

made explicit, the translator is able to ignore the fact that the form of the translated proverb bears no resemblance to a proverb within African society.<sup>1</sup>

If the goal in translating the book of Proverbs into African languages is academic or purely informational, then translators need not consider whether the shapes that biblical proverbs take within African languages sound like proverbs within that culture. But if the goal of translating Proverbs is that the biblical proverbs should be meaningful, powerful, compelling observations about life, which will transform those who hear them, then the translated proverbs must have a proverbial shape. In African cultures, which are permeated with proverbial sayings, a translation of Proverbs will be successful to the extent that the biblical proverbs are assimilated into the language and become part of the cultural fabric of the society.

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### **ADAM, FATHER, HE: Gender Issues in Hebrew Translation**

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This essay will consider three areas that have created some dispute in the issue of gender-inclusive translations of the Hebrew text. They are: the question of the rendering of *'ādām* in the first three or four chapters of Genesis, the question of the role of the term for “father” or “parent,” particularly as it is used in the book of Proverbs, and the issue of the so-called generic “he” as the most accurate rendering of the commonly recognized 3rd masculine singular independent personal pronoun in Hebrew, *hū'*. These provide pivotal issues for the question of the most appropriate and accurate translation of the Hebrew text of the Bible into English. They have also become a kind of litmus test as to whether the Old Testament is translated according to the philosophy of those who attempt a gender-specific or a gender-inclusive rendering.

At this point I wish to insert some caveats. Although I would confess that I have a preference for gender-inclusive translations, I have participated in the translation and editing of a variety of Bible translations. I have no qualms about this because I do not agree with those who search for the single ideal English translation that will accurately render the Hebrew Bible in its entirety. I believe the best option remains multiple translations, both for a variety of English-speaking subcultures and in order to demonstrate the fundamental principle that there is no single absolutely accurate translation of the Bible. For the student who wishes to understand the Bible as completely as possible, no translation can ever replace a careful and intensive study of the original languages. Failing that, the next best alternative is to draw upon the wisdom of a variety of scholars as represented by

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<sup>1</sup> Only rarely has this feat been accomplished in English translations. For a consideration of the translation of Prov 13.24 as a proverb, which has entered English culture (“spare the rod and spoil the child”), see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (N. Y.: Basic, 1985), 166-7.

many different English translations.<sup>1</sup>

Also, it is not clear to me that many of the issues raised by these different translations do in fact have any effect or significance relevant to traditional Christian doctrine. For various reasons, some of which will appear below, I reject “male orientation,” “male emphasis,” and various patriarchal concerns as somehow communicated in the Old Testament in order to teach this as the ideal.<sup>2</sup> I also reject the attempted dichotomy of the debate into those who are gender specific, complementarian, and biblically conservative on the one side; and those who are gender inclusive, egalitarian, feminist,<sup>3</sup> and liberal on the other side. Not only is it not the case that everyone’s view can be drawn into two camps (thus there are gender-inclusive complementarians),<sup>4</sup> but it is also not true that those biblically conservative gender-inclusive advocates represent the far side of the spectrum. In fact, there is a third general group in OT studies. These would fall under the category of feminist and reject biblical authority. In some cases they would insist on translations of the gender-specific complementarians. They argue that the Bible is “irredeemably patriarchal,”<sup>5</sup> and that attempts to treat the text of the Old Testament as somehow gender inclusive in its ideal, but accommodating to the patriarchy of the ancient Near East, are fallacious. The text is patriarchal and reflects a patriarchal ideal. There should be no gender inclusivity because such activity hides the truly unjust attitude of the writers of the Hebrew Bible. These would side with the first group who seek a gender-specific translation as normative. From the perspective of all the options, those who are gender inclusive find themselves occupying the center in this debate.

Finally, by way of introduction, I would note that my method is neither to answer every issue raised regarding gender-inclusive translations of classical Hebrew, nor is it to provide new nuances in the arguments and reasons for gender-inclusive translations. Rather, I believe that the evidence presented here has not been discussed before in regards to this issue. I also hope that it provides new directions for better understanding the biblical text, however various people choose to translate it.

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1 The work of Ryken, *The Word of God in English* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), represents a commendable attempt to stress the importance of a more literal translation of the biblical text. However, Ryken is not entirely correct when he gives the impression that the standard for translation of nonbiblical texts is far more literal than that of modern Bible translations. For one thing, the translations of the Septuagint (the first known translation of the Bible) varies from literalistic to more interpretive (beyond paraphrase). Further, a perusal of the traditional English translation of the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* by W. H. D. Rouse (*The Illiad*. N. Y.: Mentor, 1937; *The Odyssey*. N. Y.: Mentor, 1937) reveals a far more paraphrastic rendition of the original Greek verse than most modern Bible translation would ever allow. See also Craig L. Blomberg, Review of L. Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, *Denver Journal* 6 (2003): 0204.

2 This is my reading of the position of Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

3 In some literature of those opposed to this group, the term normally occurs as “radically feminist.”

4 This is my understanding of D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Leicester: IVP, 1998).

5 This term seems to have been applied to the discussion first by David J. A. Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1–3,” 25–48 in D. J. A. Clines, ed., *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1990).

'ādām<sup>1</sup>

Genesis 1–5 uses the noun, 'ādām, in several ways. In 1.26-28 it is used like every other noun of a living creature in that chapter. It describes the species of humanity. It distinguishes this species from the other species in the created order. It specifically includes male and female in its definition, just as every other species with males and females is described by its appropriate term in chapter one. This term for humanity does not prejudice the reader toward “man” or “woman” because that is not how it is used. The term, 'ādām, is certainly used of the masculine gender but this does not prejudice the case for two reasons. First, all Hebrew gender is either masculine or feminine, whether in semantics or syntax. There is no neuter. Therefore, the term must be masculine or feminine. The masculine gender is pre-Hebrew as attested by its usage in Ugaritic, where it refers to “people,” and by its etymological origins that probably associate it with blood and things that are red. However, this must be balanced by the use of “adam” terms in feminine personal names of the 2nd and 3rd millennia B.C. in pre-Hebrew West Semitic cultures.<sup>2</sup> The dominant usage in the biblical text of 'ādām, is that of humanity (a collective).<sup>3</sup>

The second reason why the masculine gender of 'ādām is not significant in terms of any male orientation is found in its usage in Genesis 2–3. Throughout these texts, 'ādām never occurs alone. It is always preceded by a definite article, the 'ādām.<sup>4</sup> This form alters that found in Genesis 1 in terms of its usage.<sup>5</sup> 'ādām is no longer the species but a specific member of the species. Why is 'ādām masculine here? There is one main reason and it has nothing to do with a male orientation of the name for the species.<sup>6</sup> Rather, 'ādām is intentionally contrasted with the similar sounding feminine word for “earth, ground,” 'ādāmah.<sup>7</sup> Even in their English pronunciation, the words sound similar. 'ādāmah, the feminine word for “ground,” always occurs with the definite article and it appears some eight times in Genesis 2–3. In 3.19 it is explicitly stated that the 'ādām was taken from the 'ādāmah and will return to it. The Hebrew reader or hearer of this text could not

1 This is a summary of research discussed in R. S. Hess, “'ADAM as 'Skin' and 'Earth': An Examination of Some Proposed Meanings in Biblical Hebrew,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 141-9; idem, “Splitting the Adam: The Usage of 'ADAM in Genesis i-v,” 1-15 in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Studies in the Pentateuch* (VTSup XLI; Leiden: Brill, 1990); idem, “Genesis 1–2 in Its Literary Context,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 143-53; idem, “Genesis 1–3: Egalitarianism with and without Innocence,” 79-95 in R. W. Pierce and R. M. Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

2 See the discussion of the root's etymology and examples of proper nouns and personal names from Ebla, Emar, and other West Semitic sources, in R. S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament Band 234; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1993), 14-19, 59-65.

3 L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. I: 'h*. (Trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 14. Hereafter, HALOT.

4 This is also true in 2.20 (second occurrence), 3.17, and 3.21. In each of these occurrences 'ādām is preceded by an inseparable *lamed* preposition. Although the Masoretic *Qere* does not attest to a definite article in these occurrences, the consonantal text accommodates it with no changes. It would be an amazing coincidence if the only places in these two chapters (and 4.1) where 'ādām occurs without a definite article are those with inseparable prepositions. It is likely that here as well the definite article was original.

5 In Gen 1.26 the occurrence is without the article, whereas in 1.27 it uses the definite article.

6 For the opposite point of view, see Poytress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 233-8, 329.

7 Although the final *qamets-he* on this word and the term for “woman” in the next paragraph is rendered by convention as *-ā* rather than *-āh*, it seems best to preserve the final *he* in the transliteration in order to show clearly the distinction of the characteristic feminine singular ending.

mistake the word association and the intentional relationship. The “man” came from the feminine earth or ground.<sup>1</sup>

That the *'ādām* was expected to be masculine in relation to the feminine *'ādāmah*, from which he came, is evident in the one other gender association in these chapters, that of 2.23. Here the *'ādām* recognizes the woman for the first time and says, “she shall be called *'iššāh* because from *'iš* she was taken.” Despite the likely different etymological origins of these two terms, their similar sounds relate “woman” (mentioned first) to “man.” The feminine form of the *'ādām* is the *'ādāmah* “ground.” Therefore this is an unacceptable comparison for the relationship between the man and the woman. However the feminine counterpart to *'iš* “man,” is more likely *'iššāh* “woman.” For this reason the man does not use *'ādām* to make the comparison, but he uses *'iš*. This is because the primary concern of the use of the term, “the *'ādām*” is not its male gender, but its relation to *'ādāmah* “ground.” The primary concern of the term *'iš* “man” is its relation to *'iššāh* “woman.” In both cases, the masculine/feminine gender correspondence establishes and enhances the relationship between the two. In neither case is the purpose of the gender to establish male orientation or dominance any more than it is to establish female orientation. Rather, the purposes of the gender correspondences are to define harmonious relationships as created by God. The man takes care of the earth, as his species have been given charge over it. The woman, created from the side of the man, is a helper to work and live together with the man. It is this harmony of relationships that is the point of Genesis ch. 2, and the breakdown of that harmony as a consequence of willful sin that forms the key theme of ch. 3 (including the judgements).

A supposed male/female hierarchy is nowhere explicit or even suggested, nor do the gender distinctions serve that purpose. *'ādām* as the personal name Adam occurs for the first time in 4.25. This is the first occurrence of the term where it undoubtedly does not have the definite article. The association of Adam with his wife and their son in this verse requires a personal name rather than the designation of the species, as in Genesis 1. Interestingly, linguists have observed the natural development of common nouns into titles and then to personal names. Such seems to be the case for *'ādām* in Genesis 1–4. However, claims about a masculine gender orientation for the human race are not proven by the gender of this noun. Instead, they serve other more important purposes within the existing narrative.

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1 For this reason some feminist studies have defended the translation of *'ādām* as “earthling” or “groundling;” e.g., M. P. Korsak, “Translating the Bible: Bible Translations and Gender Issues,” 132-46 in A. Brenner and J. Willem van Henten, eds., *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Authority, Reception, Culture and Religion* (JSOTSup 353; The Bible in the 21st Century 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic and Continuum, 2002). (See originally Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978]). In the same volume, see also the response of Caroline Vander Stichele, “Murder She Wrote or Why Translation Matters: A Response to Mary Phil Korsak’s ‘Translating the Bible,’” 147-55, who presents some alternatives, although she emphasizes the importance of the ideology of the translator. These renderings (earthling, groundling) do not do justice to the text’s presentation of a male individual endowed with intelligence. Further, he is not in any obvious manner (to the narrative) distinguished from the *'ādām* who appears after the formation of the woman and who must be understood as the man or the male of the couple.

## Father and parent

It has been argued that the Hebrew *'āb*, the term often translated “father” in traditional translations, should not be rendered as “parent,” as it often is in gender-inclusive Bibles. In particular, the many occurrences in Proverbs of this term should preserve “father” because not to do so would reduce the accuracy of the translation.<sup>1</sup> This is because wisdom was passed from father to son in the ancient Near East and the father-son relationship would be somehow compromised by the rendering “parent.” In some contexts the translation “father” is surely justified, if for no other reason than biological necessity or juxtaposition to the term for “mother” (1 Kgs 5.15; Gen 2.24). However, the argument goes, in many instances in a book such as Proverbs the translation “parent” is by no means required nor is it the most accurate rendering available.

Translation attempts to express words, ideas, and concepts in such a manner as to reflect faithfully in the receptor language what has been spoken or written in the donor language. Context is essential. For this reason it is insufficient to focus on translation only at the levels of clause, sentence, and paragraph. There is also a need to consider the larger contexts of chapter, book, and the entire canon. Traditionally, work on Proverbs has been limited to clauses and sentences. Only recently have the larger contexts of paragraphs and chapters been considered. This is especially important in the more difficult sections. For Proverbs this involves examination of clusters of proverbs, such as Heim has studied.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this, however, the larger units must be taken into consideration. This has been recognized for some time in terms of the theological significance. The question naturally arises for the reader of Proverbs who discovers that many of the sayings do not contain any explicit reference to God or otherwise suggest a theological reason for their inclusion in a book of the Bible. Furthermore, scholars have discerned a common collection of wisdom sayings in the ancient Near East. The biblical aphorisms share this apparently secular wisdom material with other collections, pre-eminently those of Egyptian origin. In particular, it has long been recognized that significant sections of Proverbs 22–24 share expressions identical in content with the Wisdom of Amenemope.<sup>3</sup> This text may actually be earlier in date than that of the biblical proverbs. How is the distinctive witness of the book of Proverbs to be understood over against the other collections of wisdom literature in the Bible? Key to this question is the text of Prov 1.7 that follows an introduction statement about the purpose of the book. This verse identifies the fear of Yahweh as the beginning of all wisdom. In so doing, it transforms the entire wisdom enterprise in Israel, from an ancient Near Eastern perspective on how to succeed in the world into a text that serves as a guide for life lived under the reign of God. The sentence at the beginning of the book therefore signals that the entire corpus of Proverbs is to be so interpreted. It is of course the case that there are numerous later references to the reality of God in this wisdom book. However, this summary and thematic statement at the head of the book guarantees that every proverb, whether or not it specifically mentions God, should be so read.

1 Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 106-9, 285-7.

2 Knut M. Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver: An Interpretation of Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10.1–22.16* (BZAW 273; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

3 See Harold C. Washington, *Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs* (SBLDS 142; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

This principle may also be applied to the question of the Hebrew *'āb*, and its translation as “father” or as “parent.” Does the translation as “parent” really lose the “male orientation” of the book or is something else happening with this term? Of course, the modern lexicons indicate that “parent, progenitor, ancestor” are all legitimate translations. However, is this truly the case in those texts in Proverbs where there is no requirement for the male gender to be so designated? Once again, the context of the whole book becomes important. Just as v. 7 summarizes the message of the book, theologically, so v. 8 summarizes its approach in terms of the gender question. The NIV translation renders:

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction  
and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.

Here father and mother are in parallel. Just as the reference to the fear of Yahweh summarizes the theological message, this summary statement anticipates the remainder of the book by indicating that both parents are sources of the wisdom and teaching that is found therein. An additional twelve occurrences of this word pair, father/mother, scattered throughout the book, demonstrate the unity of the two parents in the instruction.<sup>1</sup> The explicit reference to one parent, whether father or mother (cf. 31.1), does not imply only a male or female orientation to the message any more than the absence of a reference to God in a proverb implies a secular explanation. In fact, the word pair, father/mother, in wisdom literature is virtually unique. Normally, only the “father” instructs the “son” in ancient Near Eastern wisdom collections. This is because the “father” may also be used to describe the teacher and the “son” may represent the disciple. The fact that the mother is mentioned in the book of Proverbs is both surprising and virtually unprecedented. The fact that it occurs here in the first reference to the instruction of the parents supports the view that this summary and introduction sets the standard for all further references to parents, either father or mother. Why then not use a term for parent, rather than the term *'āb*? The simplest reason is that there is no other term for parent. Hebrew has no neuter gender and so the term *'āb* refers to both a father and a parent. However, another point should be made in the ancient Near Eastern context of the book of Proverbs. Because so many of the proverbs reflect a common heritage of wisdom tradition inside as well as outside the Bible, and because that tradition without exception used the term “father” for the parent or teacher (as well as “son” for the child or student), it is not surprising that these proverbs retained these terms. However, both the introductory message of “father and mother” in Prov 1.8, as well as the dozen other occurrences of the word pair, father/mother, scattered right through all the sections of the text, support the understanding of the term *'āb*, where it occurs alone, as “parent.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the gender issues are not settled. The argument remains that because the male “father” occurs first, followed by the female “mother,” this establishes a precedent for the male before the female. Therefore, the term father must be considered the primary figure addressed, the source of all authority for both father and mother. Therefore, it is preferable to translate *'āb* as “father” to preserve this precedent. In order to establish this case, however, it is necessary to

1 Prov 4.3; 6.20; 10.1; 15.20; 19.26; 20.20; 23.22, 25; 28.24; 29.15; 30.11, 17.

2 There is a balance to this position. The term *bēn* “son,” can often carry the sense of either gender. The generic meaning of “disciple” or “younger companion” occurs in the wisdom literature, *HALOT*, 137.

demonstrate that the word pair, father/mother, intentionally ranks the two figures so that the father is somehow superior to the mother, whether in status or authority. Because there is no explicit indication of this anywhere in the Old Testament, it becomes necessary to appeal to something intrinsic in the order of the two words that establishes precedence or authority of the first over the second. However, there is no basis for such an appeal in the Hebrew Bible or in the ancient Near East. Indeed, this is sometimes the basis for the argument in Genesis 2–3, that the man is mentioned first and then the woman. Elsewhere I attempt to demonstrate that there is no basis for a conclusion to be drawn from Genesis regarding precedence. That is because elsewhere in the patriarchal cultures of the ancient Near East, some stories of the first human couple consistently mention the woman before the man.<sup>1</sup> Neither in such stories, nor in Genesis, nor in Proverbs, does the sequence demonstrate a ranking and therefore a basis for translating 'āb as “father” rather than more accurately as “parent.”

Appeals of this kind should also note that this word pair precedes the writing of the book of Proverbs and indeed other parts of the Bible. In the West Semitic world it is found in the texts of Late Bronze Age Ugarit, in a culture that appears to be basically Canaanite in many of its manifestations. Thus there is no evidence that the word pair sequence reveals anything about divine intention in terms of precedence.

In summary, we have considered the context of the book of Proverbs, in particular the first appearance of 'āb, in the introductory summary of the book, as well as the recurrence of the word pair, father/mother, throughout the book. A contextual analysis of this word pair and its sequence argues that 'āb should best be rendered as “parent(s)” when it occurs elsewhere in the book in phrases that do not require a biological male.

### ***hū' is He, or is It?***

Despite the presentation of some grammars of biblical Hebrew, issues related to questions of gender are far from settled.<sup>2</sup> For example, in most beginning Hebrew grammars, students learn that the 3rd person masculine singular independent personal pronoun, “he,” is pronounced and written as *hū'*. Further, the 3rd person feminine singular independent personal pronoun, “she,” is pronounced and written as *hī'*. Of course, Hebrew was originally written without vowels. These two pronouns are clearly distinguished in terms of their consonants. While both begin and end with the Hebrew *he* and *'aleph*, the middle consonant for the masculine is *vav* while that of the feminine is *yodh*. Sometimes grammars also mention an alternative 3rd person feminine singular independent personal pronoun, “she.” It is also pronounced as *hī'*. However, it is spelled with the identical consonants of the masculine pronoun, *he*, *vav*, *'aleph*. Before the Masoretes inserted the vowel pointing onto the consonantal text in the eighth and

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1 In addition, the argument of precedence for the firstborn is explicitly rejected repeatedly in the patriarchal narratives (Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, the sons of Jacob, Manasseh and Ephraim). Thus no precedence in the family structure automatically establishes authority. See further, Hess, “Genesis 1–3.”

2 Cf. e.g., M. D. Coogan, “The Use of the Second Person Singular Verbal Forms in Northwest Semitic Personal Names,” *Or* n.s. 44 (1975): 194–7; R. Ratner, *Gender Problems in Biblical Hebrew* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 1983); idem, “DEREK: Morpho-Syntactical Considerations,” *JAOS* 107 (1987): 471–3; “Does a T-Preformative Third Person Masculine Plural Verbal Form Exist in Biblical Hebrew?” *VT* 38 (1988): 80–88.

ninth centuries A.D., both this feminine pronoun and the masculine pronoun were spelled in an identical fashion. However, if we look at the pronoun itself, as written in the text for perhaps two thousand years, there was no distinction whatsoever between “he” and “she.” Now this alternative form of “she” is not evenly distributed across the Hebrew Bible. It occurs predominantly in the Pentateuch. There it appears more than two hundred times.<sup>1</sup> The other form of “she,” spelled differently from “he,” occurs only eleven times in the Pentateuch.<sup>2</sup> The form of “she” spelled identically to “he” also occurs elsewhere. For example, in the Masoretic text known as the Babylonian Codex of the Prophets it appears a dozen places in the historical books of Joshua through 2 Kings and in the Major and Minor Prophets<sup>3</sup>. Now one might be able to stretch and argue scribal error for a few occurrences of this form in the Bible; that is, scribes in copying the biblical text mistakenly wrote “he” for “she.” However, the fact that this appears more than two hundred times in the Pentateuch and thus occurs some twenty times more frequently than the customary “she” makes the argument of scribal error doubtful. Grammars and other texts tend to refer to this form as an epicene, a pronoun that does double duty for both masculine and feminine genders.

How is such an unusual form to be explained? An epicene 3rd person singular pronoun is attested in other Semitic languages only in the oblique cases of Old Babylonian. Although earlier grammarians suspected here an archaism, those writing from the beginning of the twentieth century and others that have followed them have explained this form in the Pentateuch as an example of a scribal confusion of *vav* for *yodh* that was then followed by one scribe or a school of scribes.<sup>4</sup> However, this seems most unlikely, given its dominance in the Pentateuch.<sup>5</sup> Surely the scribes of Hebrew must have known the difference between “he” and “she,” and it is doubtful that anyone could so consistently make a mistake in copying without noticing it. Why do the grammars of the past century rely on this weak explanation? It seems that they were influenced by the critical view that the Pentateuch was composed of various sources dating as late as the post-exilic period. If this were so, then no phenomenon that occurred in all the sources, including the latest ones, could be dated early. It could only be as early as the latest source, i.e., the post-exilic period of the Priestly source. Given this presupposition, some explanation, however unlikely, had to be found that allowed the epicene form to be inserted late into the text. That this was inadequate was

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1 The first ten occurrences are from Genesis: 2.12; 3.12, 20; 4.22; 7.2; 10.11, 12; 12.14, 18, 19.

2 Cf. Gen 14.2; 20.5; 38.25; Lev 2.15; 11.38; 13.10, 21; 16.31; 21.9; Num 5.13, 14.

3 A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch* (2nd English ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 107, n. 2.

4 This theory continues to live. See J. A. Emerton, “Was There an Epicene Pronoun *hū'* in Early Hebrew?” *JSS* 45 (2000): 267-76.

5 See Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 107; P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Volume I. Part One: Orthography and Phonetics; Part Two: Morphology* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), §39 c, 122-3 (following the original 1923 edition of the grammar). For the leading critical commentary of the early twentieth century, see J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2nd ed., International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 60, n. 10. For recent agreement with this explanation, see B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 292, n. 13. The statement, “There are many other explanations available,” refers to the grammar of Joüon, who appears to support only this one and no other.



obvious. However, for these scholars it was preferable to abandoning their critical theories.

What about the possibility that it reflects a form in early Hebrew? Iron Age Hebrew texts from outside the Bible preserve no clear example of a 3rd person feminine singular pronoun.<sup>1</sup> The Amarna texts of the fourteenth century B.C. do not preserve this pronoun in any texts from Palestine or southern Canaan.<sup>2</sup> Farther, to the north, at Byblos and Ugarit, distinct feminine forms do exist. However, there are clear signs of Akkadian influence as well as dialectical differences from what would become Hebrew far to the south. The point is that neither extrabiblical Hebrew inscriptional material nor pre-Hebrew Canaanite sources from Palestine provide examples of any 3rd person feminine singular independent personal pronoun.

With this in mind, one is left with little but speculation about the origins of this form. Recent scholars, not prepared to accept the traditional explanation of source criticism and assume a late and remarkably consistent scribal error, suggest other possibilities. Perhaps some of earlier Hebrew was influenced by another language with epicene forms, such as Hurrian or Hittite.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, it may be more probable that, as in Old Babylonian, the oblique (i.e., genitive, dative, and accusative) forms of the pronoun in the Pentateuch were epicene. This would explain the handful of occurrences of the distinctive 3rd feminine singular pronoun in the Pentateuch. These are nominative and not oblique.<sup>4</sup> All evidence points to an early epicene form that saturated the Pentateuch and perhaps remained in use beyond the time of its composition. However, it died out by the end of the Hebrew canon and does not appear in later Hebrew texts such as the nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls. As long as it remained in use or influential, the same form, spelled in the same manner, could be rendered “he” or “she” in Hebrew. Only the context might indicate which was correct.

For our purposes this is important because it calls into question the assumption that the most accurate translation of the Hebrew pronoun spelled, *he-vav-’aleph*, is the English “he.”<sup>5</sup> It is not. English “he” never means “she” exclusively. However, this pronoun in Hebrew could refer to either a masculine or feminine person or object. In light of this data, the most accurate English translation of the epicene *he-vav-’aleph*, where biological or other data does not require an exclusively masculine or feminine pronoun, is a pronoun that allows for

1 S. L. Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 23; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 152.

2 A. F. Rainey, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by Scribes from Canaan. Volume I: Orthography, Phonology, Morphosyntactic Analysis of the Pronouns, Nouns, Numerals* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 65.

3 G. A. Rendsburg, “A New Look at the Pentateuchal HW,” *Biblica* 63 (1982): 351-69; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 47. For evidence of the presence of these northerners in the hill country area where early Israel settled in the 2nd millennium B.C., see R. S. Hess, “Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations,” 492-518 in V. Philips Long ed., *Israel’s Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 7; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999); idem, “Hurrians and Other Inhabitants of Late Bronze Age Palestine,” *Levant* 29 (1997): 153-6; idem, “West Semitic Texts and the Book of Joshua,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 63-76.

4 J. Tropper, “Das genusindifferente hebräischce Pronomen HW” im Pentateuch aus sprachvergleichender Sicht,” *Zeitschrift für die Althebraistik* (2001): 159-72.

5 Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 111-232; esp. 145, 192, 201, 202, 232.

either gender, i.e., “one,” “someone,” “anyone,” etc. Even 2nd person “you” and 3rd person plural forms “they,” “them,” are preferable because such forms do not compromise the epicene nature of the pronoun. If this is true in the Pentateuch, it may also remain the case in the other books of the Bible, where these forms continue to appear occasionally as 3rd person feminine singular independent personal pronouns.

In conclusion, the nature of the Hebrew language, when studied more closely regarding many of these so-called masculine-oriented forms, reveals a greater fluidity in their usage in many parts of the Bible. This variation does not support arguments for gender-specific translations.

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## FORM, FUNCTION, AND THE “LITERAL MEANING” FALLACY IN ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction: The rise of meaning-based Bible translation

The 1980s and 1990s may rightly be called the heyday of functional equivalence in Bible translation. During these decades the meaning-based translation theories associated especially with Eugene Nida, the United Bible Societies, and Wycliffe Bible Translators (SIL), flourished both in the English-speaking world and in the world of international Bible translation. Nida originally referred to his method as “dynamic equivalence,” later adopting the more appropriate “functional equivalent.”<sup>2</sup> The first English version to consciously adopt this method was *Today's English Version* (TEV; also known as the *Good News Bible* [GNB=GNT<sup>3</sup>]). The New Testament, translated by Robert Bratcher under the auspices of the American Bible Society, was published in 1966 as *Good News for Modern Man*. The whole Bible followed in 1976. Even before the GNT, various attempts had been made to produce translations which reflected contemporary English idiom. A number of such versions appeared in the early twentieth century, including *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903), produced by Richard Weymouth; *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1904), a committee production; *The New Testament: A New Translation* (1913, 1926) by James Moffatt; and *The New Testament: An American Translation* (1923) by Edgar J. Goodspeed. All of these sought to translate the Bible into clear and contemporary English. Goodspeed, in a statement with remarkable affinity to later dynamic equivalent theory, wrote, “I wanted my translation to make on the reader

1 This is an abbreviated and revised version of a paper given at the Denver Seminary Biblical Studies Conference, “From Ancient Texts to Modern Versions: Issues in Bible Translation,” February 1, 2003, and then again at the November 2003 meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, Ga. The present version is roughly half the length of the original, leaving off a major section on cautions and clarifications related to functional equivalence. The full paper may be obtained through the website <http://www.etsjets.org/meetings/2003/2003-papers-idx.html> or by contacting the author at [m-strauss@bethel.edu](mailto:m-strauss@bethel.edu).

2 See Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Nelson, 1986), 7-8.

3 [Ed. note: The translation formerly indicated by the abbreviation GNB (= Good News Bible) is now referred to as GNT (= Good News Translation).]