the text of the P source that she is barren. The P source includes details of the later lives of the children and of Rebekah's influences on her sons' lives.[36]

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[30] Gen 20:18.
[31] Gen 20:17.
[32] Gen 21:9-10.
[33] Gen 21:10, 14.
[34] Gen 21:12.
[35] Gen 22:16-18.
[36] Gen 27:46-28:1-9.

In the J source, Rebekah's barren state is mentioned in Gen 25:21 when Isaac requests a child on her behalf. Rebekah questions God about her sons, but she does not have a role in her children being requested from God.[37] However, in the depictions of Rebekah that follow the births of her sons, Rebekah does demonstrate influence over her children in the story concerning their blessings.[38] Isaac makes an active request, but that is where his action ends; he offers nothing back to God.

Most of Rachel's life is depicted in the E source. In the E source, Rachel makes an active request for her child from her husband Jacob.[39] She also gives her maid, Bilhah, to her husband so that she may have children through her maid.[40] Later in the story, the text states that God remembered Rachel, and she becomes pregnant and has her son Joseph.[41] Rachel later has a second son, Benjamin, but dies as she names him.[42] Rachel begins with an active request, though not to God, and she then becomes a passive recipient.

The P and J sources include much less detail about Jacob and Rachel's story. The P source includes Rachel in the mention of Jacob's twelve sons.[43] This section of P simply states that Rachel's two sons are Joseph and Benjamin. The P source does not include a mention of Rachel being barren. The J source states that Rachel is barren and that her sister Leah is fertile.[44] This source also includes a depiction of Rachel giving

[37] Gen 25:22.
[38] Gen 27:1-36.
[39] Gen 30:1b.
[40] Gen 30:3.
[41] Gen 30:22-24a.
[42] Gen 35:17-19.
[43] Gen 35:23.
[44] Gen 29:31.

her maid Bilhah to Jacob, as was mentioned in the E source.[45] The J source also includes the mention that Rachel has a son named Joseph.[46]

The final component in analyzing the barren mother stories and the conclusions that they present is to look at the stories of the last two barren mothers mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Manoah and his wife and Elkanah and Hannah appear only in texts that Richard Friedman attributes to the same author who wrote the J source of Genesis.[47] The story of Manoah and his wife appears in Judges 13 and the story of Elkanah and his wife, Hannah, appears in 1 Samuel 1.

Manoah is introduced in Judg 13:2, and the text states that his wife is barren. The next verse describes an angel that comes to Manoah's wife and tells her that her barren state is going to be removed. This promise scene in Judg 13:3-6 is similar to the scene in which messengers come to Abraham. However, the development of this story from the previous story is that the messenger reveals to Manoah's wife that she is to perform actions on behalf of her son. She is required to guard herself and neither to have wine nor eat anything unclean.[48] None of the other stories, thus far, have included an element in which a parent has to carry out an action that is expressed in the promise scene. Manoah's wife passively receives the news that she will have a son; she does not take an action to request her son. However, she does complete her part of the promise agreement and thereby becomes an active participant. Her actions allow her son to be a Nazirite from conception.

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[45] Gen 30:4.
[46] Gen 30:25.
[47] Friedman (1999), 15.
[48] Judg 13:4.

The final story containing a barren mother is the story of Elkanah and Hannah. In this story Elkanah has both a barren wife and a wife who has children. Elkanah shows favoritism to his barren wife Hannah. When Hannah refuses to eat because she is upset about her barrenness, Elkanah attempts to convince her that there is no need for her dismay.[49] Hannah decides to seek a son actively and prays to God that He will remove her barrenness.[50] Hannah's prayer includes a dedication that she will give her son to God's service for his life as well as making him a Nazirite.[51] This story demonstrates a human being taking on a completely active role in that she requests her child as well as imposing requirements on herself in response to God answering her request. Hannah is the sole example in the barren mother stories of a completely active human being who enters into a promise with God about her child.

Both the story of Manoah's wife and the story of Hannah demonstrate human beings who have restrictions applied to them as a part of the agreement with God. Hannah's request is reminiscent of both Isaac and Rachel's requests, but Hannah also vows to give God something in return, whereas the previous parents had not. Manoah's wife's reception of the promise from the messenger is reminiscent of Abraham's promise reception; however, the messenger imposes restrictions on Manoah's wife that she is to complete that are not present in Abraham's story. These developments place more responsibility on the human beings involved in these agreements with God.

[49] 1 Sam 1:8.
[50] 1 Sam 1:10-11.
[51] 1 Sam 1:11.

CHAPTER 4

THE RELATIONSHIP OF COVENANT IN THE BARREN MOTHER STORIES

In *The Covenant Formulary,* Klaus Baltzer compares and analyzes the concepts of covenant and treaty. This analysis may lead to further understanding of the stories of the barren women. Baltzer begins his analysis by introducing the idea that the ancient Near Eastern world had a concept of a legal framework by which agreements were organized. In "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," George E. Mendenhall states that the covenant form that relates to the biblical form was not originated by the Hittites, but was borrowed from the East.[52] Baltzer applies this borrowed framework from the ancient Near East to biblical stories and notes the similarities in the framework of both the biblical stories and the treaties. Baltzer cites J. Pendersen, who uses the link between Semitic languages to compare the Hebrew term *bĕrît* to the Arabic *ahd,* stating that they mean the "mutual relationship of solidarity, with all rights and obligations this relationship involves for the parties concerned."[53] Baltzer concludes that Pendersen means that the term "*bĕrît* refers to the relationship itself."[54] Baltzer's conclusions about Pendersen's analysis indicate that *bĕrît* can be a more general term that defines a certain type of interaction. Interestingly, Mendenhall states that "the Hittite language, and the Babylonian as well, never had a single word for contract or covenant. In both languages

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[52] George E. Mendenhall. "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," in *Biblical Archaeologist* 17, 3 (1954): 49-76. 54

[53] Klaus Baltzer. *The Covenant Formulary* (trans. David E. Green; Great Britain: Fortress Press, 1971), 3.

[54] Baltzer, 3.

the covenant was designated by a phrase which would be translated literally as "oaths and bonds."[55] Mendenhall's observation about this term in the Hittite language also presents the idea that this concept is about a type of binding agreement. Mendenhall goes on to state that "covenant is regularly spoken of as that which the sovereign gave to his vassal—it is the sovereign's covenant."[56] In the biblical covenants this is represented when God tells the covenant to the human beings, as is the case in the barren mother stories of Genesis.

Baltzer presents a formula for covenant in *The Covenant Formulary* that resembles treaties of the ancient Near East. Baltzer's formula can be compared to the elements that Ronald Hyman presents in "Four Acts of Vowing in the Bible." Baltzer's "preamble" is comparable to the narrator's introduction in the vows. The "preamble" introduces the participants of the treaty, and the narrator's introduction introduces the vow maker and sometimes states that the vow is being made to God (as is the case in the introduction to Israel's vow in Num 21:2 and Jephthah's vow in Judg 11:30-31). The "antecedent" component of the treaty/covenant formula, which consists of the history of the relations between those involved in the agreement, is comparable to components of the vow including the indication of the distress of the person making the vow, the indication of the intensity of the vow maker's feeling, and the vow maker's personal relationship with God. The part of the treaty/covenant formula that lays out the conditions of the covenant, the blessings and curses, is similar to the vow maker setting forth a condition for God and the promise that they plan to complete in response to God completing His component of the agreement. These similarities in the formula

[55] Mendenhall, 57.
[56] Mendenhall, 57.

components of these two types of agreements allow fluidity in the analysis and comparisons of vows and covenants.

These similarities, in conjunction with the positioning of the stories in the texts of Judges and 1 Samuel that are credited to the same author, strengthen the comparable nature of vows and covenants in the stories of the barren mothers. Constructing the women's stories around this agreement style helps to display a shift in the power from completely God's in the covenants to more power being imposed on human beings as is the case of the vow of Hannah. The inclusion of the gradual shift across all of the barren mother stories, leading up to Hannah's vow, places further emphasis on Hannah as the culmination of the change from human beings not being active, to human beings taking on a component of the agreement, and then the human being actually presenting the agreement herself.

Within the texts attributed to the author of the J source, there are a series of examples of both covenants and vows. Examples of vows in this author's work include Jephthah's vow in Judg 11:30, Hannah's vow in 1 Sam 1:11, and the vow made by Israel in Num 21:2. Ronald Hyman analyzes these three vows as well as a vow made by Jacob in Gen 28:20-22 which Friedman attributes to the E source.[57,58] Hyman compares these four vows, analyzing the components of the vows that all four include. Hyman notes that all of these vows are introduced by the narrator's stating that the vow maker "vowed a vow."[59] Hyman's next observation is that each vow maker states a condition that God

[57] Ronald T. Hyman. "Four Acts of Vowing in the Bible" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37, 4. (2009), 231.
[58] Friedman (2003), 77.
[59] Hyman, 232.

must complete to demonstrate His "support for the vower."[60] Hyman includes that the vow maker then identifies the promise that he or she will complete.[61] He explains that the human beings make these promises immediately following their statement of the conditions that God is to complete in the agreement.[62] Citing Num 30:4-16, he then introduces the component of vows which includes that women's vows have restrictions placed on the vows they make.[63] These restrictions include that their husbands and fathers can break the women's vows. However, the restrictions on the vows of women appear in texts that are included in the P source of the Torah.[64] Since none of the vows Hyman discusses is in the P source, the restrictions may not be applicable to these vows. However, the men's vows are not breakable in any case set forth in the text. The women's vows are unbreakable without the restrictions expressed in the P source. To clarify the separation of these four vows from the others referenced in the text of the Hebrew Bible, Hyman presents the idea that "addressing God directly is absolutely essential to a vow."[65] He states that Hannah's vow contains the most explicit example of the human being addressing God at the beginning of a vow.[66] He also states that the construction of these vows "create and express a direct and personal relationship with the Lord in their vows.[67]

Human beings make vows; God makes covenants. The human beings know that God will respond to their vows. Vows are comparable to covenants, but the main

[60] Hyman, 235.
[61] Hyman, 235
[62] Hyman, 235.
[63] Hyman, 233.
[64] Friedman (2003), 297.
[65] Hyman, 233.
[66] Hyman, 233-4.
[67] Hyman, 233.

difference is the initiator. Human vows have limits that God's do not—particularly in regard to length: a lifetime for human vows as opposed to God's promises continuing through multiple generations. Manoah's wife has interactions with a messenger of God that are reminiscent of Abraham's interaction with God about their covenant concerning Isaac.[68] Though the agreement between Abraham and God is often identified as covenant, Mendenhall notes that "in both the narrative of Genesis 15 and 17, and in later references to this covenant, it is clearly stated or implied that it is Yahweh Himself who swears to certain promises to be carried out in the future." Mendenhall follows this statement with "It is not often enough seen that no obligations are imposed upon Abraham."[69] However, this covenant component *is* present in the depiction of the agreement between Manoah's wife and God. Manoah's wife's agreement with the messenger immediately follows the story of Jephthah and his vow. These two stories have similarities with the vow scene of Hannah, which appears shortly after them within the text attributed to the author of the J source. Jephthah's vow has similarities with the vow of Hannah and the story that appears between them is the story of Manoah and his wife, which has elements that are similar to Hannah's story and immediately follow Jephthah's, thus highlighting the relationship of these three stories. The factor tying them together is the agreements that these human beings enter into with God, agreements which can also be related to the agreements in the barren mother stories of Genesis where the concept of covenant is present.

In both Jephthah and Hannah's vows, the parents promise to commit something to God, and in both cases the gifts they give to God are their children. In Jephthah's case,

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[68] Gen 22.
[69] Mendenhall, 62.

he is not aware that he is committing his child to God while Hannah is completely aware that she will have to give up her son for his entire life. The requirements that Jephthah sets forth for himself necessitate that he make his daughter a burnt offering to God. Hannah's son is not required to give up living, but he is required to live a certain life. This requirement is the same one that is imposed on Samson, the son of Manoah and his wife.[70] The fact that both Samson and Samuel have the same requirements set forth in agreements between their mothers and God demonstrates a link not only between the mothers' stories but also their sons'—who are the only two Nazirites in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, their promise agreements with God are linked based on the similarities in their sons' lives.

Similarly, there is an element linking stories of Jephthah and Manoah's wife, beyond the fact that they are both linked to Hannah's story. In Jephthah's story, his daughter remains unnamed and is referred to as "daughter" throughout rather than by any name. Manoah's wife also remains unnamed throughout her story, only referred to as "Manoah's wife." With all of these commonalities in mind, it becomes clear that the author of these three stories included elements that link all three stories together. One critical commonality of these stories is that all three stories include parents entering into agreements with God. The differences between covenants and vows do not negate the links between these stories and the similarities in the agreements.

One main difference between vows and covenants is that covenants are imparted on human beings by God, but vows are voluntarily imposed by human beings upon themselves.[71] Furthermore, vows are permanent and cannot be retracted.[72] In the case of

[70] Hyman, 235.
[71] Hyman, 232.

covenants, there are some that are irrevocable. These are called "unconditional covenants." The Noahic covenant is not to be revoked; God explicitly states in Gen 8:21 that He will never again flood the earth. There is no statement following this promise that indicates any way it could be recanted. Similarly, God's statement of covenant to Abraham in Gen 18:10 has no condition included that would allow God to recant His promise of children for Abraham through Sarah. Even Sarah's skepticism following this promise is not going to change the outcome. Like these two covenants, the Davidic covenant, which is presented in a portion of 2 Samuel that Friedman attributes to the author of the J source, appears to be unconditional.[73] In 2 Sam 7:1a, 2-12, 18-21, 25-29, God promises David that his family will rule and not be conquered anymore.[74] Like the vows of Jephthah and Hannah, these covenants cannot be revoked by God regardless of what the human beings do to displease God. Human beings' promises to God appear no less permanent than God's promises to human beings.

Another common element that appears in all of these promises—both human and divine—is the concept that the promise affects the generation following the person involved in the promise. For the Noahic, Davidic, and Abrahamic covenants, the concept of the continuation of the covenant is far reaching, to multiple generations, while the vows explicitly involve the children of the vow makers.

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[72] Hyman, 232.
[73] Friedman (1998), 248.
[74] 2 Sam 7:9-10.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS PRESENTED IN THE TEXTS OF THE AUTHOR OF THE J SOURCE

With the previous findings in mind, it is also possible to find a more source specific development. In the J source of the barren mother stories, there is a role reversal among the mothers and fathers in the barren mother stories of the Hebrew Bible. This role reversal is not only in regard to the agreements about receiving children, but it also extends to the women's roles in their children's lives. The roles described in Genesis emphasize the fathers' relationships with God, while the mothers' relationships with God are emphasized in later barren mother stories. In *The Hidden Book in the Bible,* Richard Friedman sheds more light on this idea with his evidence that the texts that contain the barren mother stories are by the same author—the author of the J source.[75] This evidence includes sections that directly tie the texts in the Torah that are accepted as texts in the J source to sections of 1 Samuel and Judges. One such example is "know (with sexual connotation)," which is found in Genesis and 1 Sam 1:19, where it is referring to Hannah and Elkanah's sexual act that results in Samuel's conception.[76] The word "to know," with sexual connotation, appears almost exclusively in the texts associated with the author of the J source.[77] There is only one occurrence of this word outside of the text that

[75] Friedman (1999), 15.
[76] Friedman (1999), 383.
[77] Friedman (1999), 383.

is attributed to the J source.[78] That occurrence is attributed to a redactor of the Hebrew Bible who was combining this text with other sources.[79] Also, there is a phrase that ties 1 Sam 1:1 to Judg 13:2 that does not appear anywhere else in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible—the phrase "and there was a man from," which is used to introduce both Elkanah and Manoah.[80] This author addresses women differently from the other authors of the Hebrew Bible, so much so that it has been suggested that the author could in fact be a woman, or a man who has a close relationship with an in-depth understanding of women.[81] Friedman's evidence opens up the possibility that the recurrence of the barren mother theme is central to the motive of a single author. The parallel structure of the stories reinforces the author's emphasis on role reversal. This role reversal is apparent when the later barren mother stories of Judges and 1 Samuel are compared to the barren mother stories in Genesis 18 and 25. The story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 parallels the story of Manoah and his wife in Judges 13. Likewise, the story of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 25 parallels the story of Hannah and Elkanah in 1 Samuel 1.

In Genesis 18, three visitors come to Abraham and reveal the promise that Sarah, Abraham's wife, will have a son. The description of this revelation and the events surrounding it has some clear similarities with the story of Manoah and his wife in Judges 13. In both stories, the husbands offer a meal to the messengers who appear to them.[82] In Genesis 18, the guests accept the meal, while in Judges 13 the messenger refuses to eat the food, saying that Manoah and his wife should offer it to God as a burnt offering.[83]

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[78] Friedman (1999), 383.
[79] Friedman (1999), 383.
[80] Friedman (1999), 381.
[81] Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 86
[82] Gen 18:5; Judg 13:15.
[83] Gen 18:5; Judg 13:16.

The author's inclusion of this common element of the meal in both stories, with the reversal of this minute fact, raises the possibility that there may be more reversals in this story that are more noteworthy.

Most of the reversals between these two stories have to do with an exchange of the roles of the father and mother of the child that is promised in the messenger's revelation. The main role reversal from Genesis 18 to Judges 13 appears when the revelation about the child is made. In Genesis 18 the messenger appears to the father of the child, but in Judges 13 the message is delivered to the mother first. In both Genesis 18 and Judges 13, the messengers are revealing that a childless woman will have a son. The fact that the message is revealed to the husband in the first story and then to the wife in the second is the first indication that there is a movement of the mother to the more significant role.

In both stories, there is a more doubtful spouse and a more believing spouse, and the roles switch from wife to husband and vice-versa from Genesis 18 to Judges 13. The doubtful spouse in each story takes a secondary role to the spouse involved in the promise revelation. The secondary role is characterized by doubt and fear, which seem to stem from a lack of understanding of God and His power. Sarah laughs at God's promise that she will have children.[84] Her doubts emerge from her physical inability to conceive children in her menopausal state.[85] Manoah's doubt is displayed in his lack of recognition that the messenger he encounters is from God.[86] Both Sarah and Manoah are also portrayed as fearful of God. The author indicates Sarah's fear when God catches her expressing her doubt about His promise. Her lack of understanding of God and His

[84] Gen 18:12.
[85] Gen 18:11.
[86] Judg 13:16.

power is apparent in her feeble attempt to deceive God by denying her doubt.[87] Manoah's fear is presented by his reaction when he finally recognizes that the messenger is in fact from God, which he realizes when the messenger disappears in the flames of the offering.[88] Manoah panics, saying that he and his wife will die because they have seen God.[89] His wife, who, as Donna Nolan Fewell states, is "clearly the wiser of the two," explains to him that if God had meant for them to be killed they would not have been given the revelation.[90] The husband in Judges takes on the role of the doubter that previously belonged to the wife in Genesis.

The secondary quality of the roles of Manoah and Sarah is intensified by God's apparent reluctance to interact with them. God addresses His question about Sarah's doubt to Abraham, and God addresses Sarah only to rebuke her deceitful response.[91] Similarly, God's messenger appears to Manoah only *after* Manoah's requests a second visit.[92] When the messenger does return, Manoah does not even realize that his request is being answered.[93] When Manoah asks the messenger to repeat what he had said to Manoah's wife, the messenger responds with less detail than he had given to Manoah's wife. [94]

There is another element to these stories that gives Manoah's wife a more prominent role in her son Samson's life than Sarah has in her son Isaac's life. When

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[87] Gen 18:15.
[88] Judg 13:21.
[89] Judg 13:22.
[90] Donna Nolan Fewell, "Women Among Men: Promises, Threats, and Bribes (chapters 13-16 of Judg.)," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. Carol A. Newsom et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 78.
[91] Gen 18:13-15.
[92] Judg 13:8.
[93] Judg 13:16.
[94] Fewell, 78.

Abraham is arranging a wife for Isaac, Sarah is not involved—her name is not even mentioned except to say that she had Isaac when she was old and when Isaac takes Rebekah into Sarah's tent.[95] Sarah may not be alive at this point, but it is unclear from the text when she actually dies. She may not have died until after Abraham has made the arrangements with the servant to find a wife for Isaac. Whether she is alive at this point of the story or not, she is not involved. At the point in his life when Samson requests a wife, both of his parents are mentioned repetitively as a pairing.[96] Both of his parents are also involved in trying to persuade their son to choose a proper wife.[97] The author's repetitive inclusion of the parents as a pair can be viewed as an attempt to promote Manoah's wife to a more equal level with her husband in regard to their son's life, while Sarah is not placed on that level in Isaac's life.

In the continuous narrative attributed to the author of the J source, the book of 1 Samuel follows immediately after the last excerpts of Judges. The author revisits the barren mother theme in 1 Samuel 1, and this story can be compared to a barren mother story from Genesis. When read continuously as a complete work, it is noticeable that the author makes a choice to leave significant women unnamed. Examples of this omission include Jephthah's daughter, Manoah's wife, and the concubine whose remains initiate an organized alliance of the tribes of Israel.[98] In the case of Samson's story only one woman is named—Delilah.[99] In the subsequent stories, no women are named until Hannah in 1 Sam 1:2. Hannah and Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, are both introduced by name in this verse, but Hannah's name appears first. The author's placement of Hannah's name at

[95] Gen 24:1-67.
[96] Judg 14:3-6.
[97] Judg 14:3.
[98] Judg 11, Judg. 13-16, Judg. 19.
[99] Judg 16.

the beginning of the verse is noteworthy since she is the first woman named since Delilah in Judges 16. The second part of the verse reverses the order of their names and mentions Peninnah having children before it mentions Hannah's lack of children. Hannah is the first woman mentioned in this section, and her barren state is contrasted with the fertility of her husband's second wife. The placement of Hannah's name and condition, at the beginning and end of the verse, indicates that she is the focus. She is a significant woman who is also barren. Furthermore, the author ceases to use Peninnah's name, and she is mentioned only with pronouns or referred to as Hannah's rival or in the all-encompassing group of Elkanah's entire house. Hannah's name appears throughout the story while Peninnah's appears three times and not again after the fourth verse of the chapter. With the author's apparent intentional focus on this barren woman, Hannah, it becomes clear that she is significant.

Hannah's significance is intensified when her story is examined for its parallel elements with Genesis 25—the story of Isaac and Rebekah. In these two stories, the similarity lies mainly in the fact that they include parents making a request to God for children. Unlike Abraham and Manoah's wife, who receive revelations that they will have children, Isaac and Hannah both take the initiative to request a child from God. Isaac requests a child on his wife's behalf because she is barren, and God grants his request.[100] Similarly, in 1 Samuel 1, there is a depiction of a desperate parent requesting a child from God directly. However, it is the wife, rather than the husband, who takes the active role in 1 Samuel 1. Hannah takes her barren condition into her own hands and makes the request herself rather than her husband Elkanah making a request on her behalf. The fact that the author deliberately excludes Elkanah and Rebekah from the

[100] Gen 25:21.

request scene indicates that they are not as involved with God as their spouses are. In fact, Rebekah and Elkanah are prominent in most of the narrative surrounding the request scene, which emphasizes their exclusion from the agreement scene.

In the text of Isaac's request, there is no indication of whether or not Rebekah is longing for a child. In the text of 1 Samuel, Elkanah's indifference is clearly depicted when he says to Hannah "Am I not better to you than ten sons?"[101] In 1 Sam 1:8, Elkanah appears not to understand the pain that Hannah endures as a result of her barren state. He asks her "Why do you mourn, why do you not eat, why is there bad to your heart?"[102] His questions do not offer any indication that he is attempting to console his wife. His comments have a tone of incredulity at that idea that her childlessness causes her such despair.

In all of the barren mother stories that are attributed to the author of the J source, only Isaac and Hannah make requests for their children. Both Isaac and Hannah's actions imply that they believe in God's prominent role in their ability to have children. In accordance with this notion, they both take their requests directly to God, and He grants them the sons that they desire. The author exchanges the roles of the husband and wife in these two stories in the way that they were reversed in the depictions of Manoah and his wife in contrast to Abraham and Sarah.

In both of the Genesis accounts of these barren mothers, the father is the primary focus of the story, but in the Judges and 1 Samuel accounts, the mother becomes the focus. This shift in importance brings the mother's relationship with God to the forefront of the story rather than the father's relationship, as was the case in Genesis. Further

[101] 1 Sam 1:8b.
[102] 1 Sam 1:8a.

intensifying the fact that the women are taking a more prominent role in human interactions with God is the author's concept of the type of relationship that Manoah's wife and Hannah have with God.

In Judges 13 and 1 Samuel 1, the women's relationships with God are reciprocal, which contrasts with the one-sided relationships that the men of Genesis have with God. In Gen 18:10, the message of the promise consists of God's promising that He will return at an appointed time and that Sarah will have a son. There is no requirement that the human beings have to complete to obtain their son. Similarly, Isaac makes the request for his son but does not offer anything to God in return.[103] However, the women enter into agreements with God, in which they make a commitment to God in response to His removal of their barrenness. God's message to Manoah's wife consists of a statement of her barrenness and the imminent reversal of that state.[104] This declaration is followed by two verses containing rules that she must follow because her son is to be a Nazirite from the womb.[105] Since he will be a Nazirite from the womb, his mother has dietary restrictions consistent with those her son will have throughout his life.

Hannah's request to God is immediately followed by her declaration that her son will be a Nazirite and that he will be submitted to God's service for his entire life.[106] Hannah's request and her promise to God are all that the text contains of her prayer. Her dedication and her willingness to do something in return for God blessing her with a child is so strong that she is willing to commit that child into God's service, even though it requires him to live apart from her. Like Samson, Samuel's mother's agreement with

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[103] Gen 25:21.
[104] Judg 13:3-5.
[105] Judg 13:5.
[106] 1 Sam 1:11.

God allows him to take on a unique position in society. He is able to be a prophet and a judge, and he is also allowed to work in the Temple at Shiloh despite the fact that he is not a Levite.

It appears that the author of these texts is purposefully expanding the barren mother's character while minimizing the character of the father and his involvement in the story. The purpose of the author's inclusion of the reversed parallel elements is to emphasize the transition of the relationships between God and men and between God and women. The parallel structure of the two sets of stories serves to underscore the major distinctions between them, primarily the exchange of the roles filled by the mother and the father.

Hannah's devotion to and interaction with God seems to be the culmination of the barren mother—rather than the father—becoming the parent that interacts more closely with God. This shift of involvement with God can be seen even from Judges to 1 Samuel. Manoah prays to God and asks to see the messenger who visited his wife, even though when God grants his request he cannot see that his guest is the messenger of God. However, Elkanah, though he is depicted as devout in his actions (demonstrated by his dedication to taking his family on the annual trip to Shiloh), does not have any conversation with God that appears in the text.[107] Thus, within the barren mother stories, Hannah and Elkanah are the culmination of the reversal of the roles established in Genesis with Abraham and Sarah.

[107] 1 Sam 1:1-28.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the fact that the barren mothers' stories were written by multiple people at different times and in different locations, the evidence suggests that they all depict a development among the human beings of these stories. It is essential to analyze all three sources that contribute to these stories to fully understand the transitional element of the human beings gaining more control or activity in regard to their agreements with God surrounding their children. However, it is possible to gain an understanding of a specific development when separating the J source from the others. Though the transition of the humans is present through all of the sources who address these stories, when the J source is considered independently it is clear that there is a transition from the men being in control to the women having more powerful roles in the interactions with God about their children.

APPENDIX

COMMENTS ON SCHOLARSHIP

The literature on the topic of the barren mother stories does not address the notion of this shift from inactive human beings to more active human beings. However, support for the idea can be found in the scholarship that is applicable to this idea. P. Kyle McCarter's translation of 1 Sam 1:1-6 highlights the repetition of the phrase "Yahweh had closed [Hannah's] womb" in verses five and six of the Hebrew text.[108] This translation highlights the emphasis placed on God's control of the fertility of Hannah, a theme that is also present in other barren women stories as mentioned previously. This idea demonstrates a connectedness of ideas within the barren mother stories. McCarter also notes that Elkanah favors Hannah because of his love for her, which is similar to the favoritism seen in the story of Rachel and Leah in Genesis.[109] McCarter attributes Peninnah's spiteful actions toward Hannah to the discrepancy in the way Elkanah treats his wives.[110]

McCarter goes on to explain that the Hebrew word צרתה, translated "rival wife" or "co-wife," became a term with a connotation of "similar force" in cognate languages such as Syriac and Arabic.[111] McCarter's phrasing appears to indicate that this term, across multiple Semitic languages, is surrounded by the notion of rivalry between the first

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[108] Kyle P. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 49.
[109] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 60.
[110] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 60.
[111] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 60.

wife and the second. The root of the word צרתה in Hebrew "means shew hostility toward, vex," while the noun form of this verb means "foe" or "adversary."[112] The "force" McCarter is referring to must be in regard to the root of this word, which means that there is an understood rivalry that began the formation of the term for the rival wife in Hebrew.

McCarter then compares Hannah's story to the story of Manoah's wife.[113] The similarities between these two stories begin with the fact that both of the women highlighted in these stories are barren. Both of the women also enter into agreements with God and those agreements result in both women having sons who are Nazirites.

In the *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Judges, Robert G. Boling notes that the phrasing in Judg 13:15, in the story of Manoah and his wife, is composed in the same pattern as Gen 16:11, which is part of the story of Abraham and Sarah.[114] The phrasing of both these verses is identical in Hebrew: הנך הרה וילדת בן, which is translated "here you are pregnant and will give birth to a son." God sends this statement to both Manoah's wife and Hagar. Both of these verses are also attributed to the same author, the author of the J source. This common phrasing reinforces the connectedness of the stories of the barren women beginning in Genesis with the story of Abraham and Sarah and continuing to the story of Manoah and his wife in Judges 13, which can be further extended because Judges 13 is connected to the story of Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samuel. These examples of the connectedness of these three stories can be further extrapolated and applied to all the barren mother stories to demonstrate the intertwined nature of these stories.

Despite the similarities between the agreements of Hannah and Manoah's wife and the covenants of Genesis, the stories of Hannah and Manoah's wife are not typically

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[112] Brown. 865.
[113] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 60-61.
[114] Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 220.

compared to the stories in Genesis. We can analyze the common elements of these stories and use that to study the stories in the framework of covenant presented in Genesis, which allows the link of the agreements to come to light. These sources analyze the interconnectivity of the stories but do not mention the idea that there is any shift of human interaction with God and the human beings taking on a more active role in the interactions.

In "The Myth of Birthing the Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," Rachel Havrelock discusses how the men of the barren women stories are able to enter into covenants with God while women have to "improvise a kind of covenant never sanctified as such that nonetheless is marked in their bodies and secures their memory."[115] In this article, Havrelock writes that "neither male loyalty nor devotion can repair this gap (caused by the 'breakdown of God's promise' which is indicated by female barrenness) between humanity and God that can be bridged only by female initiative."[116] The purpose of Havrelock's article is to relate a shift to woman as heroic figures. However, her analysis presents elements that point to the shift from God being in complete control of agreements between human beings and Him to human beings acquiring more control in regard to these agreements. Havrelock states, "barrenness can be read as [highlighting] the absence of relationship between a particular woman and God."[117] However, the text neither indicates a lack of interaction with God in most of the stories nor does it attribute the women's barrenness to any actions on their part. Barrenness is attributed to God's control, but no reason is given for His withholding

[115] Rachel Havrelock, "The Myth of Birthing a Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008), 156.
[116] Havrelock, "Myth of Birthing a Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," 155.
[117] Havrelock, "Myth of Birthing a Hero: Heroic Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," 159.

children in most cases. An example of a case in which barrenness is attributed to human action is when Sarah's presence imposes barrenness on Abimelek's house.[118] The text does not state that Sarah causes her own barrenness.

Havrelock at times disregards the definitely expressed aspects of the story included in the text in favor of theorizing the author's intentions with spatial locations not explicitly stated in the text. Havrelock states "the author first suggests the distance between male cultic authority and women's spiritual needs spatially by situating Eli in a manner of throne near the entrance of the temple while we imagine Hannah humbling herself near the temple floor." This statement indicates that there is a need for imagining Hannah's location in regard to Eli with Eli presented as sitting in a seat of honor. The text, however, does not indicate that Hannah is near the floor of the temple. Hannah is in a position that allows Eli to see her mouth moving while she prays.[119] The distance between Eli and Hannah is more apparent in the text in Eli's misconception of Hannah: he accuses her of drunkenness when he is really seeing her in an act of prayer.[120] The priest's lack of understanding when he sees Hannah pray is more indicative of the distance between the male cultic figures and the women in the society than the spatial locations of the characters.

In both the *Oxford Commentary on the Bible* and Ronald Hyman's "Four Acts of Vowing in the Bible," there is a notion that Hannah has a special relationship with God. Hyman concludes that there is a necessity of the vow maker "addressing God directly" and that it is "absolutely essential to a vow."[121] Hyman's conclusion comes despite the

[118] Gen 20:18.
[119] 1 Sam 1:12-13.
[120] 1 Sam 1:13-16.
[121] Hyman, "Four Acts of Vowing in the Bible," 233.

fact that one of the four vows he discusses, Num 21:2, does not include this element of addressing God directly. Hyman notes that "We know [that they are addressing the Lord] even though the children of Israel, unlike the other three vowers, never mention the Lord in their vow."[122] Hyman does not explain how it can be true that addressing God directly can be absolutely essential to a vow and that Num 21:2 can be considered a vow—two statements which seem contradictory. Hyman continues the discussion of the necessity of addressing God directly, stating that "the single best sign of this is the explicit salutation that Hannah uses to begin her vow."[123] Hyman notes this critical element necessary to vows in his analysis and describes Hannah's version as the absolute example of the critical element—addressing God directly. Though Hyman may be contradictory in his analysis, his conclusion still points to Hannah as being extremely significant, an idea that is also present in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* on 1 and 2 Samuel by Gwilym H. Jones. Hannah's significance is noted in Jones' description of Samuel's birth: "Samuel, the last of the judges and the maker of Israel's first two kings, is presented as a significant person in this account of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his conception and birth."[124] Samuel's unique birth was arranged by his mother and God when Hannah pronounced her vow at the temple at Shiloh. The authors of these articles, Havrelock and Jones, both note that Hannah is significant in that she is an example of a human being with an extraordinary relationship with God.

There are aspects of comments on the barren women's stories that contain elements that are useful in compiling evidence to support the idea that there is a

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[122]Hyman, "Four Acts of Vowing in the Bible," 233.
[123] Hyman, 233.
[124] Gwilym H. Jones, "1 and 2 Samuel," *Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. John Barton et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 201.

movement in the barren mother stories from human beings being passive recipients of God's promise to human beings becoming more active even to the point of seeking to enter into a promise with God. Overall, the best evidence for demonstrating this shift is found in the text itself. The fact that this movement can be displayed across multiple sources increases the validity that there is such a movement within the text of these women's stories.

In the *Oxford Bible Commentary* on 1 and 2 Samuel, Jones compares Elkanah taking a second wife to Gen 16:1-4. Jones states, "Elkanah's first wife was childless and he had decided to take a second wife (cf. Gen 16:1-4)."[125] This statement is misleading. There is no indication in the text that Elkanah *took* Peninnah as a second wife because Hannah was barren. There is no indication in the text that Hannah's marriage to Elkanah definitely preceded Peninnah. 1 Sam 1:2 states "there were to him two wives, the name of one was Hannah and name of the second was Peninnah." This verse does not clearly express that Hannah was his first wife; it is naming both women and numbering them in an order. The ordinal number used prior to Peninnah appears to be the proper structure to illustrate that there were two wives—one named Hannah and the second named Peninnah—rather than being an indication of the order in which they became Elkanah's wives. The order of the women's fertility in the second part of this verse is reversed and Peninnah's fertility precedes Hannah's barren state. The author's placement of the women's names in the syntax of the verse does not appear to be indicative of who was Elkanah's first wife. Jones also says that Elkanah decided to take a second wife because of Hannah's barrenness and then cites Genesis 16, the story of Abraham and Sarah.[126]

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[125] Jones, *"*1 and 2 Samuel*,"* 201.
[126] Jones, "1 and 2 Samuel," 201.

This citation appears to indicate that these two depictions of the women of these stories is similar; however in Genesis, Abraham does not take Hagar; Sarah gives Hagar, her maid, to her husband.[127] Sarah is the one who is distressed by her own barrenness in Genesis 16 and the one who decides to give her maid to her husband so that she may have children through Hagar.[128] Elkanah is introduced as having two wives at the beginning of 1 Samuel. His wives are first mentioned simultaneously and with no indication of a difference in their social status.[129] Abraham, on the other hand, begins with one wife and then is given his wife's maid in order to conceive a child. In Genesis 16, there is an inequality present in the relationship of the women in Abraham's life in regard to their social status. When Sarah is bothered by Hagar, Abraham listens to Sarah and tells her that Hagar is in her control.[130] She may do with Hagar what she deems best.[131] Hagar remains Sarah's maid first, and her status as Abraham's concubine is secondary because Abraham acknowledges Sarah's continued authority over Hagar.[132] However, in 1 Samuel 1, Elkanah's wives are not necessarily friendly with one another. The author of this story refers to Peninnah as Hannah's "rival wife," indicating a contention between the women, but there is no aspect of Hannah having control over Peninnah or anything that happens to her as a result of the mistreatment she imposes on Hannah that appears to be somewhat similar to what happens in Genesis 16:4 between Sarah and Hagar.[133] The stronger link between these two stories is found in the promises between God and Hannah and God and Abraham with regard to the removal of the barrenness of Hannah

[127] Gen 16:5.
[128] Gen 16:1-2.
[129] 1 Sam 1:2.
[130] Gen 16:6.
[131] Gen 16:6.
[132] Gen 16:6.
[133] 1 Sam 1:6-7, Gen 16:4.

and Sarah and the children they will receive, rather than in the wives' roles in the marriage.

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