Tony Curtis

‘My God will be your God’
Divine Agency and the role of the outsider in the Hebrew Bible

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the ‘outsider’ in relation to the community of faith in the Hebrew Bible. ‘My God will be your God’ explores recent work on election, providing a context in which to examine how ‘outsiders’ operate across a range of biblical narratives. Taking a canonical approach to the role of such ‘outsiders’, it undertakes an investigation of five figures in the biblical texts whose actions have a particularly significant impact on the chosen people – Zipporah, Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, and Jael – assessing the extent to which each may be seen as ‘outsider’ and as a divine agent of change and transformation. Paying close attention to the language used by and about them, their motives and actions, patterns emerge concerning the role of such figures in the divine economy.

The treatment of two further figures, Vashti and Aseneth, is then explored, to determine the extent to which comparable ‘outsiders’ have been similarly received. Examining the reception of each figure in extra-biblical tradition and subsequent commentary, it discerns the interpretative moves which have been made to minimise the threat posed by such ‘outsiders’, and discusses the far-reaching and long-lasting impact which they have within the salvation history of Israel. The case studies are used to propose a theological understanding of the role of ‘outsiders’ as an integral part of God’s self-communication to the ‘elect’, a feature of the divine economy which has practical implications for the self-understanding of communities of faith. Finally, some of the implications for dialogue, engagement, and the formulation of doctrine are addressed in the light of the study’s findings, proposing a new, scripturally based understanding of the role of the outside voice for today’s faith traditions.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Journals, Monograph Series

CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSNT Supp	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOT Supp	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP Sup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series

Textual Sources

LXX	Septuagint: Brenton, Sir Lancelot C.L., *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., 1851
MT	Masoretic Text: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (5th edition)*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
Tg. Neof.	Targum Neofiti
Tg. Onq.	Targum Onqelos
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

English Bible Translations

Unless stated otherwise, Bible translations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha (Anglicized Edition), Oxford: OUP, 1995. The NRSV is copyright © 1989, 1995, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, that it has been composed by me, and that it does not include work that has been presented for a degree in this or any other university. All quotations, and the work and opinions of others, have been acknowledged in the main text or footnotes.

Tony Curtis

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Introduction

What does the 'outsider' have to say today to communities of faith, and why should those communities be listening? This investigation is an attempt to answer these questions, based not on received doctrine or a desire for 'good relationships', but on the scriptural evidence regarding the role of outsiders within the Hebrew Bible, and especially in a number of key narratives which portray such individuals as acting in concordance with the divine will. My thesis is simple, but, I believe, has potentially far-reaching consequences for the way in which relationships within and between faith communities might be approached. I shall propose that, given the existence of 'outsiders' who act as divine agents and have a substantial impact on the future of the elect in the Hebrew Bible, such 'outsiders' are an essential feature of the divine economy.

Over the past fifty years or so, since the issue of *Nostra Aetate*[1] and the developments of the Second Vatican Council, there has been renewed interest in, and engagement with, interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. At the same time, global geo-political developments have necessitated greater understanding of differing and often conflicting world-views on the part of religious communities and political leaders. More recently, and perhaps partly as a result, the theology of election has been revisited by commentators and theologians seeking to investigate, clarify, and defend the biblical concept of 'particularism' in this changing global context.[2]

[1] Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,* Vatican: The Holy See, 28th October 1965.
[2] E.g. Levenson, J.D., *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; Kaminsky, Joel S., *Yet I loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election,*

In parallel to this development of changing attitudes towards people of different faith traditions, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen changes to societal and religious norms around sex and gender, accompanied by the emergence of a more visible discipline of feminist interpretation, a wide range of feminist interpretative approaches to biblical texts, and a renewed interest in the place of women within the Hebrew Bible.[3] Interest in intersectionality and the nature of exclusion has also seen biblical scholarship focusing on Liberation Theology become more prominent,[4] along with Womanist interpretation[5] and approaches which take particular account of global contexts and intertextuality.[6] The 'biblical' attitude to those who have often been seen as 'outsiders', both in ethnic/religious terms, and in terms of gender in patriarchally dominated traditions, has therefore come under greater scrutiny as both approaches to interpretation and wider societal attitudes have developed and changed.

Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007; Lohr, Joel N., *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009; Novak, D., *The Election of Israel*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995; Wyschogrod, M., *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel*, Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1996.

[3] For an introduction to and history of these developments, see e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984; Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998; Day, Linda and Pressler, Carolyn, *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld,* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

[4] See e.g. Schroer, Silvia and Bietenhard, Sophia (eds.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermenutics of Liberation (JSOT Supp 374)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

[5] See e.g. Weems, Renita J., *Just a Sister Away: Understanding the Timeless Connection Between Women of Today and Women in the Bible*, New York: Hachette, 1988; Smith, Mitzi J., *I found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock (Cascade), 2015.

[6] Recent developments include the "texts @ contexts" series, e.g. Brenner, Athalya and Yee, Gale (eds.), *Exodus and Deuteronomy (Texts @ Contexts series)*, Augsburg: Fortress, 2015.

These developments provide some of the context in which my investigation of the role of the 'outsider' as divine agent takes place. There is also a personal context to this enquiry, which involves the 'liminal spaces' which I have found myself occupying, and which continue to inform my own identity as both a Christian priest and a biblical interpreter. I grew up in a family where being female was the 'norm', in that for many years, my grandfather aside, my main familial influences were my grandmother, mother, two aunts and four female cousins. Though this context has changed over time, it was axiomatic to me as I grew up that women and men were of equal value, and that there was nothing 'unusual' about women who took a leading role in any area of activity. This has no doubt informed my understanding of gender, and influenced some of my concerns in later life, most especially my involvement in campaigns for greater equality in church and civil society.

At the same time, my immediate family has an untypical ethnic and religious heritage. In my own family tree, Northern Irish Protestants sit alongside Eastern European Jews who long ago moved to England, and were assimilated into British culture and, in time, the dominant religious tradition. In that of my wife, there are white British Christians, and German Jews who were victims of the Shoah, or who fled Nazi persecution and became naturalised British Citizens. Religious and ethnic identity in such a situation is complex, and yet we are, ostensibly, a typical, 'normative', white European family of practising Christians. I am an ordained minister in the Church of England, itself both a distinctive religious community and yet complicated by the diversity of its theology and tradition, as well as its function as a state religion. As an Anglo-Catholic, I am also part of a religious tradition which

has undergone fracture and division itself, precipitated by divergent views on gender and sexuality within the Church.

Perhaps partly as a result of this particular set of circumstances, much of my ministry has involved engagement with issues around racial and social justice, interfaith dialogue, the question of 'living well alongside' people who sit 'outside' my own community, and a concern for the place of women and men as equal partners in my own religious tradition, as well as in society at large. I have, therefore, both a personal and professional interest in what it means to be an 'outsider' in the context of a faith community, and in what the place and role of 'outsiders' might be in the divine economy. It is from this perspective that I wish to investigate the role of the 'outsider' as divine agent in the Hebrew Bible.

Identifying the 'outsider'

There is an overwhelming consensus, both within Jewish and Christian faith communities and in the academy, that the biblical texts were written largely (though perhaps not exclusively)[7] by men. It is also true, that a large majority of the narratives within the Hebrew Bible were written *about* men, and it might

[7] There is growing interest in the prospect of female authorship for a number of biblical texts. See e.g. Bledstein, Adrien Janis, 'Is Judges a Woman's Satire of Men who Play God?' in Brenner, Athalya (ed.), *Judges (A Feminist Companion to the Bible: First Series)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, pp. 34-54; Fischer, Irmtraud, 'The Book of Ruth: A 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah' in Brenner, Athalya, *Ruth and Esther (A Feminist Companion to the Bible: First Series)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, pp. 24-49; Millgram, Hillel I., *Four Biblical Heroines and the Case for Female Authorship: An Analysis of the Women of Ruth, Esther and Genesis 38*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007.

reasonably be argued that most of the texts were written *for* men.[8] Nevertheless, a number of prominent female figures exist within biblical narratives, and recent volumes have begun to highlight the variety and portrayal of such women across the Hebrew Bible and indeed the New Testament.[9] There has also been a history of attempts throughout the ages to challenge patriarchal interpretations of such texts,[10] though only in the past sixty years has such an effort been consistently undertaken, with a variety of approaches and results.

Often, female characters within the biblical texts have been assessed individually, or within the context of the particular narrative in which they appear, with the result that such figures have frequently been marginalised, or their wider significance overlooked. Another recent approach has been to 'reimagine' the biblical portrayals of female characters, interpolating large parts of their 'story' or creating a new story which is not found within (though it may be consistent with) the biblical narrative.[11] Where women in the biblical narratives have been more

[8] Danna Nolan Fewell contends that "The Bible, for the most part, is an alien text, not written by women or with women in mind. Some feminist critics have asked why we should be reading the Bible at all." (Fewell, Danna Nolan, 'Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism' in McKenzie, Steven L. and Haynes, Stephen R. (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999, pp. 268-282, p. 270.

[9] E.g. Bach, Alice (ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a reader*, New York: Routledge, 1999; Newsom, Carol A., Ringe, Sharon H. and Lapsley, Jacqueline E. (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Expanded edition*, London: SPCK, 2014. For a comprehensive survey of *all* of the women in the Bible, see Meyers, Carol, Craven, Toni and Kraemer, Ross S. (eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

[10] See Lerner, Gerder, 'One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism' in Lerner, Gerder*, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen Seventy*, Oxford: OUP, 1993, pp. 138-166, and famously in the late nineteenth century, Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, (ed.), *The Woman's Bible – Part I: Comments on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*, New York: The European Publishing Company, 1895, along with the work which followed.

[11] E.g. van Wolde, Ellen, *Ruth and Naomi,* London: SCM Press, 1997, or, from a different perspective, Fewell, Danna Nolan & Gunn, David Miller, *Compromising Redemption: relating characters in the book of Ruth*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1990.

broadly investigated, this has often been with reference to themes particular to gender, especially with regard to the challenge posed by what are seen as overwhelmingly patriarchal narratives.

There are within the Hebrew Bible, however, a number of 'double outsiders' who play prominent roles at key points in the history of God's people. These are women who, in addition to falling outside the patriarchal 'norms' of the text, are 'outsiders' in terms of their relationship to the 'elect' community. Such figures are sometimes portrayed as having a pre-existent relationship to the 'elect', but others represent the very antithesis of the 'chosen'. Taken individually, their presence can be on the one hand overlooked as an interesting anomaly, particular to the narrative in which they appear, or on the other subsumed within wider concerns of ethnicity or gender. The collective impact of these figures as 'outsiders' has also been diminished by the use of a variety of interpretative methods over the centuries, which warrant further investigation. Such moves have sought either to 'explain away' the anomalous presence or activity of prominent 'outsiders', or to assimilate their identity and thus 'make safe' their contribution to the greater metanarrative of salvation history.

Approach and Method

The fact that such figures are extant in the biblical canon as it has been received, and that their contribution to the outworking of divine promise in the narratives in

which they appear is frequently significant, leads me to ask what *purpose* the portrayal of such 'outsiders' has within the Hebrew Bible as a whole. I propose therefore to undertake a close reading of their individual appearances within the context of a canonical approach, investigating the presence, significance, and subsequent reception of such figures. This will allow me to posit a theological *rationale* for the appearance of 'outsiders', and particularly of 'double outsiders', across a range of biblical texts, and to assess some of the implications of this for faith communities today.

I am of course writing from the perspective of an active member of a community of faith, the Church of England, for whom the Hebrew Bible comprises in its entirety Scripture, that is to say, a set of sacred texts which are foundational for the religious tradition in which I sit, and for almost all Jewish and Christian traditions. I do not intend therefore to approach the biblical narratives in a way which allows me to dispense with, or to declare invalid, the texts themselves. Nor shall I attend in detail to issues of the dating or composition of the narratives, as important as these may be in other contexts. Rather I shall seek to discern, from the extant texts and their reception in subsequent tradition, what patterns emerge and what the implications of these patterns might be for communities of faith. This work is indebted to, and will in a small way contribute, I hope, to the 'clearing away' of "androcentric mistranslations, patriarchal interpretations and one-sided reconstructions"[12] which have clouded the reception and interpretation of 'outsiders' in the biblical narratives I shall investigate, as well as their portrayal in

[12] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, p. 16.

subsequent extra-biblical tradition. Nevertheless, my primary focus in this thesis will be to re-examine the contribution of a number of key figures in their canonical context, and in so doing to develop a coherent model regarding the role of such 'outsiders' within the Hebrew Bible as a whole, before going on to explore some of the implications of such a model for future relationships within and between the traditions for whom such texts are in some way foundational.

I propose first to examine the nature of 'election' itself in the light of recent scholarship, and thus to situate our 'outsiders' in relation to the 'chosen' community. This will enable detailed case studies to be undertaken within the framework of categories of election. For the individual case studies themselves, I have chosen four women who fall into the 'double outsider' category, who are protagonists or main actors within the biblical narratives, and who appear to act in a way which delivers or transforms the elect community in accordance with the divine will; they are Zipporah (Exodus 2, 4, 18), Jael (Judges 4-5), Ruth and Rahab (Joshua 2, 6). In the case of Zipporah, I shall also investigate her father Jethro, given the intertwined nature of their contribution to the narrative and Jethro's substantial impact as an 'outsider' both on the life of Moses and on Israelite legal tradition. I shall then consider two further 'double outsiders', Vashti (Esther 1-2) and Aseneth (Gen 41, 46), to examine their portrayal in the extant texts and their reception in later tradition. This will allow me to compare the treatment of these women with that of our other case studies, in order to analyse and draw out common themes which emerge in the attitudes of commentators towards the actions of the 'outsider'.

In each case, I shall assess the extent to which the character can truly be described as an 'outsider', and whether they remain so, or become assimilated into the community. Analysing the language used by and about them, and their actions as portrayed in the biblical text, I shall examine whether each can be described as a 'divine agent', that is to say, whether they are working in concordance with the divine will to transform or redeem the community of the 'elect'. I shall then assess the impact which each figure has on God's chosen people, and the way in which they have subsequently been received in Jewish and Christian tradition, paying attention to the way in which the motives, actions and identity of each individual have been portrayed. This will also allow me to examine the perceived threat posed by the outsider, and the extent to which this perception concurs or diverges from that which exists in the biblical narratives themselves.

I shall use the patterns and themes which emerge from these case study texts, which are set across the patriarchal narratives, the time of Joshua, the period of the Judges, and the exile, to propose a common theological understanding of the role of the 'outsider' within the divine economy. Finally, I shall examine the practical outworking of such a proposal, in its impact on areas of practice and doctrine for communities of faith, and in the potential future research which may follow. All of this follows, however, from an understanding of what 'election' and 'chosenness' might actually mean, and the relationship of the 'outsider' to the elect in such a context, with which I now begin.

Election and the role of the Outsider

In examining the role of the outsider, and of certain outsiders in particular, it is first necessary to outline what that term might mean in relation to the concept of election in the Hebrew Bible. There has been something of a renewed interest in election theology recently, and I intend to engage with the work of Jon Levenson, Joel Kaminsky and Joel Lohr among others to outline the challenges of election as an idea, along with the approaches which have been taken in addressing these challenges. I shall examine the way in which each has approached the interaction between the chosen and unchosen in the biblical text, noting areas which may serve as points of departure for my own proposal. I shall go on to investigate ways in which 'insiders' and 'outsiders' might relate in terms of the divine economy by focusing on a number of individuals who fall outside the core of the elect.

The very notion of election itself, with its emphasis on the particularity and chosen nature of individuals and peoples, has been regularly challenged, and since the Enlightenment has come to be viewed as problematic by many due to the perceived conflict between the ideas of Israel's election on the one hand and God's universal sovereignty (with an attendant emphasis on universal justice) on the other. Kaminsky outlines two responses to this challenge from the 16th and 17th centuries which, he contends, continue to influence thinking on election today. The

first of these, argued by Spinoza, was that "a close reading of the Hebrew Bible demonstrated 'that God chose the Hebrews neither absolutely nor forever.'"[13] Thus, for Spinoza, the election of Israel was essentially a temporary and contingent affair, which should not affect the view that God shows equal grace to all. The second response, represented by Kant, was to see in Christianity a religion of universalism, which though it physically arose from Judaism, owed nothing to the particularism of Israel's election theology.[14] Kaminsky notes that in the light of these critiques the notion of chosenness has also been uncomfortable for many Jews in the modern period, and a number of strands within contemporary Judaism have attempted to downplay or even eliminate the concept of election from their theological thinking.[15]

There is a further, more recent criticism of the whole concept of election, which stems from the notion that chosenness for one people necessarily entails ill-treatment and perhaps destruction for those who are unchosen. This criticism, perhaps unsurprising given the challenging proximity of *herem* and 'chosenness' as ideas in Deuteronomy 7:1-6, is a regular theme for those who seek to denigrate religion as a whole and monotheism in particular. The typically offensive polemic of Richard Dawkins on this subject, who describes Judaism as "originally a tribal cult of a single fiercely unpleasant God, morbidly obsessed with sexual restrictions, with the smell of charred flesh, with his own superiority over rival gods, and with the

[13] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 2, quoting Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (trans. R. Elwes); New York: Dover, 1951 [originally published anonymously in Latin in 1670]), p. 55.
[14] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p.2-3.
[15] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

exclusiveness of his chosen desert tribe,"[16] while extreme in its language, is typical of the thrust of many attacks on the concept of election from the New Atheists. Although such attacks cannot be ignored entirely, given the hostility which they incite towards faith groups and religion as a whole, it is, I imagine, safe to say that they are not grounded in any attempt to respect the integrity of the canonical text. More relevant perhaps for those seeking to defend and explore the concept of election are the critiques of biblical scholars who are better acquainted with the Hebrew Bible itself, and it is worth repeating the challenge of David Clines, with which Lohr opens his preface to *Chosen and Unchosen*:

> How can we modern readers of the Bible cope with the fact that the God represented in the Bible is a national deity? If you adopt the point of view of the Egyptians or the Canaanites, God is not experienced as a saving God, and the only words you will hear addressed to you are words of reproach and threat. If you are not Israel, you do not know the presence of God, and the main reason is not some defect in you but the fact that you have not been chosen.[17]

Ideas of chosenness are, however, central to Israel's self-understanding within the Hebrew Bible, and the challenges outlined above merit serious attention in any attempt to understand the role of the outsider in canonical texts.

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[16] Dawkins, R., *The God delusion*, London: Random House, 2007, p. 58.
[17] Clines, David J.A., *The Bible and the Modern World (Biblical Seminar 51)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, pp. 100-101, quoted in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen,* p. ix.

Lohr notes that the Biblical theology movement is one strand of Christian interpretation which has attempted to deal with these perceived difficulties, bringing with it "an onslaught of monographs devoted to the topic of Israel's election."[18] He draws attention in particular to the arguments of H. H. Rowley in *The Biblical Doctrine of Election,*[19] noting that it "seems that throughout Rowley's book there exists an underlying concern to argue that God is not to be viewed as arbitrary in his choosing."[20] The basic argument of Rowley and others is that Israel's election was to a particular purpose of mission, as the people most suited to fulfil that purpose. As Lohr goes on to highlight, for Rowley "Israel's election thus equals Israel's task, and this task (or responsibility) to the nations takes priority over the idea that God simply loved Israel."[21] Lohr notes the difficulty in supporting this conclusion from the biblical texts, and states that "it seems Rowley is especially guilty of underemphasizing the many passages (indeed the natural thrust of much of the OT itself) in which it is clear that God's relationship with Israel is founded simply on God's love."[22] This oversight on Rowley's part, in which he is not alone, may often be attributed to a supersessionist desire to show how Israel has ceded its election to Christianity, with its emphasis on mission, as Kaminsky highlights.[23]

Following a brief survey of other recent Christian interpretative moves, including the Old Testament theologies of Walter Eichrodt, Horst Dietrich Preuss, Walter Brueggemann and Charles H. H. Scobie, Lohr notes that "If there has been a

[18] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 12.
[19] Rowley, H. H., *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1950.
[20] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 12.
[21] Ibid., p. 14.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 174.

unifying factor overall in the works surveyed... it is that the election of Israel is *for* something."[24] This purpose appears for most Christian interpreters to be, often on the basis of Genesis 12:1-3, linked expressly to mission, a notably Christian concern. Not only does this seem to ignore the variety of ways in which Israel's dealings with the nations are expressed in the passages where the theme of election is prominent, but it also does little to answer the question of what it means to be on the outside of this elect group, to be unchosen. As Lohr goes on to note, in the works he surveys "few if any... discuss *actual examples of ways that the nations, or the unchosen, function in relation to the chosen in the OT*."[25] He goes on to ask the reasonable question: "For example, if Preuss says that 'election causes one to ask about those on the "outside,"' why does he not probe their stories? What of the stories of Abimelech, Rahab, Balaam, Pharaoh's daughter, and Jethro? Could not these stories give us some sense of what it might mean to be 'outside'?"[26]

Recent Jewish approaches to Election.

Lohr goes on to examine four Jewish approaches to the concept of election. Unsurprisingly, Jewish scholars have been more inclined to emphasise the special nature of God's relationship with Israel, and have recognised a distinctive and permanent chosenness in the biblical text. This entails facing the challenge of what space remains for the unchosen in the divine economy. David Novak, for example,

[24] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p.30.
[25] Ibid., p.31 (emphasis in the original).
[26] Ibid.

is at pains to emphasize that the relationship between God and the elect is both special and detached from any perceived merit in either individuals or peoples. In the case of Abraham's calling, and in the more general application of the same principle to Israel, it is God's free choice to elect whomsoever God might chose, and therefore it is simply the case that "'God loves you/chooses you/desires you because God loves you/chooses you/desires you'."[27] This does not, however, preclude a relationship between God and all of humanity, which Novak understands in terms of God's self-revelation through Torah. Lohr understands it to be implicit in Novak's outline of this relationship that "in obeying the partial Torah, the non-Jew is able to be in an appropriate relationship with God and live a life pleasing to him. Furthermore, in obeying the Noahide laws, the Gentile is able to participate in the world to come."[28]

Michael Wyschogrod places even greater emphasis on the calling of a particular people physically related to Abraham. As Lohr writes, "For Wyschogrod, God's calling of Abraham and his bestowal of blessing upon him are foundational in the history of events in Israel's life; the reason for God's love is not to be determined apart from the fact that God simply loved Abraham."[29] Wyschogrod goes further, however, and argues that it is in relationship to Abraham's biological descendents that God chooses to self-reveal to the world:

[27] Novak, *The Election of Israel*, p.116, quoted in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 48.
[28] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 51.
[29] Ibid., p. 61.

> The God of Abraham chose this people as his vehicle in history, so that his identity is irrevocably attached to this people because he made himself know to man [sic] as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thereby conferring on this people a defining function in regard to this God. There is thus created a relationship of great intimacy between a people constituted by its divine election and a God who chooses to appear in history as the God of this people.[30]

Despite his insistence on the consequently permanent and indissoluble relationship between God and all Jews as descendants of Abraham, which is unrelated to merit or even belief, Wyschogrod does not see this as excluding those who are not the elect from relationship with God. Instead, it is simply indicative of the *nature* of God's love, which is for Wyschogrod a deeply personal love, rather than "a lofty divine love equally distributed to all without recognition of uniqueness and real encounter."[31] Thus, the unchosen may have to come to terms with the fact that they are not God's favourites, but this can mean that they are personally and uniquely loved in a way that would not otherwise be possible. As Wyschogrod concludes, "The mystery of Israel's election thus turns out to be the guarantee of the fatherhood of God toward all peoples, elect and nonelect, Jew and gentile."[32]

While the approaches of both Novak and Wyschogrod serve to demonstrate that the election of Israel need not imply the destruction of the other, and indeed that

[30] Wyschogrod, M., *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel*, Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1996, p. 57, quoted in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 61.
[31] Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, p. 64, quoted in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 64.
[32] Ibid.

the non-elect can both fall within the scope of divine love and have a right relationship with God, their focus is necessarily on the place of Israel as the elect. Furthermore, their analysis deals with the theological concept of chosenness and its potential impact on the outsider, without in-depth engagement with the biblical texts which focus on the interaction between chosen and unchosen. This is not the case with the two other Jewish scholars with whom Lohr engages, and who provide a fruitful starting point for my current enquiry, Jon D. Levenson and Joel Kaminsky. Levenson notes that the creation accounts in the Hebrew Bible, in contrast to others (for example the *Enuma Elish*), are not located spatially in any particular nation, and that the Genesis accounts make clear that "it is humanity in general and not any people in particular that is created,"[33] and that as a result "all people are created equally in the divine image."[34] While Abraham and subsequently Israel are called into a special and unique relationship with God, this does not suggest an absence of any relationship between God and those who are not part of the elect. Levenson goes on to point out that "it is possible to be a faithful and responsible worshiper of YHWH... without being an Israelite,"[35] citing the use of the term "fear of God" (Gen 20:11) in the story of King Abimelech's dealings with Abraham as an example of this idea in the biblical text.[36] As a result, Levenson argues, the "convenient dichotomy of insider-outsider is too crude to accommodate the Jewish conception of the divine-human relationship."[37]

[33] Levenson, J.D., 'The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism' in Brett, M.G. (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible,* Leiden: Brill, 1996, pp. 143-69, p.147.
[34] Ibid., p. 147.
[35] Ibid., p. 148.
[36] Ibid., p. 149. This interaction is explored in more detail by Lohr in *Chosen and Unchosen*, pp. 95-114.
[37] Ibid.

If this argument seeks to demonstrate that election does not entail the exclusion of those who are not chosen from the divine economy, Levenson's major earlier work, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*,[38] examines the question of exactly what it does entail to be chosen and unchosen, in the challenging context of the history of child-sacrifice and the commandment in Exodus 22:28, "You shall give Me the first-born among your sons." Here Levenson explores Israel's relationship with YHWH, noting that "central to that relationship is Israel's status not only as YHWH's *son*, but as his *first-born son*."[39] This is fundamental to Levenson's understanding of the Exodus, which he states "is not a story of universal liberation at all, but only of one nation's release, the release of the first-born son to rejoin and serve his divine father."[40] Levenson goes on to explore the motif of the beloved son who is 'chosen' in the Genesis narratives, and the difficulty posed by divine preference for the younger over the older sibling, which "is attested too many times in the Hebrew Bible to be a mere coincidence. The list of non-first borns who attain special eminence reads like a roster of the great names of early Israel: Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses, Eleazar, Ithamar, Gideon, David, Solomon."[41]

As Levenson reminds us, the story of human dealings with a God who shows partiality goes all the way back to Cain and Abel, and the results of God's choosing are not necessarily straightforward either for the elect or for the unchosen.

[38] Levenson, J.D., *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
[39] Ibid., p. 37.
[40] Ibid., p. 38.
[41] Ibid., p. 70.

Levenson here introduces the theme of the humiliation and exaltation of the beloved or chosen son which is central to the book, noting that "Abel loses his life precisely because he is the son in whom God found favour. Abel's exaltation at the altar brings about his humiliation in the field."[42] From the perspective of the *unchosen*, the point of the Cain and Abel story, he argues, is not that there was anything inherently wrong with Cain's offering, but that Cain is challenged to deal with the seeming unfairness of God's choosing. Cain fails this test of character, and both he and the chosen Abel suffer as a result, not of God's favour for Abel, but of Cain's own need for vengeance. "What Cain cannot bear is a world in which distributive justice is not the highest principle and not every inequity is an iniquity."[43]

Levenson goes on to point out, however, that even for Cain, the exile imposed upon him for his actions is accompanied by the promise that sevenfold vengeance will be taken on anyone who should kill him. Cain therefore "survives by the grace of God - ironically, the very principle that evoked his murderous impulse in the first place."[44] Variations of the same situation present themselves in the cases of Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau, although in the former case the rivalry is played out by the two mothers, Sarai and Hagar, who at least in Sarai's mind are in competition for Abraham's blessing upon their respective sons. Levenson demonstrates that in both of these cases the chosen or beloved sons go through a

[42] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* p. 74.
[43] Ibid., p. 75.
[44] Ibid.

trial which signifies death and resurrection, in Isaac's case with the *aqedah,*[45] and in the case of Jacob with his exile, which follows almost immediately upon his receipt of Isaac's blessing: "No sooner is the promise made than it is sorely tested; no sooner is exaltation conferred upon the beloved son than his humiliation begins."[46]

Perhaps more illuminating for our investigation of the role of the unchosen, is the fact that neither Ishmael (who suffers his own near-death and miraculous survival) nor Esau are left empty-handed. Both Abraham (Gen 17:20, Gen 21:13), and Hagar (Gen 16:10, Gen 21:18), are promised God's blessings on Ishmael in response to their concern for their child, who survives the encounter intact with his blessing, if not with his inheritance. As Levenson notes: "Like Ishmael, also supplanted, Esau does finally receive a blessing but one inferior to that of which Jacob robbed him,"[47] but in the case of Esau and Jacob, the conflict between them is finally resolved, and they are reconciled as very different men. Jacob realises his debt to Esau, and his brother, content to let the injustice go, "is no longer the crude and vengeful man Jacob escaped. He is now a person of consummate graciousness."[48] In this encounter we begin to see the possibility of a constructive relationship between the chosen and unchosen, in which reconciliation is achievable and both parties grow as a result of their status, a theme which is continued in the lengthy Joseph narrative of Genesis 37-50.

[45] See Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* pp. 111-142 for Levenson's full treatment of the *aqedah* and its meaning.
[46] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, p. 65.
[47] Ibid., p. 62.
[48] Ibid., p. 68.

In his discussion on the Joseph story, Levenson describes it as "the most sustained and the most profound exploration in the Hebrew Bible of the problematics of chosenness,"[49] and he goes on to summarise the challenge of election within the Genesis narratives as he sees it:

> Human nature, the story makes clear, is not constituted so as to facilitate the acceptance of chosenness. The one chosen is sorely tempted to interpret his special status as a mandate for domination... Those not chosen are unlikely to view their status with grace and quiet acceptance... If the challenge of the chosen is to bear their exalted status with humility and altruism, the challenge of the unchosen - and chosenness is meaningless unless some are *not* chosen - is to play their subordinate role with grace and with due regard for the common good.[50]

In the course of the narrative, Joseph grows from the boy who insensitively offends his father and brothers with "the dreams of a teenager, full of grandeur and with little or no deference to the responsibilities that the ancient Israelite ethic associates with true greatness"[51] into what Levenson sees as the justification of God's favour, a man "who, because of his mounting strength of character and self-knowledge, is able to put it to proper use."[52]

[49] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* p. 154.
[50] Ibid., pp. 154-5.
[51] Ibid., p. 166.
[52] Ibid., p. 167-8.

Equally, in Levenson's reading, the reconciliation in the Joseph narrative is only brought about by the unchosen brothers' recognition of Joseph's favoured status, "when Joseph's dreams of receiving his family's homage are realized in a situation of legitimate authority and his brothers' egalitarian resentment gives way to acceptance, grateful and gracious, of Joseph's unique position."[53] Joel Kaminsky also comments on the continued perceived unfairness in the Joseph narrative, and additionally on the favouritism shown by Joseph to Benjamin in Gen 43.34 before he reveals himself to his brothers: "Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him." In this, Kaminsky sees Joseph acting in the same manner as the partial God who has shown favour to him: "he, like God, wants to see whether it is possible for a group of non-favoured brothers fully to accept that the gifts people receive in life are never fairly distributed, especially the love and favor received from parents or from God."[54] Following Wyschogrod, Kaminsky sees here not a divine exclusion of those who are not favoured, but rather the fact that "in some sense, God's special love for Israel reveals God's ability to connect to humans in a much more profound and intimate way than the assertion that God has a generic and equal love for all humans."[55]

From the approaches of Levenson and Kaminsky there emerges a picture of complex interaction between the chosen and unchosen, in which the favour shown towards the elect or especially beloved of God need not preclude diving blessing

[53] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* p. 168.
[54] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 67.
[55] Ibid.

and love shown to the unchosen. Indeed it may be as a result of the conflict between the two, and its resolution, that both chosen and unchosen are seen to grow as they come to terms with their relationship. For Levenson certainly, the chosen are often tested almost to death, and their success for him proves that their election is not completely arbitrary: "the proof is that those chosen, like Abraham, for exaltation, are able to pass the brutal tests to which God subjects them and thus to vindicate the grace he has shown them."[56] As Lohr notes in discussing the same passage however, there is a certain tension here, and "these words, though arguing that the choices of God are vindicated, do not, we must note, necessarily give *reason* for God's prior choice of Israel, or the earlier patriarchs."[57] God is still free to choose, and God's choosing cannot be second-guessed, but a purpose may possibly be discerned in that choosing.

Lohr notes that in Levenson's discussion of the purpose of Israel's election, "the election of Israel does, in agreement with Rowley, entail service; the specifics of this service, however, are related to observance of Torah."[58] There is no necessary correlation, as far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, between election and mission, and certainly not between election and conversion. Kaminsky sees another element in Israel's calling, based upon texts such as Genesis 18:17-19, which suggest that "at least one part of Abraham's and later Israel's elective service involves functioning as a mediator pleading for God's mercy,"[59] an idea which he sees as further developed in some of the covenantal language about Israel as a priestly kingdom,

[56] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* p. 139.
[57] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 78 (emphasis in original).
[58] Ibid., p. 80.
[59] Kaminsky, *Yet I Love Jacob*, p. 84.

"a concept that entails her functioning as a mediator of the divine world as a whole. If one takes such language as more than metaphor", he continues, "it implies that Israel not only intercedes for the nations, but she is also the means by which God's blessings radiate out to the larger terrestrial world."[60] However the purposes of election are to be understood, it is also clear that to be chosen frequently entails great danger, and is accompanied by rigorous and often near-fatal testing, along with enhanced responsibilities toward God, which may be seen to some extent to justify that same chosenness.[61] The question of election and the role of the non-elect is therefore not simply a matter of divine partiality which favours one group over another.

Most of the examples which have been explored above have related specifically to familial disputes, and concern the narratives of election within Genesis which largely address (Cain and Abel excepted) the fates of those who are directly descended from Abraham, and could be seen as competing heirs for the promise of blessing bestowed in Genesis 12:2-3. This is unsurprising given the foundational nature of these narratives both for the notion of divine election but also for Israelite and subsequently Jewish self-identity. Nevertheless, to understand the relationship more broadly between the chosen and unchosen, both Kaminsky and Lohr go on to address the wider question of Israel's interaction with other peoples,

[60] Kaminsky, *Yet I Love Jacob*, p. 84.

[61] One way of interpreting this understanding of election from a Christian point of view is posited by Walter Moberly, using Luke 12:48, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required." See Moberly, R.W.L., 'Is election bad for you ?', in Middlemas, Jill, Clines, David J. A. and Holt, Else K. (eds.) *The centre and the periphery: a European tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010, pp. 95-111 (especially pp. 106ff), for an exploration of this idea.

and to examine specific examples within the Hebrew Bible of 'outsiders', their treatment, and their place within the divine economy. Their conclusions, grounded within the context of our understanding of election as a concept as developed thus far, will form the background for my inquiry into those figures who are clearly 'unchosen' but through whom God is seen to act in relation to the elect.

Categories of election?

Kaminsky begins his discussion of Israel and the Other by noting the tendency among some Jewish and Christian scholars to reject the whole idea of chosenness, "because, so they claim, such an idea inherently leads the elect to devalue and ultimately maltreat those not belonging to the chosen group."[62] He counters this argument by suggesting that "the Israelite idea of election presupposes three rather than two categories: the elect, the anti-elect, and the non-elect."[63] Kaminsky's argument is essentially that although there are a small number of groups who are "deemed to be enemies of God and whom Israel is commanded to annihilate,"[64] the reality is that most of the 'others' encountered by Israel do not fall into this category. "If one hopes to understand what Israel's election theology implied for non-Israelites," he states, "one must recognize that most texts that affirm Israel's elect status view the vast majority of foreign individuals and nations as members of the non-elect rather than the anti-elect. These non-elect peoples were always considered fully part of the divine economy, and in a very real sense,

[62] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, p. 107.
[63] Ibid., p. 109.
[64] Ibid. This idea in itself, as Kaminsky notes, poses "a serious challenge to any biblical theologian or scholar" (*Yet I Loved Jacob,* p.109), and he discusses the issue of the 'anti-elect' in pp. 111-119.

Israel was to work out her destiny in relation to them, even if in separation from them."[65]

In examining those who are not portrayed as the enemies of God (and therefore of Israel), Kaminsky notes that "the Hebrew Bible presents an exceedingly complex set of views on the way Israelites relate to those who are best referred to as the non-elect."[66] In considering legal texts, he notes the tensions in attitudes towards foreigners in the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-26 and in Ezekiel 40-48, including exhortations to treat the resident alien well, which exist alongside texts underlining the distinction to be maintained between Israelite and non-Israelite.[67] Kaminsky also notes Christiana van Houten's argument that the legal framework of Israel gradually became more inclusive of the alien.[68] With regard to narrative texts, Kaminsky notes the wide variety of portrayals of foreigners, and that "a number of these portraits are remarkably positive toward certain foreign individuals or groups."[69] Many foreign figures are treated with great respect, and Kaminsky lists a number of cases from Melchizedek to the people of Nineveh as examples, including in his list Jael, whom I shall examine in more depth. He also notes that "foreign individuals, clans or groups are closely attached to or even merged with the people of Israel,"[70] and even that "a number of texts in the Hebrew Bible appear to be

[65] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, p. 121.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., p. 123.
[68] Ibid., p. 124. See van Houten, C., *The Alien in Israelite Law (JSOT Supp 107).* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991., p. 175.
[69] Ibid., p. 124.
[70] Ibid., p. 125. A number of these figures will also feature in my analysis.

challenging Israel to recognize that the non-elect often have much to teach the elect about how one should act in the world and serve God."[71]

Noting the unusual way in which figures such as Balaam interact with the elect, Kaminsky argues that this "suggests that Israel is aware that certain non-Israelites may have greater insight into God's plans for Israel than many Israelites do. Far from being derogatory towards outsiders, these texts indicate that Israel needs the theological insight of non-Israelites to help her realize her unique status and fulfill her destiny."[72] This theme of the outsider as one who can bring theological insight is one which I shall explore in looking at the particular figures whom I have chosen as representatives of the outsider as divine agent. Kaminsky draws attention to the complexity of relationship between the elect and his category of the non-elect across a range of texts, but it will be helpful for our purposes to examine further Joel Lohr's investigation of concrete examples within the narratives of the Pentateuch, and the resulting conclusions which he draws about the role of the non-elect, to which I now turn.

The role of the outsider

Lohr selects four texts from the Pentateuch to examine closely. While admitting the risks associated with such a strategy in terms of selectivity or of generalising from a small subset of narratives, his stated intention is to offer a close reading of some

[71] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, p. 125. Kaminsky cites the examples of Naaman, Uriah and Abimelech.
[72] Ibid., pp. 125-6.

lesser-known stories which deal with the issue of election.[73] Lohr describes the texts he has chosen as "a sample of test cases - attempts to get at the heart of what it means to be chosen and unchosen."[74] It must be said at this point that Lohr is not entirely convinced by Kaminsky's category of the 'anti-elect', especially because of the implication in Kaminsky's work that the 'anti-elect' acquire such a status due to their actions. "If Kaminsky is indeed making connections between anti-election and wicked action (i.e., anti-election is incurred), it seems that the category he introduces, anti-election, becomes redundant."[75] Whilst happier with simply referring to Israel as the elect and others as non-elect, Lohr however does agree that "the thing to note, as Kaminsky does so aptly and persuasively, is that there is gradation and fluidity within these categories and that actions result in consequences, at times modifying one's position with God."[76]

One of Lohr's test cases concerns the relationship between Israel and the nations in Deuteronomy. Reflecting on the troubling concept of *herem*, he does actually find Kaminsky's categories useful after all, and argues that the 'seven nations' may indeed seem to be 'anti-elect', not because of their wickedness, but because "the thrust of the text is that they are simply people who dwell in a land promised to Israel. They must be removed because Israel is to possess their land; further, their staying will prove to be a snare, according to the speaker."[77] While the implications of this are indeed troubling, it is not my intention to examine further at this point

[73] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 92. I shall pursue a similar approach in some of the following chapters.
[74] Ibid., p. 93.
[75] Ibid., p. 42.
[76] Ibid., p. 43.
[77] Ibid., p. 192.

the concept of *herem* in Deuteronomy, which topic would be the subject of a thesis entirely in itself. More relevant to my inquiry are the three cases which Lohr examines relating to Kaminsky's 'non-elect', those individuals and peoples who fall outside of the people of Israel, and whose relationship with the elect is complex and often positive. In this category, Lohr looks specifically at King Abimelech's dealings with Abraham, the unnamed daughter of Pharaoh who saves Moses, and the curious case of Balaam in the Book of Numbers. Lohr's major conclusion from his reading of these texts relates to the non-elect and their treatment of Israel, but some of his observations along the way are also highly significant for my current inquiry.

Lohr finds the portrayal of all three figures, Abimelech, the Pharaoh's daughter, and Balaam, to be positive, and is at pains to show, for example, that all of Balaam's actions, at least in Numbers 22-24, can be interpreted in a way which shows him as a man of integrity.[78] Nevertheless, the strand which runs through all three stories for Lohr is the treatment of the chosen by the non-elect in the narrative, and the consequent repercussions for the non-elect. Thus, Abimelech in Genesis 20, deceived into thinking that Sarah is Abraham's sister, is condemned by God for his potential adultery with her, which is not only unknowing and unintentional but also prevented by God's timely intervention. Furthermore, he is told that in order to undo the death sentence looming over him he must ask for Abraham, the very man who deceived him, to intercede on his behalf. As Lohr asks, "why does God condemn Abimelech and rescue Abraham? Why does the man who acted in the

[78] See especially Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen pp. 132-9,* including much discussion of the famous talking donkey.

integrity of heart need the prayer of the man who probably did not?"[79] The answer which Lohr provides is that Abraham "is a prophet, a specially chosen man of God who has divine promises laid upon him. These include the promise that those who bless him will be blessed, and the one who treats him lightly, or disdainfully, will be cursed (Gen 12:3)."[80]

The same is true for Lohr of the Pharaoh's daughter who acts to save Moses in Exodus 2:1-10. Contrasting her actions with Pharaoh and his people who "experienced the curse 10 times," he concludes: "The unchosen again appear to have a duty to bless God's special people, and treating them lightly will result in a curse from God."[81] In the case of Balaam, whose oracles "speak faithfully, poetically, and richly concerning the special love that God has for his treasured possession, Israel,"[82] Lohr sees this working out of Genesis 12:3 to be even more pronounced, in the light of Balaam's subsequent actions and their consequences. Lohr notes that "the unchosen learns something about what it means to interact with Israel. Balaam blesses Israel, and I think we can assume that had this been the end of the story, Balaam would have found himself blessed. In the end however, the story tells us that he treats Israel with disdain and leads the people astray (Num 31:16). Because of this, Balaam receives what we might call a curse: he is slaughtered with the kings of Midian (31:8)."[83] Thus, the non-elect seem to find in their treatment of Israel a reflection of their destiny, thanks to God's promise to

[79] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 111.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., p. 124.
[82] Ibid., p. 146.
[83] Ibid., pp. 146-7.

Abraham in Genesis 12:3. While there is certainly a correlation between their treatment of the elect and the fortunes of the non-elect in the texts, Lohr's own close reading of the narratives suggests that there is something more complex in these interactions than simply the outworking of Abraham's promised blessing.

Three features in particular in the passages which Lohr examines are worthy of mention. Firstly, there is the familiarity of King Abimelech with the God of Israel. In Genesis 20:3-5, when God appears in a dream to Abimelech, Lohr notes that "the text seems to assume that the foreign ruler is familiar with the God who appears to him. Absent is any question of uncertainty, such as 'Who are you?' Rather, Abimelech replies with a reverential address, 'Lord' (אדני), 'will you slay a nation, even a righteous one?' The response suggests a familiarity with the deity not only in the address but in the expectation of the king: God will do what is right; God will not slay an innocent nation."[84] As the conversation works itself out, it is true that Abimelech is told that restoring Sarah and requesting Abraham's intercession are the only actions which will save him. Nevertheless, the relationship which the king has with YHWH seems to have begun prior to, and therefore may be independent of, Abimelech's relationship with Abraham.

Moberly notes that "when God speaks to Abimelech... it is taken for granted that YHWH, the one God, is speaking."[85] In the context of the patriarchal narratives, he argues, this is unsurprising, given that "patriarchal worship of one God is a matter

[84] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*., p. 99.
[85] Moberly, Walter, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism,* Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001, p.88.

of straightforward religious fact, rather than, as in Mosaic Yahwism, a matter of urgent religious choice."[86] It follows that "there is no hint that these 'pagans' might worship Baal or some other alien deity. On the contrary, God speaks with them as naturally as with the patriarchs."[87] This allows the reversal of expectations where moral and religious propriety are concerned: "It is striking, for example, that although Abraham imagines that the inhabitants of Gerar would have no fear of God (Gen 20:11), the story explicitly rebuts this assumption with God confirming that Abimelech acted in integrity (20:4-6)."[88] It is interesting for my current enquiry to note, however, that similar seeming familiarity with God on the part of the outsider persists in other episodes I shall examine, which take place outwith the context of the patriarchal narratives and their less exclusive concept of proper relationship with the divine.

Secondly, Lohr concludes that "Balaam's story shows that the unchosen can discern truth or give divine utterance and that true prophecy lies not only in Israel."[89] He is keen to underline the fact that Balaam can only speak to reaffirm the special relationship between God and Israel, and that ultimately Balaam is excluded from that relationship. While this may be the case with Balaam, and there is significant disagreement about his motivation,[90] he also serves as an example of the outsider who brings theological insight to the elect, a motif which I wish to explore further.

[86] Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, p. 87.
[87] Ibid., p. 88.
[88] Ibid., p. 89.
[89] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*., p. 146.
[90] Lohr devotes an Appendix to this very subject. See Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen,* pp. 201-207.

It is also noteworthy that Balaam is another example of a member of the non-elect who seems to have a pre-existent relationship with the God of Israel.

Thirdly, in describing the behaviour of Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:5-6, Lohr notes that "if we pay attention to possible biblical allusions, we see that the daughter of the enemy displays actions that are often associated with Israel's God. The daughter of the Pharaoh opens the little ark, sees the child, hears its cries, and has compassion."[91] Furthermore, Lohr comments that "it is not without significance that God is absent from the story,"[92] the implication being that God is working in this passage through this Egyptian woman, the daughter of an enemy. "Although much has rightly been made of the importance of female characters in these stories, I think it is equally important that they are not from within, but are outsiders who bless Israel."[93] It is difficult to ignore the fact that without the actions of this unnamed, unchosen woman to save Moses, the future deliverer of Israel would not have survived. Lohr also draws attention to Trible's description of the woman's act: "She draws him out of the water, thereby becoming herself the first deliverer of the Hebrew people. She models for Moses his forthcoming role."[94] This theme of the outsider who acts on behalf of God, and who brings blessing or salvation to Israel, is one which I wish to explore in greater depth in this thesis, using a number of case studies to highlight the role played by those who stand outside the community of the elect.

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[91] Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen,* p. 119. Lohr refers especially to the theophanic connotations of the verb ירה (ותרד in Exodus 2:5) and parallels between Exodus 2:6, Exodus 7:15 and 22:25-26[26-27].
[92] Ibid., p. 122.
[93] Ibid., pp. 122-3.
[94] Trible, P., 'The Pilgrim Bible on a Feminist Journey' in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 1990, 11, pp. 232-9, p. 238, quoted in Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen*, p. 123.

Zipporah and Jethro

The Wife of Moses and the Priest of Midian

Moses' wife Zipporah and her father, variously known as Reuel, Jethro or Hobab,[95] have generated a certain amount of creative exegesis throughout the history of interpretation of the Book of Exodus, where they appear most notably in three distinct but related passages. As foreigners who play an important and intimate role in Moses' exile and subsequent mission of deliverance, various attempts have been made either to subsume them into the community of faith, or more recently to posit a Kenite origin for the worship of YHWH as a result of their prominence. The seemingly intractable problem of relating such theories convincingly to the evidence available, and especially to the biblical text, which will be explored in more detail below, does nothing to diminish the significance of Zipporah's and Jethro's actions, or the role which they appear to have played in Moses' own development, and indeed survival. As two key examples of the 'outsider' who are inextricably linked with the actions of God in the Exodus story, I shall attempt to unpick the strands of interpretation which have surrounded them and to discern the theological significance of their portrayal within both the biblical text itself and subsequent exegesis.

[95] It is not my intention to revisit here the attempts to reconcile the three names. Whilst acknowledging that there are different possible options in interpreting the relationship between Reuel/Jethro and the Hobab(s) of Numbers 10.29-32 and Judges 1.16 & 4.11, as explored e.g. in Albright, W.F., 'Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew Tradition', in *CBQ 25 (1963)*, pp.1-11 (esp. pp.4-7), I shall assume throughout that Jethro is the father-in-law of Moses who gives Zipporah to him in marriage, in line with his description as such in Ex 4 and 18.

I intend to examine firstly the three passages within Exodus where Zipporah and Jethro appear (Ex 2.15-22, 4.18-26, 18.1-27), paying attention to the text of the MT, the rendering and reimagining of these incidents in the LXX, Targumim and elsewhere, and the attempts throughout the history of interpretation to comprehend each passage. This will also involve reference to related passages elsewhere within the Pentateuch which have a bearing on the Exodus story.[96] I shall then look at the portrayal of each figure in more depth, highlighting the complexities which arise when attempting to 'solve' perceived difficulties arising from the actions of Zipporah, Jethro, and by implication Moses, as they appear in the MT. I shall offer a summary of the significance of Jethro and Zipporah, an assessment of the extent to which they act as divine agents, and a theological interpretation of their presence and actions within the Exodus narrative as they currently appear.

The incident at the well and Zipporah's marriage to Moses (Ex 2)

Zipporah first appears, unnamed, along with her sisters. Moses, fleeing for his life from Pharaoh, has settled in the land of Midian (Ex 2.15) and sits down beside a well. The MT describes how "the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away." (Ex 2.16-17a) At this point, despite his abortive and rejected attempt to intervene in a dispute which led to his exile from Egypt, Moses "got up and came to their defence and watered their flock" (Ex

[96] E.g. Deuteronomy 1, Numbers 10-12.

2.17b). As a result, the daughters arrive home early, and are quizzed by their father, identified here as Reuel.[97] After hearing that "an Egyptian helped us against the shepherds" the father inquires as to his whereabouts, and asks "Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." (Ex 2.20) In the MT at least, Moses finds it agreeable to stay with the man, who gives Zipporah his daughter to Moses in marriage (her first mention by name). Finally, we are told of the birth of a son, whom Moses calls "Gershom; for he said 'I have been an alien residing in a foreign land'." (Ex 2.22)

This relatively short passage of seven and a half verses has been understood in a range of ways, and has been significantly embellished or reinterpreted according to interpreters' views of Jethro and the significance of his role as an outsider, especially in the context of his later actions in Exodus 18. Even Jethro's identity rapidly became problematic; while Ex 2.16 in the MT begins וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע בָּנוֹת ("The priest of Midian had seven daughters"), which is similarly rendered in the LXX as "Τωι δε ίερει Μαδιαμ ησαν έπτα θυγατερες", his title of 'priest' is replaced in the Targumim by terms along the lines of 'chief', 'lord' or 'ruler'[98] in order to distinguish this outsider from the priests of Israel. Other than this amendment, Tg. Onq. and Tg. Neof. closely follow the Hebrew text, although interestingly it is Zipporah who names Gershom in Tg. Neof. (2.22) Targum Pseudo-Jonathan departs significantly from the Hebrew text, adding heroic language about Moses to describe

[97] This name is preserved in the LXX as *΄Ραγουηλ*, despite its insertion of the name *Ἰοὐθορ* twice in the preceding verse to identify him clearly with Jethro.

[98] Tg. Onq., Neof., Ps.-J. respectively, a gloss which is followed by e.g. Rashi (Carasik, M. ed. and trans., *The Commentators' Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* Philadelphia: JPS, 2005, p. 13), whereas others such as Nahmanides and Ibn Ezra maintain the title of priest, in the latter case arguing that "Jethro was indeed a priest of the true God." (Ibid.)

his mighty strength (2.17) and his miraculous watering of the flock with only one drawing of water (2.19), in contrast to the Hebrew text, in which the writer, Childs comments, is "obviously not interested in portraying Moses as a folk hero," [99] and then inserting into the scene at Reuel/Jethro's house a passage which acts to place Reuel (here identified as Jethro's father) on the side of the enemy Pharaoh, as well as introducing a reciprocal act of kindness on the part of Zipporah following Moses' intervention at the well: "When Reuel learned that Moses fled from Pharaoh, he threw him into a pit. But Zipporah, his son's daughter, provided for him in secret for ten years. At the end of ten years he took him out of the pit." (2.21)

The story of Moses' imprisonment in Midian became part of the wider interpretation and embellishment of the Exodus text, and is told in greater detail in *The Chronicle of Moses*,[100] where Reuel's motivation is provided: "When Reuel heard this, he said to himself, 'I shall put this man in prison, by which I shall please the Cushites from whom he fled.'"[101] In common with Tg. Ps.-J., Moses' survival is ascribed to the kindness of Zipporah, who secretly fed and watered him for ten years, but Zipporah here goes further and persuades her father that it is YHWH who has provided for Moses' miraculous survival, putting into her mouth a declaration of God's saving acts for Abraham and his descendants which begins "'Hast thou not heard, O my lord, that the God of the Hebrews is great and powerful, and that He works wonders at all times?'"[102] Zipporah's passivity and

[99] Childs, B.S., *The Book of Exodus*, Louisville: Westminster, 1974, p. 31.
[100] Contained within Gaster, M., *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel: or, The Hebrew Bible Historiale.* London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1899, pp. 102-130.
[101] Ibid., p. 120.
[102] Ibid.

silence within the MT is therefore replaced within some strands of interpretation by her intervention to save Moses' life and her vocal and eloquent advocacy on his behalf, couched in terms of the biblical narrative regarding the God of the patriarchs. This portrayal of both Jethro and Zipporah must be considered when examining their roles in the subsequent incidents in the Exodus text (4.18-26, 18).

The setting of the encounter at the well has obvious parallels with Genesis 24 and 29, to the extent that the Moses and Jacob stories were strongly identified and even conflated in later Muslim exegesis.[103] The interpolations described above also have echoes in the Qur'an's version of the Exodus 2 narrative, where Zipporah is again an advocate on Moses' behalf, imploring her father to employ such a strong and trustworthy man; here though it is Moses who voluntarily serves her father for ten years in order to win her hand in marriage (sūrat l-qaṣaṣ 26-28). There is a persistent strand of interpretation which therefore reimagines the scene at the well and the subsequent reception of Moses into the family of Jethro in a way which portrays Zipporah as the means by which Moses is rescued from his predicament of exile, while distancing Jethro to some extent from her hospitality.

Modern commentators, untroubled by the implications of Jethro's positive or negative reputation, have drawn attention to the contrast between Moses' reception as would-be resolver of disputes among his own people in Ex 2.11-15, and his welcome among outsiders following his intervention at the well on behalf

[103] Wheeler, B.M., *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis,* London: Routledge Curzon, 2002, pp.46-56. Wheeler notes that the daughters of the priest of Midian are frequently named as Leah and Zipporah (p. 51).

of Zipporah and her sisters. Childs highlights the questioning of Jethro, and how this is not simply used as a means to explain his subsequent hospitality: "It also works as a literary device to enhance the contrast in response between an earlier example of aid which had been rejected and one of true gratitude."[104] Fretheim takes this idea further and develops a more dualistic distinction between Israel and Midian as a whole:

> Moses is not welcome in the Israelite community, but here Moses is shown considerable hospitality by strangers... even being given a daughter for his wife (though he has not one word to say!). Israel does not appreciate his acts of justice on its behalf; the Midianites welcome it. Israelites engage in accusations of Moses; the daughters of Reuel publicly sing his praises. Those who stand within the community of faith are abusive; those without faith in Israel's God exemplify genuine relationships.[105]

While he sees in this episode a foreshadowing of Moses' difficulties in leading the people of God, Fretheim perhaps gets carried away in an effort to prove his theological point, and slips into the sort of generalisation which it is difficult to infer in an unforced way from the isolated example of the one Israelite who admonishes and threatens Moses in Ex 2.14. Nevertheless, he makes the point rather forcefully that Moses' attempt to uphold justice for the oppressed is more gratefully received in Midian, and by a Midianite priest in particular. Perhaps Childs' final comment on the contrast between these two scenes is more valuable in the context of my

[104] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 32.
[105] Fretheim, T., *Exodus,* Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.

examination: “In the first, Moses flees from his home; in the second he finds a home.”[106] This is the first of two linked episodes which provide a nuanced echo of the themes of the death and resurrection of the chosen firstborn, identified by Levenson, with special regard to Moses’ relationship with Jethro and Zipporah. In the scene at the well, the endangered son, elect of YHWH, finds not disgrace but welcome and even praise from a foreigner who will guide and shape his life and future mission.

This echo is more complex but more pronounced if the interpolations contained within Tg. Ps.-J. and *The Chronicle of Moses* mentioned above are held in mind, wherein Jethro’s role is less straightforwardly positive, but Moses is literally saved from death only by the intervention of Zipporah. In these later interpretations and in the MT itself, Moses appears to “find a home” in Midian, in which he is quite settled, and from which he can only be called back to Egypt by a direct encounter and lengthy dispute with YHWH regarding his commission as divine agent of deliverance. Only in Ex 2.22, “She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, ‘I have been an alien (גֵּר) residing in a foreign land’” are we reminded of Moses’ state of exile from his family and people by the name which is given to Zipporah’s child, a name which as Meyers points out[107] also has the effect of linking the circumstances surrounding Gershom’s birth to the dialogue with Abraham in Genesis 15, “Then the Lord said to Abram, ‘Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens (גֵּר) in a land that is not theirs’” (Gen 15.13), and thus to promise of the deliverance which God will bring about through Moses.

[106] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 32.
[107] Meyers, Carol, *Exodus,* Cambridge: CUP, 2005, pp. 45-6.

Departure from Midian and the 'bridegroom of blood' (Ex 4.18-26)

Moses' encounter with God and his eventual, reluctant acceptance of the divine commission, recounted in Ex 3.1-4.17, are followed by his return to Jethro his father-in-law, and his less than entirely transparent request, "'Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living.'" (4.18) Jethro's simple reply, לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם ("Go in peace"), unembellished even in the Targumim, gives no indication of whether Jethro believes Moses or knows anything about the preceding scene at Horeb. He seems content though to accede to Moses' request and to wish him well on the journey, and after another prompt, and a reassurance of his safety from YHWH in verse 19, Moses sets off in a very uneventful manner after loading his wife and sons on a donkey - the first mention that another child has been added to the family. The subsequent summary of YHWH's instructions to Moses upon his return to Egypt gives no warning of the brief and confusing incident which is to follow, and which has given rise to a diverse and creative range of attempts at explanation (vv.24-26)[108]:

24 וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בַּמָּלוֹן וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיְבַקֵּשׁ הֲמִיתוֹ

25 וַתִּקַּח צִפֹּרָה צֹר וַתִּכְרֹת אֶת-עָרְלַת בְּנָהּ וַתַּגַּע, לְרַגְלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי חֲתַן-דָּמִים אַתָּה לִי

26 וַיִּרֶף מִמֶּנּוּ אָז אָמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לַמּוּלֹת

[108] Rendered in the NRSV as: "On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, 'Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!' It was then she said, 'A bridegroom of blood by circumcision.'"

Childs introduces Ex 4.24-26 thus: “Few texts contain more problems for the interpreter than these few verses which have continued to baffle throughout the centuries. The difficulties cover the entire spectrum of possible problems.”[109] He goes on to outline some of these problems, included among which is the absence of antecedents in verses 24 and 25, rendering even a clear interpretation of who did what to whom complicated. The other major difficulties over the centuries have included the motivation for YHWH’s attempt on Moses (or his son’s?) life, the salvific intervention of Zipporah which at least in the MT is left unexplained, and the use of the term חֲתַן-דָּמִים (“bridegroom of blood”) at the end of verse 25, Zipporah’s own exegesis of which, inserted into the following verse, only hints at its significance. Such issues and the shocking and sudden nature of the episode have clearly troubled commentators and interpreters from very early times; the attempts to smooth out the text and clarify its meaning go back at least as far as the LXX text, which amends the identity of the aggressor to *Αγγελος Κυριου* (“An angel of the LORD”) (4.24) and removes the reference to the ‘bridegroom of blood’ entirely, replacing it with the phrase *εστη το αιμα της περιτομης του παιδιου μου* (“The blood of the circumcision of my son is staunched”). (4.25,26)

It is happily not my intention to revisit every theory which has been proposed to ascertain the meaning of these verses,[110] but rather to examine the role which Zipporah plays in the incident and its subsequent portrayal, along with the attendant portrayal of Jethro which, though absent entirely from the MT, makes its

[109] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 95.
[110] For some forty possible approaches to this passage's interpretation, see Willis, J.T., *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: The Role of Exodus 4:24-26 in the Book of Exodus,* Bern: Peter Lang, 2010.

way into the Targumim and later interpretation. Nevertheless, this approach will necessarily include an examination of the ways in which the text has been amended to fit particular theological paradigms or directions within exegesis, a relatively uncomplicated example of which is seen in the way the identity of the aggressor in vv. 24-27 is handled. Sarna comments that "whereas polytheistic literature would attribute the experience to a demonic being, Israelite monotheism admits of no independent forces other than the one God. Hence, the action is directly ascribed to him. In order to soften the anthropomorphism, rabbinic sources... introduce an angel as the instrument of affliction."[111]

Leaving aside the difficulties of referring to the exclusivity of 'monotheism' in the context of the book of Exodus,[112] it is true, as noted above, that the LXX text introduces the phrase *Αγγελος Κυριου* ("Angel of the Lord), a convention also followed by the Targumim. Other interpretation moved a step further however by removing YHWH as the aggressor altogether. Ginzberg describes how "Satan appeared to him in the guise of a serpent, and swallowed Moses down to the extremities."[113] The book of Jubilees refers instead to "what Prince Mastema desired to do with you when you returned to Egypt,"[114] and gives only a cryptic reference to the rest of the episode: "And I delivered you from his hand..."[115] Ironically, by excising Zipporah's contribution entirely, the Book of Jubilees

[111] Sarna, N.M., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, Philadelphia: JPS, 1991, p. 25.
[112] See e.g. Moberly, W., 'How appropriate is 'Monotheism' as a category for Biblical interpretation?' in Stuckenbruck, L.T. & North, W.E.S. (eds.), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism (JSNT Supp 263)*, London: T&T Clark, 2004, pp. 216-234, for more on this.
[113] Ginzberg, Louis, *The Legends of the Jews*, *Translated from the German Manuscript by Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin,* Philadelphia: JPS, 2003, Vol.1 ,p. 496.
[114] (tr. Wintermute O. S.), *Jubilees*, §48.2, in Charlesworth, J.H. (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985, p. 139.
[115] Ibid., §48.4.

implicitly if unconsciously equates her actions with those of God, and for anyone familiar with the text of the MT, casts Zipporah firmly in the role of the divine agent who "delivers" Moses from destruction. As Childs outlines, more modern attempts to decipher Ex 4.24.-26 have involved 'emending' the original story to involve some local *numen* or even a Midianite deity which was warded off by Zipporah's words and actions,[116] although as Childs also points out, such a theory involves so much supposition and so little textual and other evidence, that "the theory raises as many problems as it solves."[117]

Disagreement regarding the identity of the attacker is quite limited however when compared with the extent to which interpretative glosses have been inserted into the remainder of this difficult passage. While neither the MT nor the LXX explicitly state the reason for the danger faced by Moses, Tg. Ps.-J. introduces an explanation, that Moses was attacked "because of Gershom, his son, who had not been circumcised on account of Jethro, his father-in-law, who had not allowed him to circumcise him. But Eliezer had been circumcised according to an agreement which they had made between them." (4.24) Ginzberg describes such an agreement, though in reverse, stating that Jethro "bestowed his daughter Zipporah upon him as wife, giving her to him under the condition that the children born of the marriage in Jethro's house should be divided into two equal classes, the one Israelitish, the other Egyptian."[118] Having circumcised the first child, Ginzberg relates, upon the birth of the second "Moses realized that his father-in-law would

[116] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 97-8.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol.1*, p. 496.

not permit him to circumcise this one, too, and he determined to return to Egypt, that he might have the opportunity of bringing up his second son as an Israelite."[119] Similarly, Tg. Neof. inserts into Zipporah's speech the confession that "in truth the bridegroom sought to circumcise, but his father-in-law did not permit him." (4.24). Rashi contends that "he had not circumcised his son Eliezer,"[120] although the failure here is not attributed to Jethro's intervention, and Ibn Ezra concurs that Eliezer is the son who has not been circumcised, due to the perceived danger to the boy of travelling immediately after circumcision.[121] He goes on to clarify: "God forbid that anyone should believe that Moses made an agreement with Zipporah (as one tradition says) that the first son should be his, and circumcised, and the second son Zipporah's, and uncircumcised. A prophet would never do any such thing, much less the prophet of all prophets."[122]

Ibn Ezra thus highlights the difficulty of interpretations which attempt to show Jethro (or Zipporah) preventing Moses from carrying out the commandment regarding circumcision. While such explanations might cast the Midianites in a negative light, it is Moses the Israelite upon whom the blame falls for the omission, and this is simply compounded if it is a result of following Midianite traditions, rather than for some seemingly benign yet misguided reason of his own. Regardless of the reason for the uncircumcision of Moses' son (whichever son the text is taken to describe), the fact that Zipporah is the one who responds, and the nature of her primary *act* in response, is largely undisputed. She takes a flint and circumcises the

[119] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol.1*, p. 496.
[120] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 31.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

child. Even her next act, touching "his" feet with the foreskin, is unclear due to the lack of the antecedent, and the meaning of her accompanying utterance in the MT is apparently so obscure that the LXX chooses to replace it entirely. The Targumim also attempt to render something more comprehensible in their account of Ex 4.25. Thus in Tg. Onq. we find "On account of this circumcision blood, let my husband be given back to us," and in Tg. Neof. and Tg. Ps.-J. petitions that "the blood of this circumcision" should atone for Moses' sins. Clearly the phrase חֲתַן-דָּמִים ("bridegroom of blood") is not easily decipherable, despite extensive speculation regarding its origin, and as Childs notes, "the significance of the words and to whom they are addressed remain enigmatic. What is clear, however, is the effect of her action: 'he let him alone.' That is to say, the attack by Yahweh on the life of the person ceased."[123] Whatever Zipporah meant by her choice of words, her actions as a whole were immediately effective, and the danger to Moses' life averted. Recounting the apocryphal story of Moses' initial imprisonment by Jethro, Ginzberg remarks that "thus Zipporah saved Moses' life twice, first from the pit and then from the serpent."[124]

That Zipporah is the one who saves Moses from this mortal jeopardy is not lost on modern commentators, but there is some debate as to the meaning and significance of her actions. Susanne Scholtz suggests that the obscurity of the passage is a result of Zipporah's deliberate removal from the story, that "the androcentric storyteller transmits an unintelligible fragment that erases the

[123] Childs, *Exodus,* p.98.
[124] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* Vol. 1, p. 496.

meaning of Zipporah's words and thus her significance."[125] If that was indeed the intention of the redactor, it would have been far simpler to excise either the incident itself, or Zipporah's part in it, entirely. Childs wonders whether the redactor could even make sense of the original passage, and comments in relation to the 'blood-bridegroom' that "It is not at all clear that the redactor understood any longer what the phrase meant."[126] Dozeman remarks that "the story functioned at one time as an etiology for infant circumcision,"[127] and goes on to assert that "the story tells of a transfer of circumcision from the religious practice of the Midianites to the Israelites through Zipporah."[128] This seems rather back to front however, and for the redactor, Childs suggests, "the story does not explain the origin of circumcision, but rather circumcision explains the meaning of Zipporah's action. This interpretation is, of course, the exact opposite of the etiological."[129] Whatever its origins, Ex 4.24-26 would be a complex, obscure and ambiguous set of verses to retain purely as an explanation for circumcision.

Commentators have also noted the link between this passage and the blood which serves to protect the firstborn of Israel from the destroyer at the Passover. Thus Sarna describes a "thematically arranged chiasm" which relates circumcision to the death or protection of the firstborn.[130] Fretheim makes a similar link, drawing parallels between the redemption of Moses' firstborn and the firstborn sons of

[125] Scholtz, S., 'The complexities of 'His' liberation talk: a literary feminist reading of the Book of Exodus' in Brenner, A. & Fontaine, C.R. (eds.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, p. 30.
[126] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 100.
[127] Dozeman, T.B., *Commentary on Exodus,* Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009, p. 155.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Childs, *Exodus,* p. 100.
[130] Sarna, *Exodus,* p. 25.

Israel,[131] and Dozeman explicitly relates the two stories, commenting that "both explore Yahweh's claim on firstborn, introduced in 4:22."[132] He goes on to discuss the relationship between the two incidents, God's claim in Ex 13.1-2 over all firstborn animals and humans, and "a possible tradition of child sacrifice."[133] Levenson discusses this possibility in greater depth, and emphasises the role of blood in both Ex 4.24-26 and Ex 12-13. He notes that "the blood of circumcision functions within the larger redacted story of Moses and Pharaoh as a prototype of the blood of the lamb."[134] Levenson also suggests that the incident in Ex 4.24-26 "recalls the story of King Mesha, who survived the Israelite siege because he sacrificed his first-born son and heir apparent (2 Kgs 3:26-27)."[135] Thus for Levenson, it is possible in the light of this passage that "circumcision must join paschal lamb, Levitical service, monetary ransom, and Naziritehood as a sublimation of child sacrifice in ancient Israelite religious practice."[136]

Zipporah's prominence remains significant, regardless of the text's other connections, and she is undeniably the active human participant in the exchange. Fretheim notes that Zipporah is on one level simply the latest female character to intervene on Moses' behalf: "Once again it is a woman who, by her quick-wittedness and insight, saves Moses. She stands in the train of the midwives, Moses' mother and sister, and the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses owes his very life to

[131] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 80.
[132] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 156.
[133] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 156.
[134] Levenson, J.D., *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 50-1.
[135] Ibid., p. 51.
[136] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, p. 51.

a series of actions by women, two of them non-Israelites."[137] While he notes her Midianite heritage, Fretheim does not explore it further, but he does point out that "the difference between Zipporah and the other women is that, while they saved Moses from Pharaoh, she saves him/his son from God... She thus plays the role of mediator between God and Moses, anticipating the very role that Moses will later play on Israel's behalf."[138]

Ilana Pardes also contends that Zipporah "follows in the footsteps of a whole array of female characters in Exodus 1-2 who venture to trick Pharaoh as they rescue Moses from the deadly royal decree,"[139] but sees Zipporah's actions as similarly those of a trickster who "placates the attacker by complying partially and cunningly with his whims."[140] Pardes also sees a very different echo in the passage, and while she notes Moshe Greenberg's link with the Passover to come, and his argument that God's message to Moses and the subsequent struggle in Ex 4.24-26, "turn out to be premonitions of things to come depicted in intensely personal terms,"[141] she accounts for Zipporah's prominence as the protagonist by seeking the incident's likely origin in Egyptian mythology. Pardes conjectures that the incident related in Ex 4.24-26 "is a modified version of the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris."[142] She further contends that Isis is "'wrenched apart' as her role of midwife-mother-sister-wife is divided among Shiphrah, Puah, Yocheved, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter, and

[137] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 80.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Pardes, I., *Countertraditions in the Bible: a feminist approach*, Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1992, p. 80.
[140] Ibid. p. 83.
[141] Greenberg, M., *Understanding Exodus*, New York: Behrman House, 1969, p. 117, quoted in Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p. 80.
[142] Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p. 90.

Zipporah."[143] Thus for Pardes, Zipporah's prominence in this scene is really a sublimation or domestication of Isis, contributing to what she refers to as "the repression of goddesses in the Bible."[144]

Pardes' initial parallels between the figures of Zipporah and Isis are, however, stretched far beyond the point for which evidence can reasonably be claimed in her subsequent argument. From the position of the redactors of Exodus, there are also more effective ways to suppress the influence of a foreign goddess than to embed her so fully in the life of Israel's most revered deliverer. The fact that such parallels can be drawn at all though highlights how difficult it is fully to comprehend the meaning of Zipporah's words and actions, and how open to interpretation and speculation the whole passage has become. I believe it is certainly significant that such a figure as Zipporah, whose origins lie outwith the Israelite community, and outside the 'norms' of the Israelite relationship with God, comes to prominence in such an impenetrable incident, where the motives and meanings behind words and actions, both of the LORD and of Zipporah, are so difficult to explain. It is left to an 'outsider' to determine intuitively the 'right' thing to do in so unfathomable a situation, and to deliver Moses, and by extension Israel, as a result.

Exodus 18: "I will give you counsel, and God be with you!"

The final Exodus appearance of Jethro and Zipporah occurs in Chapter 18, where Zipporah is reintroduced to Moses with her children (now explicitly numbered as

[143] Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p. 93.
[144] Ibid.

two), but does not speak. This silence of Zipporah is noticeable in the light of her earlier actions, but is ambiguous with regard to determining her status at this point in the narrative. Jethro, however, goes on to be the focus of two episodes which take place over the course of successive days. In the first of these, he is welcomed by his son-in-law, then hears and reacts to the news from Moses of God's rescue of Israel from Pharaoh (vv.1-12). In the second episode, Jethro witnesses Moses in action, and then offers counsel regarding his role as mediator (vv.13-27). I shall briefly outline the text of each incident, along with its variant interpretations in the Targumim and subsequent commentary, examining the issues each passage raises with regard to Jethro's position as 'outsider' and the theological possibilities which arise as a result of his words and actions.

Ex 18.1 explains that Jethro "heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt." The following verses (2-5) explain that Jethro came to meet Moses, ostensibly to bring back Zipporah his wife אַחַר שִׁלּוּחֶיהָ ("after he had sent her away"; literally "after her sending back"). Quite what this means is open to debate. Childs comments both that the syntax is difficult, and that the noun שִׁלּוּחֶיהָ is ambiguous, noting that "the *Mekilta* understands dismissal as a divorce and cites the parallel in Deut. 24.1."[145] Ibn Ezra discusses the possible range of meanings before tentatively agreeing with Jeshua's interpretation of the phrase: "'after she had been given her dowry,' following the usage in 1 Kings 9:16."[146] On the other hand, Nahmanides simply assumes that at

[145] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 320.
[146] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 138.

some point Moses had sent Zipporah and her sons home to her father,[147] while Rashi expands on this in his commentary on Ex 4.27 and proposes a conversation between Aaron and Moses in which Moses agrees to send his family home for their own safety.[148] Modern commentators are similarly divided; Meyers suggests, for example, that שַׁלּוּחֶיהָ here is "referring to the dowry Jethro provides for Zipporah when she finally leaves her family,"[149] indicating that Moses' family is now reunited. Gafney on the other hand, examining the use of the verb elsewhere argues, *contra* Meyers, that Ex 18.2 "begins with the acknowledgement that Moses has divorced Zipporah sometime in the past"[150] and that "like many male clergy, Moses has been held beyond reproach with many biblical translators conspiring to preserve his image by obscuring his divorce."[151] Whichever explanation is assumed, Zipporah now reappears only to disappear entirely after Ex 18.6, a point which I will discuss further in considering her overall portrayal below.

Verses 5-7 speak of Jethro's approach to the Israelite camp, the word he sends to Moses announcing his arrival, and Moses' enthusiastic welcome for his father-in-law. Despite the attempts of interpreters outlined above to cast doubts on Jethro's role as an 'outsider' and his potential culpability in relation to the events of Ex 4.24-26, here the honour which is afforded Jethro is unquestionable.[152] Moses bows down and kisses Jethro, they exchange greetings and go together into "the tent"

[147] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 138
[148] Ibid., p. 32.
[149] Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 136.
[150] Gafney, Wil, 'A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah' in Smith, *I found God in Me*, pp. 131-157, pp. 152-153.
[151] Ibid., p. 153.
[152] Rashi adds, commenting on Ex. 18.5, that "This is written to praise Jethro, whose heart moved him to leave his position of glory in the world to go out to the barren wilderness in order to hear the words of Torah": Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 138.

(18.7). While most sources add little to this initial exchange, and commentators such as Childs[153] and Dozeman[154] see "the tent" as an informal family setting,[155] Tg. Ps.-J. avoids the difficulties which arise in verses 10-12 by adding in Ex 18.6 Jethro's desire to become a proselyte, inserting his conversion into verse 7, and referring to "the tent" as "the tabernacle, the house of instruction." Ibn Ezra refers to the tent as "Moses' tent, that is, the Tent of Meeting,"[156] while Fretheim echoes the possibility that this is "a travelling sanctuary."[157]

Tg. Ps.-J.'s amendments are ideological, to pre-empt the theological difficulties of the subsequent verses. Ibn Ezra's are only partially so, and reflect his contention that Exodus 18 appears to be out of sequence, not only due to the difficulties presented by Ex 18.12, but also because of the problem raised by Moses' making known "the statutes and instructions of God" in Ex 18.16 prior to the revelation on Sinai, and Moses' conversation with (as he is named here) Hobab in Num 10.29-33, which occurs *after* the events recalled in Num 9/Ex 19ff. This chronological difficulty is compounded by Moses' own recollection in Deut. 1.9-18 of the events depicted in Ex. 18.13-26, in which Jethro's contribution is not mentioned, and the setting is immediately prior to the departure from Horeb. Sarna, referencing Ibn Ezra's argument, sees the placement of this chapter as thematic, and possibly indicative of "a now lost record of a treaty friendship between Israel and the

[153] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 328.
[154] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 403, after discussing the other possibilities.
[155] Meyers assumes it to be Jethro's tent [Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 136] but its nature is similarly domestic.
[156] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 139.
[157] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 196.

Midianites/Kenites."[158] The untangling of the chronological difficulties has some impact on the interpretation of Ex. 18.10-27, but without requiring the scene to take place after the revelations at Sinai, it is still possible to take completely opposite views on its significance, as I shall detail below.

In Ex 18.8-9, Moses relates to Jethro "all that the LORD had done... and how the LORD had delivered them" and Jethro rejoices "for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians." This at least is fairly uncontroversial, although it serves to indicate the intertwined family connections between Moses and Jethro, and their familiarity. Childs comments on the complete informality and genuine enthusiasm of these two verses,[159] in which Jethro's joy reflects that of his son-in-law. Following this exchange, in verses 10-12, Jethro's response is more recognisably formulaic, and suggests one who is acquainted with the proper ways in which to recognise God's greatness. Childs notes that "his response follows the pattern which the Psalmist outlines for the faithful of Israel to praise God (cf. Ps. 135)."[160] Similarly, Dozeman comments that Jethro's blessing, בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה ("Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh"), "is a cultic form of praise" which is used in the Psalter but which "is uncommon in the Pentateuch."[161] Although Israelites are blessed, and priests receive the power to

[158] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 98.
[159] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 328.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 403.

bestow blessing, he goes on to note, "only non-Israelites bless God in the Pentateuch."[162]

While it is noteworthy that Jethro offers such a blessing, and the comparison with Melchizedek is interesting, Sarna reminds us that "it is not uncommon in the Bible" for non-Israelites to invoke the divine name in their dealings with Israelites, citing Abimelech in Gen 26.28-29, Rahab in Josh 2.9,11 and the Gibeonites in Josh 9.9 among other examples.[163] Jethro follows this praise of the LORD however with the confessional statement in verse 11: עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-גָדוֹל יְהוָה מִכָּל-הָאֱלֹהִים ("Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods"), followed by his reasoning, that God has delivered the people from the Egyptians. In itself, this "Now I know" formula need not imply a moment of 'conversion', but could instead be a confirmation of previous knowledge, hence Rashi's interpretation "I acknowledged him in the past, but now even more so."[164] Sarna concurs with this reading,[165] and Dozeman draws parallels with both Psalm 20 and even Gen 22.12.[166] The significance of Jethro's statement with regard to his status as 'outsider' or convert is therefore difficult to discern. Tg. Ps.-J. and others[167] have seen confirmation of Jethro's conversion here, while Tg. Onq. feels the need to make his statement more certainly monotheistic, adding the words "and that there is no God beside him" in Ex 18.11a. Some

[162] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 403; in particular he cites Melchizedek in Gen 14.20 and the servant of Abraham in Gen 24.27.
[163] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 99 and note 5 on p. 250.
[164] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 140.
[165] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 99.
[166] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 405.
[167] E.g. Buber, M., *Moses*, New York: Harper & Row, 1946, pp. 95-6.

commentators such as Rowley,[168] and more recently Blenkinsopp, see a confirmation of their hypothesis that Jethro is here the insider, who "pronounced the blessing on Yahweh and acclaimed this demonstration of the incomparability of his god."[169]

While Jethro's words in Ex. 18.10-11 are open to interpretation, his actions in 18.12 have been the source of significant controversy: וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה עֹלָה וּזְבָחִים לֵאלֹהִים ("And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God"). As Meyers comments, "given the incessant claim that the Israelites desired to leave Egypt to sacrifice to their god, it is astonishing that this Midianite priest is the first actually to do so after the departure from Egypt."[170] This is seen more clearly by Ibn Ezra as indicative of conversion, "for now the LORD became Jethro's God,"[171] and by Rowley as the opposite, describing this sacrifice as "the first incorporation of the Israelite leaders into the worship of Yahweh."[172] Dozeman accepts Rowley's hypothesis, commenting that "Exodus 18:12 describes the first Israelite sacrifice, completing the transfer of cultic ritual from the Midianites to the Israelites."[173] Neither interpretation is necessary however. Sarna instead comments that "this ceremonial most likely possessed a juridical function,"[174] cementing ties between the Israelites and the Midianites, and Childs notes that "there is no hint in the text that [Jethro] has won the right to participate in the cult because of a recent

[168] Rowley, H. H., *From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical traditions in the light of archaeology*, London: British Academy, 1950, p. 150.
[169] Blenkinsopp, J., 'The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah' in *JSOT 33 (2008)*, p. 134.
[170] Meyers, *Exodus*, p. 137.
[171] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 140.
[172] Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*, p. 151.
[173] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 405.
[174] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 99.

conversion. Rather, he bears witness to the greatness of the God of Israel by praise, confession, and sacrifice."[175] Childs, like Sarna, raises the possibility that a treaty between the two peoples informs this passage, but notes that "according to the present form of the text, the sacrifice flows naturally from Jethro's response to the story of Israel's deliverance."[176]

Clearly Exodus 18.10-12 and the entire narrative from 18.1-12 can be, and have been, interpreted as demonstrating completely opposite hypotheses with regard to Jethro's status as 'outsider' or 'insider' and his relationship to both Moses and YHWH. It seems equally clear, however, that Jethro is the central figure in this passage, introduced as both priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, with his name and relationship to Israel's leader repeated throughout the text. Childs notes that "The fact that Jethro is a priest from a foreign country who does not belong to the people of Israel is an essential part of the tradition."[177] This itself is not sufficient however to support the idea that the Midianites are responsible for introducing Israel to YHWH, nor to suggest that Jethro is an instant convert. Instead I suggest that the two most relevant parallels within the Pentateuch, both of which involve foreigners, are the scenes in which Abimelech and Melchizedek appear.

As I have previously discussed,[178] Abimelech in Gen 20.3-5, a foreign ruler who does not belong to the people of Israel, already appears to be familiar with Israel's God prior to his dealings with Abram, and uses the divine name in his petition for

[175] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 329.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 329.
[178] Q.v., p. 39.

clemency. Abimelech's response in his conversation with God, as Lohr notes, "suggests a familiarity with the deity not only in the address but in the expectation of the king."[179] It is not unheard of that a ruler, or in Jethro's case priest,[180] from a foreign nation should have knowledge of the LORD,[181] and possibly less so given that as a Midianite Jethro is descended from Keturah (Gen 25.1-2), and therefore a descendant of Abraham, included within the promise of Gen 22.15-18. In the case of Melchizedek, his origin in the MT is unspecified, although he is described as כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן ("a priest of God the Most High") (Gen 14.18), a less ambiguous priestly association with YHWH than Jethro's,[182] though still open to speculation. Nevertheless Melchizedek is an 'outsider' priest who prepares a meal and blesses God for an act of deliverance. This act of an 'outsider' who appears to carry authority and knowledge of God is quickly brought within the bounds of comprehension and familiarity by the assertion within Jewish interpretation that מַלְכִּי-צֶדֶק ("Melchizedek") is Noah's son Shem, which fact explains his priestly authority.[183] It is of course used differently in Christian texts.[184]

If it is possible that Jethro may be seen as a priest of some description descended from Abraham, albeit an 'outsider' as far as the Israelites are concerned, then the

[179] Lohr, J.N., *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation*, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009, p. 99.
[180] It is interesting to note in this context the use of the terms "lord", "chief" etc. in the Targumim in place of כֹּהֵן when referring to Jethro, e.g. in Ex. 2.6, 18.1 etc.
[181] Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, p.88.
[182] Ginzberg cites a number of sources in describing Jethro as "doing a priest's service before the idols" and recounting that "As time went on, he grew more and more convinced of the vanity of idol worship," leading eventually to his "transformation from an idolatrous priest into a God-fearing man" (Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 1, p. 493).
[183] Tg. Ps.-J. for example amends the text of Gen 14.18 to describe him as "Malka Zadika, who was Shem bar Noah, the king of Yerushalem."
[184] Cf. Hebrews 5.6,10; 6.20; 7.1,10,11,15,17,21, referencing both Gen. 14.18-20 and Psalm 110.4.

fact that he should have some knowledge of the LORD is, though unusual, not in itself extraordinary. The centrality of Jethro in the passage as the main actor, whose name is mentioned seven times over the course of twelve verses, demands more attention. The repeated description of Jethro as Moses' father-in-law, a reminder of his familial tie but also of the sanctuary which he provided during Moses' initial flight from Egypt, add to the esteem in which he appears to be held. However, the assumption that this passage displays the Midianite origin of Israel's religion is, like the conversion narrative of early interpreters, simply another way of transposing rather than directly addressing the questions raised by the prominence of Jethro and the nature of his actions in the light of the revelations to Moses described in Exodus 3 and subsequently.

Jethro continues to be central to the second episode in Chapter 18, although in 18.13-27 he is referred to throughout simply as "the father-in-law of Moses." Observing Moses acting as "judge" for the people (verse 13), Jethro inquires of Moses what he is doing for them: "Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" (Ex 18.14) Moses explains that "the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." (18.15-16) While Dozeman takes this response as a whole, and comments that "the verdict is likely some form of an oracle. As a result, Moses promulgates the divine statutes and laws,"[185] Childs points out the discrepancy here in the use of the phrases 'to inquire of God' and language about

[185] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 408.

'the statutes and instructions of God': "these technical legal terms are normally not used to designate decisions in a civil case, such as seem to be intended in v. 16a."[186] This problem did not escape earlier commentators either. The Tg. Onq., Tg. Neof. and Tg. Ps.-J. all amend v. 15 to end "to seek instruction from the LORD," and Ibn Ezra pulls apart the two strands of what Moses is doing: "I am doing two things. First, the people come to me to inquire of God. That is, to inquire about his Torah. Second, when they have a dispute, it comes before me. Corresponding to this second demand on him, I decide between one person and another. Corresponding to the first demand, I make known the laws and teachings of God."[187]

Jethro appears to discern the same problem in the conflation of Moses' various duties: "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." (Ex 18.17b-18) His advice which follows is remarkable primarily in the way it is expressed. Beginning with the phrase "Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you!" (18.19),[188] Moses' father-in-law separates the functions he is performing: "You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do." (18.19b-20) Childs comments on the way in which this advice re-emphasises the importance of Moses' unique function: "Once again the description of Moses' role moves from that of an arbitrator in civil cases to a preacher of the divine will. Indeed, in v. 19 Moses

[186] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 330.
[187] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 142.
[188] rendered similarly in Tg. Neof.; Tg. Onq. has "then the Memra of the Lord will support you", Tg. Ps.-J. "the Word of the Lord be your helper."

functions as a mediator, not between disputing Israelites, but between God and Israel."[189] Despite Dozeman's comment that "the Midianite father-in-law of Moses transmits divine legal advice in addition to his cultic leadership,"[190] it is important to note that it is the *form* rather than the *content* of Moses' role that Jethro addresses; the revelation of God's will is still left entirely in Moses' sphere of knowledge.

In Ex 18.21-22 Jethro advises Moses that he should share the burden of adjudicating disputes, and in Sarna's words "defines the ideal social, spiritual, and moral qualifications for judges - those necessary to create and maintain a healthy and just legal order."[191] This passage is echoed by the similar description in Deut. 1.9-18 of the ordering of judicial functions, in which Jethro is not mentioned. Childs compares the criteria given in the two passages, regarding the importance (Ex 18.22) and difficulty (Deut. 1.17), and the combination of both factors given in the account of the practical implementation of Jethro's advice in Ex 18.26. The conclusion of Jethro's speech, that "If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace" (Ex 18.23), carries with it an explicit declaration of divine instruction which is not mitigated even in the Targumim.

[189] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 330.
[190] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 408.
[191] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 101.

This may be seen as surprising, and is used by Rowley as further evidence that Jethro "was acting not merely as the father-in-law of Moses, but as the priest."[192] As Childs comments though, "the remarkable thing is that the Old Testament itself does not seem to sense any problem on this issue."[193] He goes on to posit that "because the world of experience was no less an avenue through which God worked, the narrative can attribute the organization of a fundamental institution of Israel's law to practical wisdom without any indication that this might later be thought to denigrate its importance in the divine economy."[194] It is worth noting however that both Ibn Ezra and Rashi, despite being convinced of Jethro's conversion, advocate a reading of Ex. 18.23 along the lines of "if God should so command you."[195] Whether Jethro is perceived as a new convert, or somehow as Moses' priestly mentor, it remains striking that such a passage should be included in its entirety. Sarna comments on the remarkable nature of Jethro's role as it is portrayed, and argues that the ascription of the Israelite judiciary to a Midianite priest "testifies to the reliability of the tradition and to its antiquity. In light of the hostility that later characterized the relationships between the Midianites and the Israelites, it is hardly likely that anyone should invent such a story."[196]

Finally Jethro disappears from the action in Exodus 18.27 "to his own country" and does not reappear, at least in the Exodus account. The difficulty with this chronology is highlighted not only by the account of Deut 1.9ff, but also the brief

[192] Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua*, p. 151.
[193] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 332.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Carasik, *Miqra'ot Gedolot: Exodus,* p. 144.
[196] Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 100.

conversation in Num 10.29-32 between Moses and "Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law," which takes place after the events of Ex 19-34 and in which Moses entreats his father-in-law to come with the Israelites, promising after his initial refusal that "if you go with us, whatever good the LORD does for us, the same we will do for you." (Num. 10.32) It is unclear from that passage whether Hobab/Jethro ultimately accedes to Moses' request, or even whether the conversation requires the events of Ex 18 to have taken place after the revelation on Sinai. Dozeman comments that the mention of Hobab once again in Judges 4.11 "suggests that he did accompany the Israelites to the promised land."[197] This is of course speculative, although it certainly appears from Judges 1.16 and Judges 4-5 that the positive association of Midianites with Israel does not end when Moses bids farewell to his father-in-law in Ex 18.27.

The methods of dealing with Jethro, his prominence, and the nature of his words and actions in Exodus 18, have broadly fallen into three categories. One, as Childs recounts, and as has been demonstrated to some extent above, is seen in Jewish exegetical tradition: "from the early Tannaitic times through the modern era Jethro is understood as a pagan who is converted to the faith of Israel, that is, to Judaism."[198] This negates the problem of the prominent 'outsider' simply by bringing him inside the community before he does anything that might be seen as remarkable. The second method is to rely on the 'Kenite hypothesis' and to find in all of Jethro's actions indications of the origins of Israelite religion in Midianite culture. Thus in Blenkinsopp's judgment, Budde, Rowley et. al. are clearly correct in

[197] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 410.
[198] Childs, *Exodus*, pp. 332-3.

assuming that Moses is in this passage converted to the religion of Jethro rather than the other way around.[199] This approach also allows Dozeman to comment matter-of-factly that "Zipporah transmitted the ritual of circumcision to Moses during his individual journey through the wilderness (4:24-26). Now in the Israelite journey through the wilderness, Jethro leads the people in the cultic ritual, performing two types of sacrifices."[200] Leaving aside the obvious difficulties with the interpretation of Ex 4.24-26, this approach fails to explain the theological significance of Jethro "the priest of Midian" as he is portrayed in the extant text of Exodus, or indeed why he should continue to be so prominent here if the Midianite origins of Israel as a religious group have elsewhere been so completely suppressed. Furthermore, such an interpretation seems completely irreconcilable with the plain sense of Exodus 3 and the revelation to Moses.

A third approach in considering the role of Jethro in this chapter has focused precisely on his status as 'outsider' and its significance. Regardless of his conversion or otherwise, Childs notes that some early Christians "particularly Origen (*In Exod. Hom.* XI.6) and Clement (*Strom.* VI.66.5) reflected at length on the significance of Moses learning divine truths from a pagan priest. They found in this openness a warrant for seeking knowledge from non-Christians, who likewise had access to divine truths."[201] This line of thought, to which I shall return, is highly significant for my overall hypothesis, and was picked up by others. Childs continues: "Augustine (*Quaest. in Hept.* II.67) saw in Jethro's advice a good example of natural law and

[199] Blenkinsopp, 'The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited', pp. 134-5.
[200] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 405.
[201] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 334.

reasoned that Moses was able to recognize a wise plan as being from God however it may have originated."[202] Thus, Childs considers "the most fruitful theological dimension of this text for today" is the way in which revelation (through Moses) and practical wisdom (through Jethro) are balanced.[203] "In a sense," he concludes, "the basic problem of relating the divine law as given in the Pentateuch with the knowledge of God as found in wisdom has already been posed within Ex. 18."[204] This is true, but I suggest it is also worth considering further the significance of Jethro's language of divine command with which he recommends his 'advice', and which is preserved in both the MT and the Targumim.[205]

The portrayal of Zipporah and Jethro

Zipporah and Jethro both, at different stages of the Exodus story, take centre stage, and their actions have at different points in the history of interpretation been the subject of intense scrutiny. Their portrayal in the MT is entirely positive, and Zipporah in particular attracts relatively little criticism.[206] Zipporah's passivity and silence as portrayed in Ex 2 in the MT was modified by the apocryphal stories of her kindness to and advocacy on behalf of Moses in texts such as Tg. Ps.-J., *The Chronicle of Moses*, and some Islamic interpretation, and yet she remains an

[202] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 334.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., p. 335.
[205] The LXX renders the beginning of Ex 18.23 as "ἐὰν τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο ποιήσῃς κατισχύσει σε ὁ θεός..." ("If you will do this thing, God will strengthen you") thus promising divine success to the enterprise, rather than presenting it as divine command, but the point stands.
[206] Although cf. Langston, S.M., *Exodus through the centuries*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, p. 73 for Ephrem's interpretation in which Zipporah is to blame for the incident in Ex 4.24-26 as she had not accepted Moses' religion, and p. 76 for at least one modern midrash which "emphasized Zipporah's status as a non-Israelite."

outsider, a Midianite, a fact which is stressed by her disappearance after the strange events recorded in Ex 4.24-26 until her brief, silent return in Ex 18. The idea that the circumcision incident is the method by which "she passes on the ritual knowledge to Moses and hence to the Israelites"[207] is somewhat unconvincing, given how incomprehensible and open to interpretation the entire incident appears to be in the received form of the text. Instead it is Zipporah's very otherness and arcane, intuitive knowledge of what to do which delivers Moses.

It is at the point where explanation seems to break down, where the very atmosphere of the scene renders it most theologically troubling and the text most difficult to comprehend, that Zipporah becomes the focus of attention and acts decisively. Whatever it is that Zipporah accomplishes in Ex 4.24-26, it seems that only she is aware of and capable of achieving it, and in the process capable of acting in accordance with divine will. Perhaps the survival of this passage in the extant text of Exodus has to do with this potent combination of fear and unknowing, as if the interaction between Zipporah and YHWH, so crucial to Moses' survival and mission, was too powerful and disturbing to be excised by the hand of the redactor. Certainly in her most active role, Zipporah appears to be entirely 'outsider', transgressing boundaries relating to both gender and ethnicity in performing the circumcision,[208] and yet acting as divine agent in relation to her salvific act on behalf of her husband. Susan Ackerman suggests that Zipporah's actions occupy the most liminal of spaces: "Indeed, the site of Zipporah's priest-like

[207] Dozeman, *Exodus*, p. 155.
[208] See Kessler, G., 'Let's Cross that Body When We Get to It: Gender and Ethnicity in Rabbinic Literature', in *JAAR 73.2 (June 2005)*, pp. 329-359.

actions - some unnamed lodging place at some unspecified point on Moses' journey back to Egypt - could hardly be more ambiguously (that is liminally) described."[209] The result is to make possible "a priest-like role for Zipporah that is otherwise difficult (if not impossible) to imagine within the organizational structure of Israelite religion."[210]

Zipporah's presence in Ex 4.24-6 as such a dangerous-seeming figure, who is nevertheless necessary for salvation in a way that is not easily comprehensible, may account for her virtual disappearance after that point in the narrative, and yet the positive outcome of her actions is undeniable (at least within the text). Modern interpretations of Zipporah have cast her in a more active role throughout, and Langston notes the retelling of her story by Elizabeth Cady Stanton as an example of "the wife who, though deceived by her husband and forced to follow her husband's desires, nonetheless saved him,"[211] as well as her complete reimagining in fiction, including in the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*.[212]

Jethro's portrayal, while positive within the text, varies widely in interpreters' eyes, as can be seen by the attempts to distance him from his son-in-law in the Targumic renderings of Exodus 2, in which he is suspicious of Moses, and the interpretations of Ex 4.24-26 which blame him for the uncircumcision of the child which leads to the attack on Moses. These negative observations are not consistent however,

[209] Ackerman, S., 'Why is Miriam also among the prophets? (And is Zipporah among the priests?)' in *JBL* Vol. 121/1 (2002), pp. 47-80, p. 75.
[210] Ibid., p. 75.
[211] Langston, *Exodus through the centuries*, p. 75.
[212] Ibid., p. 37.

even internally, with the Jethro who is portrayed in Exodus 18, and it is difficult to reconcile the two depictions in terms of Jethro's underlying character, even were one to assume his 'conversion' upon hearing of the events which have transpired in Egypt.

Furthermore, although Jethro is described repeatedly as the 'priest of Midian' in the MT ('lord' or 'chief' in the Targumim), and at least in the Exodus account remains outwith the community and returns "to his own country" (Ex. 18.27), he is still afforded the role of protagonist in the events of Exodus 18, in which his blessing formula, confession and subsequent sacrifice to YHWH are described, and in which his advice to Moses on administrative matters is accepted at face value as being a representation of divine command or blessing in itself.

Whether or not one sees in the narratives I have analysed in Exodus evidence in favour of a 'Midianite-Kenite hypothesis',[213] it is certainly the case that at points of individual and corporate stress and transition in the lives of Moses and Israel respectively, the 'outsiders' Zipporah and Jethro are portrayed as the agents by which divinely approved salvation and knowledge are bestowed upon the people of Israel, in ways which are important to the future survival of the community; it appears in both cases that it is their position as 'outsiders' which *allows* them to fulfill this role. This in turn may give a clue to the role of the 'non-elect' in relation to divine will and the developing community of faith.

[213] I have no intention of representing the evidence for and against such a claim which has accumulated over the past centuries, and which is a field of research in itself.

Jael (Judges 4-5)

'Most blessed of Women' - Deliverer of Israel from oppression

The figure of Jael has been a contentious one almost throughout the history of interpretation, despite the biblical text's unequivocal approval of her, expressed in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5.24). She is known only for her assassination of Sisera, the captain of the host of Jabin, king of Canaan, who had for "twenty years mightily oppressed the children of Israel" (Judges 4.3) when Deborah was judging Israel. By killing Sisera, Jael delivers Israel from oppression and brings to fruition Deborah's prophecy (Judges 4.9) that "the LORD will give Sisera over into the hand of a woman." She is therefore a prime example of an outsider, both a foreigner and a woman, who becomes the LORD's chosen instrument to deliver Israel. Her reception has not been straightforward however. The graphically violent language which describes Sisera's death at the hands of Jael has been the subject of continuous fascination and horror, depicted in art and the subject of commentaries and sermons alike.[214] The scene's situation within Jael's tent, seemingly in the context of broken hospitality,[215] has also encouraged commentators to confront the nature of her deed, which has largely been seen as shocking even by those who approve of her positive portrayal, and either to find some way of justifying Jael's actions, or to condemn her for them. The text of the MT itself gives very little

[214] Gunn discusses the portrayal of the scene in art and Christian commentary, and particularly the portrayal of Jael as assassin, from the mediaeval period onwards in Gunn, D.M., *Judges (Blackwell Bible Commentaries)*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 71-86.

[215] See, e.g. Matthews, V.H., *Judges and Ruth: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary,* Cambridge: CUP, 2004, pp. 68-73 for a discussion of hospitality protocol, and its numerous apparent breaches in the story of Jael and Sisera.

indication of Jael's motives in killing Sisera, and this has allowed interpreters to fill in the gaps with the theory which best suits their view of her character, as either valorous heroine or femme fatale, or sometimes as both.[216]

The scene is set for Jael's introduction into the biblical text by Judges 4.11, which notes that Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the group of the Kenites, who are associated immediately in the text with Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, calling to mind the previous association of the Kenites with Israel.[217] It is left ambiguous whether this has any bearing on the loyalties of either Heber or his household. Jael herself is not named until Judges 4.17, when Sisera, whose army has been defeated, flees on foot, either towards or to (אֶל) the tent of Jael, "the wife of Heber the Kenite." This is explained by the fact that there was שָׁלוֹם ("peace") between Jabin and the house of Heber, although the precise nature of their relationship is again unspecified. At this point, Jael is known only by her association with Heber, and it is presumably this relationship which draws Sisera in her direction. Jael, referred to without any qualifying connection in v.18, "goes out" (וַתֵּצֵא) to meet Sisera, and actively draws him into her tent, repeatedly encouraging him to "turn in" (סוּרָה) to her, and using the deeply ironic reassurance אַל-תִּירָא ("do

[216] Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities,* §31, (Pseudo-Philo, tr. Harrington, D.J., *Biblical Antiquities*, §32.12, in Charlesworth, J.H. (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 2,* London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), is an early example which falls into this category, with a lavish description of Jael the temptress interspersed with her prayers to God to send signs of divine intent.
[217] Particularly in Exodus 18, but also in Judges 1.16, adding further ambiguity to Heber's relationship with Israel.

not fear"). Sisera duly turns in to her tent, and she covers him (or the tent?) with a covering of some sort.[218]

In the scene which follows, Sisera makes a request for water, to which Jael responds with milk (Judges 4.19), and he orders Jael to stand at the door of the tent, and "if a man comes and asks you, saying 'is there a man here?' you will say, 'None.'" Jael's next actions are to take a tent-pin and hammer, to go to him softly, and to drive the pin into his temple/head/mouth/throat,[219] killing him. (Judges 4.21) The sudden transition from language and actions which have by turns been interpreted as either seductive (e.g. Pseudo-Philo), hospitable (e.g. Matthews[220]) or maternal (e.g. Bal[221]) to language and actions of violence, with strong connotations of sexual violence,[222] is shocking, and the bluntness of Jael's act combined with the lack of explanation of her motives has provided a fruitful area for those willing to offer conjecture and interpolation. After the act itself, all that remains is for Jael, again taking the initiative, to bring Barak to see the fallen foe. The corresponding description of the same events in Judges 5.25-27 lacks some of the detail of Jael's

[218] The hapax שְׂמִיכָה and its possible interpretation is discussed by Johanna W. H. Bos in 'Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17-22; Ruth 3' in *Semeia* 42 (1988), pp. 37-67., p. 51. Bos nevertheless agrees in this passage that "Word-plays on 'open' and 'close/cover' indicate the hidden intent of Yael." A less conventional reading which insists that שְׂמִיכָה has an overtly sexual connotation is offered by Pamela Tamarkin Reis, 'Uncovering Jael and Sisera. A New Reading' in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament 19:1 (2005)*, pp. 24-47, and is refuted in the same journal in by Chisholm, Robert B Jr, 'What Went on in Jael's Tent?', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament 24:1 (2010)*, pp. 143-144.

[219] See e.g. Bos, 'Out of the Shadows', p.51 or van Wolde, Ellen, 'Ya'el in Judges 4' in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 107 (1995), p. 245 for the issues in translating בְּרַקָּתוֹ. It is in any event a somewhat gruesome method of dispatch.

[220] Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 72-73.

[221] Bal, Mieke, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 213.

[222] See Fewell, D.N. and Gunn, D.M., 'Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 & 5' in *JAAR 58.3 (1990)*, pp. 392-4 on the mixture of maternal and sexual imagery in this passage, and the "powerful image of reversed rape" (p.394) in verse 21.

deception but dwells on Sisera's death, with the repetition of כָּרַע ("he sank") and נָפַל ("he fell") placing emphasis on the dramatic demise of the once-proud warrior at the hand of Israel's new heroine. The biblical text itself is curt and brutal in its assessment of events: "So perish all your enemies, O LORD." (Judges 5:31)

The main areas of interest in Jael's depiction and its reception for this study are threefold. Firstly, the extent to which Jael's actions are condoned or rejected within the text and subsequent tradition are important in assessing her status as a deliverer of Israel and as a heroine of the covenant people. Secondly, the reaction to Jael *qua* outsider and the motives ascribed to her actions give an insight into whether Jael can rightly be described firstly as an 'outsider' and secondly as a divine agent. Thirdly, a closer examination of the language used to depict Jael's actions within the text itself will confirm or contradict the assumptions which have been made about whether she acts in concordance with the divine will. I shall tackle each of these areas in turn before assessing the extent of Jael's role as a divine agent and outsider who interacts positively with the covenant people.

Reception of Jael's actions

As I have described, there is little in the biblical text which suggests condemnation of Jael's actions. In the prose narrative, the only commentary on the Jael and Sisera incident is found in Judges 4.23, "So God subdued on that day Jabin king of Canaan before the children of Israel." In the poetic account of events in Chapter 5, as I have already noted, verse 24 presents a completely positive picture of Jael's role in

Sisera's downfall: "Blessed above women shall Jael be, the wife of Heber the Kenite, above women in the tent shall she be blessed." Early Jewish sources seem to concur with the biblical assessment. Pseudo-Philo, despite his lengthy interpolations concerning the methods used by Jael to seduce and kill Sisera, is equally bold in his praise of her actions: "And so Jael is glorified among women, because she alone has made straight the way to success by killing Sisera with her own hands."[223] Bronner describes how "the midrash, following the biblical tone of praise for Jael, echoes the words of Judges 5.24: 'Above women in the tent shall she be blessed'. The sages say that this refers to the wilderness generation, who gave birth to children who, if not for Jael, would have been destroyed. An alternative view is that the verse refers to the matriarchs, whose offspring would have been destroyed had it not been for Jael."[224] Bronner goes on to recount that "the rabbis praise even her modus operandi. They credit her with displaying a knowledge of *halakhah*, noting that she evidently knew the prohibition against women using weapons (Deut 22.5), and that she therefore slew Sisera using a hammer and tent pin rather than with a spear or sword."[225]

Early Jewish reaction to the portrayal of Jael seems therefore to have been very positive, viewing her actions as necessary for the deliverance of Israel and indeed heroic, to the extent that she is placed alongside or even above the great matriarchs of the covenant people. Gunn recounts however, that "early Christian

[223] Pseudo-Philo, (tr. Harrington), *Biblical Antiquities*, §32.12, in Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha Volume 2,* p. 346.
[224] Bronner, L.L., 'Valorized or Vilified? The Women of Judges in Midrashic Sources' in Brenner, A. (ed.), *Judges (The Feminist Companion to the Bible: First Series),* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, pp. 72-95, p. 87.
[225] Ibid.

interpretation produces a different Jael, valued as a type or forerunner of Christ or the Church."[226] He goes on to describe how "allegorical and typological interpretations" are developed by a number of Christian apologists, and notes that "in the medieval *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* ('Mirror of Human Salvation') we find Jael, who overcame the enemy general Sisera, prefiguring Mary, who 'conquered our enemy the Devil.'"[227] Thus Jael is assimilated by early Christian writers into their preferred theological interpretation of the whole episode recounted in Judges 4-5. Unfortunately, this leads to the depiction in at least one Christian treatise of Jael as representative of the victorious Gentile Church succeeding in contrast to "the Jews who failed to follow up, 'by the virtue of faith,' the enemy they initially put to flight."[228] Nevertheless, by these accounts Jael is afforded a positive role in biblical history as a legitimate agent of God and biblical heroine. Gunn describes how Martin Luther, not known for his appreciation of Jewish heroines, follows this trend, casting Sisera in the role of Pride: "Jael represents the Church, the bride of Christ (who, like the Kenite, is related to Moses), which offers first the milk of gentler doctrine to calm him and then pierces his spirit with the strong word of the Gospel,"[229] and these themes of Marian and ecclesiastical prefiguration appear to have remained prominent in Christian discourse on Jael throughout the early modern period.[230]

[226] Gunn, *Judges,* p. 57.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid., the work under discussion being Ambrose's *Treatise Concerning Widows*, which might otherwise be taken as surprisingly feminist in its outlook. Gunn also notes for example that Ambrose uses the story of Judges 4-5 "to enlist women as church leaders."
[229] Luther, M. [1513-15] ed. Oswald, H.C., *First Lectures on the Psalms [10],* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, cited in Gunn, *Judges*, p. 71.
[230] Ibid., pp.71-2.

Jewish and Christian reaction to Jael and her actions seems therefore to have been positive from the earliest times at least until the Reformation, although for slightly different reasons. Subsequently it appears that Jael's execution of Sisera becomes morally problematic for both commentators and preachers, who begin to be shocked by the actions and even the person of Jael herself. Gunn quotes Puritan preacher Richard Rogers, who struggles with what may be seen as Jael's "barbarous cruelty and treachery"[231] which should not be emulated, but eventually finds her justified in her context: "She acts, he insists, out of faithfulness against God's enemy... and by God's special commission which overrides all else."[232] It appears that for men like Rogers, Jael's role as divine agent is axiomatic, even if her actions presented difficulties for contemporary sensibilities. Less than a century later however, a very different reaction begins to emerge, perhaps associated with the wider puritan attitude towards issues around sexuality and gender. Thus for John Gibbon, Jael becomes not the divinely appointed heroine, nor the prefiguration of New Testament salvation, but herself a model of sinfulness: "When sin, like Jael, invites thee into her tent, with the lure and decoy of a lordly treatment, think of the nail and hammer which fastened Sisera dead to the ground."[233]

This treatment is quite extraordinary when compared with the unstinting praise poured upon Jael by early interpreters, because of rather than in spite of her methods, though perhaps it is not entirely surprising considering the obsession

[231] Gunn, *Judges*, p. 74.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., pp. 73-4, quoting Gibbon , J [1661], 'How may we be so spiritual, as to check sin in the first rising of it?' in Nichols (ed.), *Puritan Sermons,* Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts*,* 1981, *I.v*, p. 98.

with temptations of the flesh which was current at the time.[234] Nevertheless, such viewpoints seem to be indicative of a complicating factor in Jael's more modern reception, which relates to the appropriateness of her actions *as a woman*. Successive commentators in the modern period attempted to justify Jael's acts as appropriate in the context of divine command, though *in*appropriate as a model for imitation, especially by women.[235] In the context of later concern with breaches of the hospitality code described by Matthews, Le Moyne's comments are interesting. While praising Jael's unparalleled courage, he notes that women who might otherwise balk at the violence employed by Jael may imitate her "without violating the Laws of Hospitality; without exasperating the mildness of their Sex; without inraging or staining the Graces with blood."[236] Gale Yee also draws attention to the particular difficulty which many interpreters have had with the concept of the woman warrior which Jael represents,[237] to which I now turn.

Jael as outsider

Jael's position as an outsider is in terms both of her sex and of her identification with the Kenites. In terms of her sex, Yee argues that the figure of Jael represents a

[234] It is worth observing, for example, that the 'Homily against peril of Idolatry' contained in the *Second Book of Homilies,* which is still commended to be read in Anglican Churches by Article XXXV of the *Articles of Religion*, argues that "the nature of man is none otherwise bent to the worshipping of images, if he may have them and see them, than it is bent to whoredom and adultery in the company of harlots." ['Against peril of Idolatry' in *Certain Sermons Or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory*, London: SPCK, 1864, p. 182]. According to such a worldview, one could argue that it is manifestly unfair for a woman to use even the suggestion of seduction, as no man is (apparently) capable of withstanding sexual temptation if he is unfortunate enough to be presented with it.

[235] Gunn discusses some of these attempts in *Judges*, pp. 74-78.

[236] Le Moyne, Pierre, (tr. the Marquess of Winchester)*, Gallery of Heroick Women*, London, 1652, quoted in Gunn, *Judges,* pp. 76.

[237] Yee, G.A., 'By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman-Warrior in Judges 4' in *Semeia 62 (1993)*, pp. 99-134.

metaphor of the woman warrior which can be variously interpreted depending on the reader's own attitudes to gender roles. For Yee, it is "precisely the liminality of the woman warrior, her anomalous position neither inclusively male nor totally female, that permits the metaphor to support, denounce, modify, or otherwise express various facets of gender meanings and relationships."[238] The metaphor of the woman warrior becomes part of a "strategy of entitlement" which interpreters use to cope with such liminality, appropriating the perceived threat or opportunity presented by the metaphor itself for political ends, and indeed Yee argues that "the male author of Judges 4 created metaphors of Deborah and Jael as women warriors in order to cope with women's roles in wartime and his own notions of the normative maleness of war."[239] While it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the validity of Jael's actions without implicitly falling into one of Yee's categories of response, which is a somewhat awkward position, Yee does draw attention to the motives which have been ascribed to Jael by a number of commentators in the absence of any illumination within the biblical text. The motives thus supplied give some credence to Yee's hypothesis as Jael is alternately justified and condemned depending on the perception of what is appropriate action for a woman in Jael's position.

Pseudo-Philo describes in Deborah's words how her prophecy is the LORD's response to Sisera's intention to take Israel's women as the spoils of war: "'I will divide their spoils among my servants, and I will take for myself beautiful women as concubines.' And on account of this the LORD said about him that the arm of a weak

[238] Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p. 100.
[239] Ibid., p. 109.

woman would attack him and maidens would take his spoils and even he would fall into the hands of a woman."[240] For Yee, Deborah thus "becomes the champion of female honor that had been disgraced in Sisera's hands,"[241] but she takes from this that Jael's actions and "the female references... do not highlight female leadership and perspicacity, but rather Sisera's dishonor and disgrace in defeat."[242] Yee does highlight that "Ps-Philo palliates the execution scene by having Jael pray to the LORD for signs that he will act along with her when she kills Sisera," but contends that "Jael in these expansions does not function as the autonomous actor of the biblical story, independently carrying out the assassination of an oppressor, but a beautiful pious waverer who needs divine signs in order to act."[243]

I would contend that Pseudo-Philo's portrayal of Jael is in fact more positive than Yee admits, casting her as a woman who constructs a plan herself to remove God's enemy because "Sisera has made a plan and said, 'I will go and punish the flock of the Most Powerful One.'"[244] The depiction of Jael in Pseudo-Philo is also undoubtedly one of a divine agent who acts out God's will, and it is interesting that despite Yee's description of his 'shaming' in Judges 4,[245] Barak is entirely approving of the outcome in Pseudo-Philo's account: "Blessed be the LORD, who sent his spirit and said, 'Into the hand of a woman Sisera will be handed over.'"[246]

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[240] Pseudo-Philo (tr. Harrington), Biblical *Antiquities*, §31.1-2 in Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha Volume 2,* p. 344.
[241] Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p. 118.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid., p. 122.
[244] Pseudo-Philo (tr. Harrington), *Biblical Antiquities*, §31.5 in Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha Volume 2,* p. 344.
[245] Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p. 115-6.
[246] Pseudo-Philo (tr. Harrington), *Biblical Antiquities*, §32.9 in Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha Volume 2,* p. 345.

Although the biblical text is so positive, and as we have seen neither Pseudo-Philo nor the early Jewish commentators have a problem with Jael's actions as a woman (although some get rather carried away with their imaginative treatment of Jael's 'seduction' of Sisera),[247] much of later commentary has taken pains to ascribe motives to Jael which mitigate or justify the violence and deception which she employs. Yee recounts how Harriet Beecher Stowe "deals with Jael's seemingly 'shocking' execution of Sisera by relating it to an incident closer to her 1874 era"[248] in which the brewers of London lynched a notorious Austrian tyrant and abuser of women, and details Robert Horton's imaginative account of how Jael, having witnessed Sisera's brutal treatment of women first hand, decides to "take her life in her hands to save other women from the misery and shame."[249] While these interpretations may be seen to portray a Jael who takes the initiative on behalf of abused women and thus becomes an autonomous figure, Yee also points out that the danger to men of such a violent figure is mitigated by "entitling her as a warrior primarily to vindicate and reinstate female sexual honour."[250]

A renewal of interest in the portrayal of women within the biblical text and the rise of feminist criticism has brought with it response to those such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Leonard Swidler and F. D. Maurice who were unable to accept the

[247] See Bronner's discussion in 'Valorised or Vilified', pp. 88-90 of the treatment of Judges 5:27 in the Midrashim, and the variety of ways in which lurid sexual details are introduced into the scene, although there are also dissenting voices.
[248] Yee, ' By the Hand of a Woman', p. 122.
[249] Horton, R.F., *Women of the Old Testament*, New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1897, p. 128, quoted in Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p. 123.
[250] Ibid.

deception which Jael undertakes in order to accomplish her goal.[251] Fewell and Gunn describe how Bal, for example, "argues that commentators who 'throw themselves with such zeal upon the theme of deceived hospitality' do so because they are trying to 'forget the theme of male (i.e., Sisera's and Barak's) shame."[252] Bal elsewhere argues that the focus on hospitality and preserving her honour as Jael's two possible motives are an "attempt, carried out by means of binary thinking, to exclude a third possibility, which would be Yael's wish to participate in political action."[253] For commentators such as Bal and Bos, Jael acts with autonomy, and in a manner which blurs the boundaries between the public and private domain in the same way that her status of woman warrior blurs the boundaries of normative gender roles.[254] Yee also notes that for Bos and Hanselman, Jael's actions constitute a subversion of patriarchal norms.[255] Jael has therefore been embraced by some as a figure of female empowerment, and the ambivalence shown towards her since the Reformation, and the difficulty with which her actions are still received by many, show that she remains to some extent a troubling figure for androcentric commentators.

One way in which commentators have sought to justify Jael's actions as a woman has been to question her status as an ethnic or political outsider. As Fewell and Gunn note, "for many commentators the assumption seems to be that she acts out

[251] Gunn, *Judges,* pp. 81-84 and Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p. 123 for more on this.
[252] Bal, M., *Murder and Difference: Genre, Gender, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1988, pp. 116-120, 123-4, quoted in Fewell and Gunn, 'Controlling Perspectives', p. 395.
[253] Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry*, p. 212.
[254] Ibid., pp. 212-4, Bos, 'Out of the Shadows', p. 55-6.
[255] Yee, 'By the Hand of a Woman', p.124.

the commitment to Israel, or YHWH, or both."[256] They go on to outline how Yairah Amit views the relationship of the Kenites and Israelites through Hobab to be sufficient explanation for Jael's actions, while for John Garstang and Robert Boling, Jael must actually have been an Israelite to have breached Heber's alliance with Sisera.[257] Through such readings Jael is effectively assimilated and her actions become less threatening both as a woman and as an outsider as she is simply identified as another Israelite through whom God brings victory to Israel. As Fewell and Gunn note, "that, of course is not something the text ever says... Nor need we suppose that Jael treasured a special loyalty to Israel any more than did her husband."[258]

Lillian Klein seems to take the same position as Garstang and Boling with regard to Jael's nationality: "We may assume Jael is an Israelite because the text takes care to identify even half-assimilated non-Israelites such as Jael's husband... her actions define her allegiances: she acts for Israel - against the interests of her husband's friendship with Sisera - and is therefore presumed to be an Israelite."[259] Klein goes further however, and insists that "there is no indication that she acts under the spirit of Yahweh. She is a woman who breaks the codes, and though her actions seem a gain for Israel, they are devious. Jael acts, but Yahweh is silent. Yahweh's name is not mentioned in direct conjunction with Sisera or Jael's deeds, as it is with

[256] Gunn & Fewell, 'Controlling Perspectives', p.395.
[257] Ibid: see Amit, Yairah, 'Judges 4: Its Contents and Form' in *JSOT 39 (1987)*, pp. 89-111, p. 94; Garstang, John, *The Foundations of Bible History: Joshua, Judges,* Edinburgh: Constable & Co., 1931, p. 301; Boling, Robert G., *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (Anchor Bible)*, New York: Doubleday, 1975, p. 97,100.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Klein, L.R., *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges (JSOT Supp 68)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988, p. 43.

those of Barak."[260] There are a number of difficulties with this position which I shall address below.

Fewell and Gunn, while acknowledging that Jael's motives are left unspoken in the text, assign to her the role of ultimate outsider and victim of circumstance. "With a husband on the losing side, Jael is a woman caught in the middle... Her best bet for survival for herself, and no doubt for her family, is to turn Sisera's presence in her tent into proof of her own personal allegiance to the victors."[261] Thus for Fewell and Gunn, Jael is sucked into a world where violence is authority: "Violence delivers her, gains her security and will earn her praise in patriarchal Israel."[262] Fewell and Gunn therefore reject the idea that Jael is an unidentified Israelite who takes her people's side when the moment of truth arrives, but in so doing they also remove all motivation from her actions other than self-preservation. Despite their contention, using similar language to Bal, that "both Sisera and patriarchal reader fail to consider the woman's wider social/political interest,"[263] their limitation of that interest is to self-preservation under duress as a trigger for violence. Thus Jael's role as outsider with regard to the covenant community in terms of her identification as wife of Heber the Kenite stands in contradiction for many modern commentators (where it is even considered) with any role which she may have as divine agent; indeed the two roles often appear to be assumed as mutually exclusive. As I have touched on above this was not the case in early interpretation, and Bronner summarises the position within midrash thus: "Though Jael was not an

[260] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 43.
[261] Ibid., p. 396.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Fewell and Gunn, 'Controlling Perspectives', p. 406.

Israelite, the sages credit her with both the knowledge and observance of *halakhah*, and praise her heroic feat against Sisera rather than in any way criticising her for it. She is given full credit as a savior and judge of the Israelite people."[264] Thus the sages drew different conclusions from Klein for example on both the issue of Jael as an outsider, and the divine sanction of her actions.

Back to the text

The above brief survey shows both the early lionizing of Jael (along with the move from sexual language to the assumption of sexual activity), and her subsequent ambivalent reception as variously a heroine or anti-heroine, an inhospitable Kenite or a justified Israelite restoring female honour, or perhaps just a woman caught in the middle of someone else's war who is forced to use whatever means are at her disposal to secure her survival and that of her family. She is a fascinating figure, perhaps because opinion regarding Jael even now seems to vary so widely from one commentator to the next. One common strand in attempting to understand Jael, however, has been to supply motive for her actions. Fuchs, who identifies the difficulties associated with the dramatisation and even celebration of Jael's deception, draws attention to the vacuum created by the text's silence and reads this as indicative of a wider problem with the biblical portrayal of women as deceptive: "The discriminatory treatment of deceptive women is reflected in two major strategies manipulated by the biblical text : the suppression of motivation,

[264] Bronner, 'Valorized or Vilified', p. 91.

especially when the deceptive act is directly related to woman's inferior status and political powerlessness, and the negative presentation of women who deceive for causes that are not meant to enhance male power."[265] However, the absence of motive in the Jael story need not be interpreted thus; as we have seen, other commentators such as Bal and Bos see Jael as an autonomous and powerful figure.

More to the point, much of the deception in the Sisera and Jael episode is Sisera's self-deception. Fewell and Gunn point out that "Sisera understands the world as patriarchy: if Heber is a Canaanite ally then so must his wife be."[266] As Matthews points out,[267] it is Sisera as much as Jael who breaks the rules of hospitality, and many commentators have of course drawn attention to Sisera's ironic command to Jael in Judges 4.20 to inform anyone who comes looking that there is "no man" in her tent, anticipating his own death, but also commanding Jael to carry out a deception. As Bal points out, Jael "in her autonomy, can decide not to lie and still fulfill the conditions required: to say 'none' and yet to speak the truth. It can be done by killing the man who gives her the misplaced order, so that he will be truly none."[268] Bos argues that "as Yael's deceptiveness has been exaggerated, so both her victim's helplessness and her violence receive an emphasis in the translations and commentaries which the text does not warrant. The violence of the story is

[265] Fuchs, E., 'Who is hiding the truth?' in Collins, A.Y. (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1985, pp. 137-144, p. 142.
[266] Fewell and Gunn, 'Controlling Perspectives', p. 392.
[267] Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 71-73.
[268] Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry,* p. 214.

disturbing, but so is all the violence which one encounters in the Bible, whether it is perpetrated by women or by men."[269]

Additionally, the language used by Jael herself does not give us a clear indication of her motive, but her choice of words to Sisera presents echoes of language used elsewhere which bears reflecting upon. Matthews draws attention to the irony of Jael's words 'have no fear' in Judges 4.18,[270] while also noting that the phrase "appears elsewhere in the context of theophanies, a situation in which fear is justified..."[271] Although Matthews does not take this any further, Bos notes that "the word 'fear' strikes a discordant note on what should be an occasion which contains no threat, since it is based on the assumption of *shalom*."[272] It is coupled with Jael's repeated invitation to Sisera to "turn aside" (סוּרָה) which is both a play on Sisera's name but also seen frequently elsewhere in the context of deviation from the covenant.[273] Bal also comments that the phrase 'fear not' "belongs to the vocabulary of war. The contradiction between the invitation into the peaceful home and the encouragement to battle not only holds a warning for one who listens carefully, it is also a statement about the inseparability of the two domains. Yael lets us know that, although she lives inside the tent, she will participate in the battle."[274] This curious combination of language is the first of Jael's two invitations; the second, to the pursuing Barak, consists of her delivering Sisera into his hand, in

[269] Bos, 'Out of the Shadows', p. 52.
[270] Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 71.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Bos, 'Out of the Shadows', p. 53.
[273] E.g. Ex 32.8, Deut 28.14, 1 Sam 12.20-21, 2 Sam 22.23, 1Kgs 9.6, 1Kgs 15.5, 1 Kgs 22.43, 2 Kgs 22.2, 2 Chr 7.19, 2 Chr 20.32, 2 Chr 34.2, Ps 125.5, Prov 7.2. Interestingly one of the few places where this used positively is to Moses in Exodus 3:3, during a rather more famous and explicit intervention by God to deliver the Israelites...
[274] Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry,* p. 212.

fulfilment both of God's promise in Judges 4.7, and of Deborah's prophecy in Judges 4.9. This is followed immediately by the summary of what has taken place: "So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites." (Judges 4:23).

The implication that Jael is indeed acting as divine agent, however she might express her motives (or not), is reinforced by the use of language *about* Jael. Ellen van Wolde examines both the name יָעֵל ("Yael") itself, and the language which is associated with her actions.[275] Van Wolde emphasises the consistency with which Jael is seen to be active, to be one who rises or goes up: "Ya'el's programme is indicated by her name, יָעֵל: she goes up, עלה, she goes out, יצא, and she acts independently... Sheer action, in which Baraq was not a hero, is abundantly present in Ya'el."[276] Furthermore, the echoes of language about God in the language about Jael are telling. Van Wolde highlights how Ya'el *goes out* to both Sisera and Barak, and comments that "In Jud 4, so far only YHWH has been said to go out, יצא, before Baraq. It now appears that Ya'el, too, is going out before Baraq."[277] There is a similar resonance in the description of the killing itself, and van Wolde draws the parallels between Jael taking the hammer in her hand and Deborah's words of prophecy: "In v. 6. 9 and 14 the word *hand* was also central: »I (=YHWH) will give (...) into your hand« (4,7), »YHWH will sell Sisera in to the hand of a woman« (4,9) and »the day on which YHWH is giving Sisera into your hand« (4,14). In all three texts, this ›giving into the hand of... ‹ was used as a complement to ›going‹. This

[275] van Wolde, 'Ya'el in Judges 4'.
[276] Ibid., p. 244.
[277] Ibid., p. 243.

can also be said of Ya'el: she gets up and literally takes matters in hand."[278] Though, as Klein insists, "Jael acts, but Yahweh is silent,"[279] the language of the text strongly hints at the action of Jael as the LORD's proxy.

Van Wolde also comments on Jael's position as outsider. She is identified by her relationship to Heber, who is himself separated from his own people, and "the wife of such an outsider is an outcast in two ways: both as a stranger and as a woman she is only attached to her husband, she has no ties with either relatives or foreigners. It is this woman, this twofold outsider, who kills Sisera and hands him over to Baraq. Through her actions, she emerges as even more of an outsider."[280] She goes on to comment that "this story is therefore not only about a reversal of male and female roles, but also about a reversal of the roles of outcasts and Israelites. Ya'el is the one who acts where Baraq hesitates and fails."[281] Bos argues in agreement that "the extraordinary feature of Judg 4 and 5 is that women become the 'helpers' through whom God accomplishes victory and that one of them is not a member of the Israelite tribes."[282] Jael then remains something of a stranger to us, but it seems clear that as a complete outsider she is the one who is chosen by the LORD to bring about the deliverance of the covenant people. Her motive for the killing of Sisera remains unclear, and yet her deeds are not condemned in any way. It is worth commenting at this point on Fewell and Gunn's discussion of the description of Jael's act in Judges 5, in which they argue that the

[278] van Wolde, 'Ya'el in Judges 4', pp. 244-5.
[279] Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, p. 43.
[280] van Wolde, 'Ya'el in Judges 4', p. 245.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Bos, 'Out of the Shadows', p.58.

celebration of victory acts as a means by which to legitimise Israel's own violence as victors.[283] They sum up thus: "Israel, because of victory, is now counted as YHWH's friend. Jael, because of her violence, is now a lover of YHWH."[284] The reality however, is that Jael's voice is not heard in Judges 5; she is an actor only insofar as her deeds are recounted by others for their own purposes. She remains silent as to her motive, and offers no understanding to Barak or the reader regarding the necessity of her actions. She acts, and there are strong suggestions that through her, the LORD acts also. Perhaps theologically the real threat of the figure of Jael is that, through her God is seen to act in an unexpected and shocking way, through those whom we do not know, whose purposes remain opaque to us, and no explanation is offered.

[283] Fewell and Gunn, 'Controlling Perspectives', pp. 403-408.
[284] Ibid., p. 409.

Ruth: the bringer of *ḥesed*.

The scroll of *Ruth* is unusual in many ways. It is one of only a handful of biblical books named for a woman, alongside *Esther* and the Greek *Book of Judith*. It is also one of only two books named after people who at least start off as foreigners (the other being the book of Job). As the only biblical text specifically named after a foreign woman, Ruth is therefore of particular concern with regard to an investigation into the role and treatment of such 'double outsiders'. The book is elusive with regard to dating and authorship, neither of which can be reliably determined, despite substantial investigation and supposition.[285] Along with inconclusive philological evidence, difficulties around the book's treatment of legal issues and interpretation of legal customs have also served to cloud the issue of date and therefore historical situation. *Ruth*'s original purpose cannot as a result be stated with confidence, dependent as it is on a context which is difficult to ascertain, although there has been substantial speculation concerning *Ruth* and its relationship with Ezra and Nehemiah, particularly in its treatment of marriage and the questions of exogamy and endogamy in post-exilic Israelite society.

The scroll of *Ruth* begins with the story of a family who move to Moab, one of Israel's traditional enemies, whose people are explicitly excluded from the assembly of the LORD in Deuteronomy 23.3-6. The scroll ends with a Moabite who

[285] Larkin, Katrina J.A., *Ruth and Esther*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, pp. 18-25, provides a summary of the arguments that have been put forward as part of various theories, none of which can be proven. Sasson also notes that "neither 'internal'... nor 'external'... evidence is compelling enough to establish a credible period in which our scroll was either authored or committed to writing." (Sasson, Jack M., *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p. 251).

becomes a resident of Bethlehem, who marries an Israelite and becomes the ancestor of King David. Unlike other texts, where foreignness may be of concern in the context of this investigation, but is not necessarily presented as central to the narrative, *Ruth* has a major concern with a woman who is unmistakeably a foreigner, an outsider from Moab, and with her impact on the community in Bethlehem. Ruth and Boaz's son is named in the genealogy of Chapter 4 as the direct ancestor of King David, and her impact is therefore substantial, with long-lasting consequences which go to the heart of subsequent understandings of national identity. *Ruth* is therefore of huge importance in examining issues of identity and election as they relate to divine agency and the role of the outsider.

Approach

I intend firstly to examine the purpose of the *Ruth* as it has been presented, and Ruth's reception as an exemplary figure within the narrative, along with the nature of the genealogy and its link to King David. I shall look at Ruth's status as foreigner, and particularly her troublesome status as a Moabite in the context of her ostensible role as ancestor of the Davidic dynasty.

I shall examine the relevance of Ruth's status as foreigner and/or convert and her high profile marriage as a possible – though, as it turns out, unlikely - critique of the portrayal of exogamous marriage within Ezra and Nehemiah, along with the attendant difficulty of dating the book. I shall then go on to question the treatment which has resulted from Ruth's Moabite heritage, and in particular the views which

have arisen regarding Ruth's status as a 'convert'. This will include the extent to which she is assimilated into the community within early, mediaeval and modern commentary and tradition, and the perception of Ruth as a 'role model' for converts to Judaism. I shall look at the extent to which Ruth is actually converted, accepted, and assimilated within the text, and to ask whether Ruth's identity as a Moabite ever changes, or whether her Jewish and Moabite identities are ultimately held together in tension.

I shall go on to examine the extent to which Ruth can be seen as a divine agent. This will involve an analysis of the very few mentions of direct divine action compared with the frequent mention of God by the main characters within the narrative. In particular I shall look at the use of the term *ḥesed* and how dialogue within *Ruth* referring both to God and *ḥesed* impacts on an understanding of the relationship between human and divine action and response. I shall then examine Ruth's actions as a whole: whether she is one who acts or is acted upon, the consequences of her actions, and the extent to which Ruth may be thought of as an agent of change.

Finally I intend to examine the relationships between Ruth, Naomi and Boaz, and to look at how these change over time and the effect which they have on the wider community. I shall attempt to assess the theological significance of Ruth as a protagonist and of the book itself in the context of Israel's salvation history, given the references within *Ruth* to earlier incidents within Genesis and Deuteronomy and its current place within scripture as an origin narrative for the Davidic line.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulties with dating and context, I shall propose an understanding of the significance of the text within the canon for both Jews and Christians which takes into account the role of Ruth as an ancestor of both David and Jesus within the respective traditions.

The reception of the scroll of *Ruth*

Sasson points out that "Ruth's canonicity and inspired nature were never seriously questioned"[286] and cites Rabbi Simeon b. Johai's second century CE opinion, quoted in *b. Megillah 7a,* that "*Ruth, Song of Songs,* and *Esther* 'defile the hands'."[287] He goes on to assert that "Ruth's connection with David and his ancestors, the beauty of Ruth's language, the nobility of its characters, the frequent mention of the divine name -- all these were elements which doubtless played a role in securing the scroll a place within Scriptures."[288] The authorship of the scroll was traditionally ascribed to Samuel, and Sasson argues that this is "testimony to Rabbinic recognition that *Ruth's* language was strongly reminiscent of that of *Samuel* and *Judges.*"[289] Samuel's authorship is still upheld by conservative Jewish commentators,[290] and the genealogy of Chapter 4 is seen by some ultra-orthodox voices as central to the purpose of the scroll. Meir Zlotowitz, commenting on any perceived impropriety in Boaz and Ruth's encounter on the threshing-floor, calls the meeting "the dawn of

[286] Sasson, *Ruth*, p. 11.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] E.g. Scherman, Nosson and Zlotowitz, Meir, *Megillas Ruth: A new translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1976, p. xx.

the blazing sun of the Davidic dynasty"[291] and goes on to describe Ruth herself as "the righteous and pure 'dove' for whose sake God spared incestuous, selfish, iniquitous Moab for over seven hundred years."[292]

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi draws attention to the suggestion that Ruth was written "either aiming to exonerate David's foreign origin or promoting popular acceptance of the Davidic dynasty with the active role of foreigners under David and Solomon."[293] While the scroll of *Ruth* and its protagonist seem to have been held in high regard from an early stage in their reception, *Ruth's* subsequent adoption for liturgical use during the Festival of Weeks[294] can only have cemented its reputation. The portrayal of Ruth herself and the treatment of her 'foreignness' are therefore highly significant given the importance of David in subsequent tradition. As a Moabite woman, Ruth makes an unlikely matriarch for the royal dynasty, and the methods which have been used to comprehend and defuse her status as outsider are revealing. The very early acceptance of Ruth indicate that her origin seems not to have been a problem, but it becomes clear on closer examination that Ruth's status as exemplary 'convert' is central to her heroine status.

[291] Scherman and Zlotowitz, *Megillas Ruth*, p. xxvii.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn and Frymer-Kensky, Tikva, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011, p. xix.
[294] For background to the scroll's liturgical use see e.g. Sasson, *Ruth*, pp. 12-13; Eskenazi and Cohn, *Ruth*, p. xxvi; Larkin, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 35.

The problem of Ezra/Nehemiah and Ruth's "conversion"

Hubbard noted in 1988 that "until recently, a strong consensus taught that Ruth was a polemic written to protest the policy of Ezra and Nehemiah against interracial marriages,"[295] and went on to state that "obviously, if true, this view would entail a postexilic date of composition."[296] Hubbard himself outlined several problems with this contention, including the lack of polemic tone, Ruth's links with Solomon whose marriages were "the very example Nehemiah cites (Neh. 13:26),"[297] and the very fact that the scroll was included in the canon by "the same priests who carried on the work of Ezra and Nehemiah."[298]

Even Bush, whose analysis of the Hebrew text ultimately brings him down in favour of a date "at the beginning of the post-exilic period,"[299] sees the predominant theme of the scroll not in its treatment of foreigners, but in the redemption of Naomi, whom he describes as "unquestionably the most important character in the book."[300] It is very unclear therefore whether Ruth was originally written with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah in mind. Nevertheless, the scroll's presence in the canon certainly offers its own independent challenge to passages such as Deuteronomy 23.3-6 which view outsiders as a threat and potential contamination, and it is this challenge which commentators have sought to address from the beginning through the device of Ruth's assumed 'conversion'.

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[295] Hubbard, Robert L., *The Book of Ruth (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 35.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid., p. 36.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Bush, Frederic, *World Biblical Commentary Volume 9: Ruth/Esther,* Dallas: Word, 1996, p. 30.
[300] Ibid., p. 49.

This route is exemplified in The Targum of Ruth, the dating of which is contested,[301] but which is significant given the liturgical context of the Megilloth and the role of the Targumim in interpreting them.[302] *Targum Ruth* inserts a whole conversation regarding conversion into Chapter 1 of the scroll, beginning with verse 10 where Ruth and Orpah declare "We shall not return to our people, nor to our god. Rather, we shall return with you to your people, *to become proselytized*."[303] After Orpah's familiar departure, Ruth's intense pleading with Naomi in the MT (Ruth 1.16ff) becomes in the Targum a dialogue about the former's conversion, her declaration to Naomi interspersed with Naomi's instructional responses:

> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not to follow you; *for I demand to be converted." Naomi said, "We are commanded to observe the Sabbaths and Holy Days, not to walk more than two thousand cubits." Ruth replied,* "Wherever you go, I shall go." *Naomi said, "We are commanded not to dwell together with the nations." Ruth replied,* "Wherever you dwell, I shall dwell." Naomi said, "We are commanded to observe six hundred and thirteen commandments."[304]

[301] Beattie argues for a potentially very early date, based partly on the divergence between the Targum and Mishnah in Ruth 1.17 – see Beattie, D.R.G., 'The Targum of Ruth — 18 years on' in *Hermathena* 138 (Summer 1985), pp. 57-61, p. 60, and subsequently Beattie, D.R.G., 'Towards Dating the Targum of Ruth' in Martin, James D. and Davies, Philip R. (eds), *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane (JSOT Supp 42),* Sheffield: JSOT Press, pp. 205-221, whereas Brady, initially sympathetic to this argument (e.g. Brady, Christian M. M., 'The Conversion of Ruth in Targum Ruth' in *Review of Rabbinic Judaism Vol 16 Issue 2 (2013)*, pp. 133-146, p.138), has more recently argue that this is not necessarily the case (e.g. Brady, Christian M.M. *The proselyte and the prophet: character development in Targum Ruth*, Boston: Brill, 2017, pp.18-20).

[302] Brady notes that "a central, if not primary, role of the Targumim was to provide an Aramaic version of the biblical text read in the synagogue" (Brady, *The proselyte and the prophet*, p. 16) and that "the nature of... exegetical additions [in the Targumim] often shows evidence of a synagogal context." (Ibid., p. 17).

[303] Levine, Étan, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973, p.20 (my italics).

[304] Ibid., p. 22: Ruth 1.16 (my italics).

The dialogue in the Targum continues, until Naomi eventually relents when Ruth tells her to stop talking and makes the same oath as in the MT: "Thus and more may the LORD do to me, if anything other than death shall separate us," following which Naomi "saw how determined she was to go with her, so she ceased arguing with her. And the two of them went on until they reached Bethlehem."[305]

Even when Boaz inquires who Ruth is in Ruth 2:6, the Targum inserts "She is the one who returned *and was proselytized*, with Naomi"[306] to make her converted status clear. Boaz in turn assures both Ruth and the hearer of the Targum that Ruth's Moabite ancestry is not a problem by attenuating the specific Deuteronomic prohibitions against Moab in his own midrash of the situation: "And she said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your eyes, to acknowledge me, when I am of a foreign people, from the daughters of Moab, who are not permitted to enter into the congregation of the LORD?' Boaz said in reply, 'I have been surely told about the edict of the sages: that when the LORD commanded concerning you, he commanded only in reference to the males,"[307] before referring again to her conversion in Ruth 2.12.[308]

The effect of these interpolations is threefold. Firstly, Ruth is portrayed as a definite and full convert to the religion of the God of Israel as practiced in Bethlehem, therefore creating an exemplary convert and precluding the possibility that she

[305] Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, p. 22-4: Ruth 1.17-19.
[306] Ibid., p. 24 (my italics).
[307] Ibid., p. 26: Ruth 2.10-11. See Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, pp. lviii-lix for a discussion of the rabbinic interpretations of Deut 23 as applicable (or not) to Moabite women.
[308] Ibid., p. 28.

introduces any Moabite influence into the people of God or indeed the house of David.[309] Secondly, Naomi's silence, which can be interpreted in a number of ways as I shall investigate below, is filled with instructional wisdom as she becomes Ruth's teacher in the faith rather than (potentially) a begrudging mother-in-law who has just acquired one more mouth to feed. Thirdly, suggestions of impropriety are removed from Boaz, making him a worthy hero and defusing the potential for his actions to be seen as in any way negating aspects of the law. Interestingly, the end of the famine is also attributed to Boaz's prayers in the Targum,[310] and the sexual ambiguity of the threshing-floor encounter is defused by the Targum's insistence that upon discovering a young woman at his feet, Boaz "controlled his inclination, and refrained from approaching her, just like Joseph the Righteous who had refused to approach the Egyptian wife of his master..."[311] Thus any idea of 'foreignness' being imported into Israel by the presence of Ruth is mitigated by the extent of her assimilation as portrayed in the Targum and subsequent interpretation, which picks up the same idea, while at the same time any moral ambiguity in Ruth and Boaz's actions is downplayed through explanatory notes regarding their conduct.

A number of modern commentators have noted the difficulties associated with such a reading of Ruth's 'conversion'. Aside from the fact that the dialogue between Naomi and Ruth so vividly imagined in the midrash takes the form of a

[309] Brady contends that throughout the text "the Targumist is attempting to address one of the most fundamental questions presented by (or perhaps even being answered by) the book of Ruth: How is it that Boaz should marry a Moabite and that she should be the great-grandmother of King David?" (Brady, *The proselyte and the prophet*, p. 138).
[310] Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Ruth*, p. 20: Ruth 1.6, where he is called "Boaz the Righteous."
[311] Ibid., p. 32: Ruth 3.8.

simple declaration (and lack of response) in the biblical text, there are also continued and repeated references to Ruth as a Moabite throughout the scroll, subsequent to her declaration in Ruth 1.16. Indeed, as she is referred to simply as "Ruth" before leaving her home country of Moab (1.4, 1.14, 1.16), it is only *after* her declaration in 1.16 that Ruth becomes "the Moabite, her daughter-in-law" to Naomi, upon their arrival in Bethlehem (1.22). Leaving aside her own self-description as "Ruth your servant" to Boaz in 3.9, Ruth is described without reference to her ethnicity only three times after her arrival in Bethlehem (2.8, 2.22, 4.13), while on six occasions she is "Ruth the Moabite", or simply "the Moabite" (1.22, 2.2, 2.6, 2.21, 4.5, 4.10).

Neil Glover, exploring the issues of ethnicity in Ruth, proposes "that Ruth's name is used without the Moabite tag whenever her re-situation within Israel has been recognized."[312] Thus for Glover, Ruth is gradually recognised by first Boaz (2.8), then by Naomi (2.22) and finally by the entire assembly (4.13): "After the marriage takes place the assembly can celebrate Ruth's re-situation within the house of Boaz (4.12-13) and by reference to Rachel and Leah, within the house of Israel. At last, they too refer to her as 'Ruth'."[313] If, as Glover argues, Ruth has effectively ceased to be a Moabite with this final re-situation and "her ethnic status has actually changed"[314] then it is perhaps significant that the adulation of the assembled women is not reflected in a greater level of assimilation in the final six verses of the scroll, including the genealogy, from which not only Ruth's Moabite identity but

[312] Glover, Neil, 'Your People, My People: An Exploration of Ethnicity in Ruth', in *JSOT 33.3 (2009)*, pp. 293-313, p. 302.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Glover, 'Your people, My people', p. 302.

also her name disappear entirely. Is Ruth accepted, or is she simply neutralised as a signifier of David's potentially embarrassing Moabite ancestry, in this reading?

Any assimilation of Ruth into the community appears to be gradual, and unaffected by Ruth's declaration in 1.16 that "your people shall be my people, and your God my God." Despite the later interpretation of 1.16-17, Eskenazi draws attention to Shaye Cohen's work on Jewish origins, in which "he claims that conversion was not formalized until the Hellenistic era, around the second century BCE,"[315] and emphasises that "Ruth affirms her commitment to Israel's God because it is Naomi's God, not because of some independent conviction of her own."[316] Although she concedes that at this point through the verbal link to Orpah's decision, "the author underscores that Ruth is indeed standing at a crossroads," Eskenazi argues that "whatever transformation takes place at this moment, it is not perceived within the narrative as an altered ethnic or communal identity."[317]

It seems that Ruth remains distinctively Moabite at this moment of transition where she makes her first commitment to the God of Israel in the text. This may be pertinent to the role which she goes on to play as an agent of change in Bethlehem, and from the very beginning Ruth's own view of God appears to be more nuanced and sophisticated than her mother-in-law's. Naomi appears to see divine action as a sort of celestial reward system, an attitude first seen in her exhortation in 1.8, "May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me,"

[315] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, p. xliii.
[316] Ibid., p. 21.
[317] Ibid.

and in her complaint of 1.13: "it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me."

By contrast, as Ellen van Wolde states, "Ruth's trust in YHWH is not like Naomi's. Ruth does not say that she believes in proportionality, far less does she know whether her God will reward her for her good behaviour... And yet Ruth believes and sets out."[318] Ruth takes a decision to step into the unknown and to place her trust in the God of Israel, and however she understands that decision, it is pivotal to her future and that of Israel itself. This brings me to the question of the extent to which Ruth can be seen as a divine agent, to which I now turn.

Ruth as agent of YHWH

Ruth's decision to go with Naomi despite her mother-in-law's protestations is the first and most dramatic in a series of choices which she makes, each of which contribute to the restoration of Naomi, and ultimately of Israel. Trible notes that "from a cultural perspective, Ruth has chosen death over life. She has disavowed the solidarity of family; she has abandoned national identity; and she has renounced religious affiliation."[319] For Trible, only Abraham comes close to the radicality displayed by Ruth, and she makes the point that Abraham was sustained by a divine promise and a family. She goes on to say that "Ruth stands alone; she

[318] van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi,* p. 25.
[319] Trible, Phyllis, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 173.

possesses nothing. No God has called her; no deity has promised her blessing; no human being has come to her aid."[320]

It is certainly true that the scroll of Ruth does not contain the call and promise of Genesis 12.1-3, and yet there are, as Trible rightly points out, substantial parallels between the two. For Trible though, it is not the declaration of allegiance to Naomi's people or to Israel's God that is most staggering, it is her decision to commit to another woman's prosperity even beyond death. "One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends on men. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel."[321] This is indeed a radical decision, and yet there is something more to Ruth's declaration in 1.17 that "your people shall be my people, and your God my God," than a simple confirmation that she has thrown her lot in with Naomi for better or for worse.

Fewell and Gunn suggest that Ruth's statement about God is part of a hyperbolic response to Naomi's bitter complaints about her treatment by the same God in the preceding verses, and a way of reassuring Naomi that she is not part of the problem: "Her willingness to change people and gods is also a response."[322] They conclude that "Religious conversion serves another commitment: that of Ruth to her mother-in-law."[323] Indeed, for Fewell and Gunn, Ruth's religious commitment is almost flippant: "But god in this speech ranks merely with lodging houses and burial plots. How easily Ruth changes her allegiance to Naomi's god! How easily, we

[320] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 173.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, p. 96.
[323] Ibid.

could (ungallantly) wonder, might she change it again? - if circumstances so dictated."[324] This view, at the opposite extreme from the traditional notion of a model convert, suggests that for Ruth faith is a convenient marker to display allegiance to another human being, rather than any indication of relationship to the divine. The final part of Ruth 1.17 is interesting in this context however: כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יוֹסִיף כִּי הַמָּוֶת יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ ("May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"). While this may seem at first glance to be similar to any number of formulaic 'oaths' which invoke the witness of God, the nature of the vow and its context here suggest that it is more significant in discerning Ruth's motivation and commitment than it may initially appear.

Other characters in the scroll liberally sprinkle their speech with references to the divine name,[325] to invoke or petition for blessing, or even to attribute blame for their situation, but 1.17 is the only occasion when Ruth specifically uses the name of God. Hubbard notes the strength of this oath as a mark of the "deadly seriousness of her intentions,"[326] and points out given Naomi's previous lament about her treatment at God's hands that if she failed to live up to her oath "Ruth could conceivably expect the worst."[327] In passing however, Hubbard also points out one of the most interesting aspects of Ruth's oath from the perspective of this investigation. "Strikingly," he notes, "elsewhere the oath is spoken only by leaders about weighty matters of state... Does she, thereby, speak audaciously as a royal

[324] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, p. 97.
[325] Boaz and Naomi between them manage thirteen such references.
[326] Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 119.
[327] Ibid.

figure in anticipation of 4:17?"[328] The idea of Ruth speaking as a leader of Israel may seem a stretch from this verse alone, and yet her subsequent actions and the language used about and by Ruth in the rest of the scroll suggest it is a distinct possibility.

Hubbard also notes Trible's reference to Abraham,[329] and goes on to state that "Thematically, this allusion to Abraham sets this story in continuity with that one. Thus a sense of similar destiny hangs over Ruth's story."[330] Ruth is therefore connected thematically with Abraham at this defining moment and linguistically with the great leaders who are to follow her. In conjunction with the references to Rachel, Leah and Tamar in the adulation of the witnesses in 4.11-12, it appears that Ruth may be offered to us as a divinely inspired protagonist throughout the story, regardless of the 'reality' of her conversion, and despite or perhaps because of the continued nature of her Moabite identity which allows her to bring change to Bethlehem. This is further suggested by an examination of the references to the divine name in conjunction with the concept of *ḥesed* and Ruth's own actions.

Ruth and *ḥesed*

Whether or not the scroll of Ruth was written to cement the legitimacy of the Davidic line, commentators are broadly agreed about the centrality of the concept of *ḥesed* ("loving-kindness") within the story. Eskenazi begins her introduction to

[328] Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 119, footnote 31. Hubbard lists the examples elsewhere as 1 Sam 14.44; 2 Sam 19.14; 1 Kings 2.23; 20.10; 2 Kings 6.31; 1 Kings 19.2; 1 Sam 20.13; 1 Sam 25.22; 1 Sam 3.17; 2 Sam 3.9; 2 Sam 3.35.
[329] Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 120.
[330] Ibid., p. 121.

the JPS commentary by declaring that "No story in the Bible demonstrates more fully than the Book of Ruth the extraordinary power of love, channeled as *ḥesed* – kindness or generosity – that goes beyond the expected obligation. No book better models what it means to love the stranger and what it means to demonstrate *ḥesed*…"[331] Tikva Frymer-Kensky notes that *ḥesed* "refers to acts of benevolence that one does out of kindness, not out of any obligation. Yet despite its ostensibly selfless nature, a particular act of goodness, or *ḥesed*, often sets up an expectation of reciprocation… the first action can set off a chain of good deeds."[332]

The concept of *ḥesed* is used in the Bible of both human and divine interaction, but with subtle differences in the nature of the actions involved, and specifically in whether *ḥesed* is deserved or undeserved. Campbell, in examining the relationship between *ḥesed* and change in the Book of Ruth, builds on Sakenfeld's exploration of *ḥesed,*[333] in which she summarises the features of human *ḥesed*, before exploring the particular features of divine *ḥesed* and its relationship with forgiveness. Campbell's conclusion is that "virtually the only difference I sense between human and divine *ḥesed* lies with the determination on the part of God to act in a *ḥesed* way even when profound forbearance and undeserved forgiveness is required".[334] The expectation or realisation of reciprocity is therefore not a necessary feature of divine *ḥesed*, but is almost always present in human notions of

[331] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, p. xv.
[332] Ibid., pp. xlviii.
[333] Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.
[334] Campbell, Edward F., 'Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, *hesed* (חסד) and change' in *Austin Seminary Bulletin 105,* 1990*,* pp. 64-74, p. 68.

ḥesed, as expressed for example in David's instructions to Solomon regarding the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite in 1 Kings 2.7.[335]

Often it is the LORD's *ḥesed* that is invoked to repay perceived acts of human *ḥesed* by others, e.g. in 2 Sam 2.5-6, and this is the pattern initially assumed by Naomi in her response to Ruth's actions. In attempting to dismiss Ruth and Orpah from their (or possibly her) obligations, Naomi thanks them for their past kindness (*ḥesed*) and, having nothing else to offer in return, calls upon the LORD to show *ḥesed* to them "as you have dealt with the dead and with me." (1.8) This blessing/invocation is perhaps Naomi's method of repaying the debt she feels is owed to her daughters-in-law, and this seems to be an agreeable and mutually accepted conclusion to the relationship by Naomi and Orpah.

Ruth's response defies Naomi's expectation however, and she refuses both the offer of leave to depart implicit in Naomi's blessing, and the explicit commands to turn back in 1.11-12. Naomi's ambivalent approach to the justice of the LORD at the beginning of the scroll is highlighted in this passage, where she moves from the blessing of 1.8 and accompanying assumption of divine justice, to the complaint that "the hand of the LORD has turned against me" in 1.13, emphasised even further on her return to Bethlehem in 1.19-21 in her complaints to the women who greet her, which end with the quite shocking accusation וְשַׁדַּי הֵרַע לִי ("the Almighty has brought calamity upon me"; literally – "has done evil to me"). Naomi's expectation that God should operate a divine system of reward and punishment based on the

[335] "Deal loyally, however, with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; *for with such loyalty they met me* when I fled from your brother Absalom."

human understanding of justice is therefore immediately undermined by her own perceived experience of injustice, but is also challenged by Ruth's awkward and perhaps unwanted declaration of commitment and continuing acts of *ḥesed*.

Naomi's lack of response in 1.18 leaves much unexplained, but Sakenfeld points out that "Ruth is offering an undesired 'gift'…" and that "Naomi's silence may be interpreted as despair, anger, or resignation – in her own word, bitterness. For Naomi, Ruth's presence is as much a reminder of tragedy as it is potential comfort."[336] Certainly the enthusiasm of Ruth's promise seems not to be reciprocated. Fewell and Gunn pick up on this poignant silence which greets Ruth's emotive declaration, and rather than interpolating the ambiguity noted by Sakenfeld or the didactic conversion dialogue of the Targum, read into it Naomi's mounting annoyance with Ruth at her intransigence and the burden that she will become. They ask the question, if Ruth's speech "can melt the hearts of a myriad preachers and congregations down the centuries, why not Naomi's heart?"[337] Drawing parallels with the Judah-Tamar story of Genesis 38 (itself explicitly referred to in 4.12 by the people of Bethlehem), and Judah's suspicion of a Canaanite woman, Fewell and Gunn suggest that Naomi's silence "emerges as resentment, irritation, frustration, unease. Ruth the Moabite is to her an inconvenience, a menace even."[338]

[336] Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob, *Ruth (Interpretation: A Bible commentary for teaching and preaching),* Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999, p.35.
[337] Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M., '"A son is born to Naomi!" Literary allusions and interpretation in the Book of Ruth' in *JSOT 13(40) - 1988*, pp. 99-108, p. 100.
[338] Fewell and Gunn, '"A son is born to Naomi!", p. 104.

Ruth's own declaration in 1.16-17 is even more telling in the light of this response. Ruth's oath is not made in response to any personal experience of divine *ḥesed* of which we are made aware in the scroll. Nor is it made, as I have discussed, in the hope of the kind of reciprocity expressed as an expectation in the blessings of Naomi (and later Boaz). Ruth's oath seems to be itself an expression or reflection of divine *ḥesed*, and its implications may need to be reassessed in this light, given the subsequent portrayal of Ruth's actions and her own role as an agent of change in Bethlehem.

Ruth as agent of change

Bush is adamant in analysing the genre and structure of the book that "the discourse structure unmistakably and emphatically makes clear that the problem of the story is the death and emptiness that have afflicted the life of Naomi"[339] and regards the question of an heir for Elimelech as "but a secondary concern to the story… its only role in the story is as part of the resolution of a subordinate plot development."[340] Certainly the fate of Naomi, and indeed the fates of Ruth and Boaz, play a more central role in the developing narrative than the requirement to find an heir for Elimelech. Additionally, the legal positions of Boaz and the unnamed 'redeemer' with regard to redemption and marriage are unclear and complicated by discrepancies with descriptions of biblical law elsewhere,[341] and

[339] Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, p. 51.
[340] Ibid.
[341] See Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, pp. 48-63, for a discussion of these legal difficulties and their possible resolution, and Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, pp. 215ff for a detailed discussion of the problem in Ruth 4.5-6.

appear to function more as plot devices or rhetorical strategies to achieve the goals of the protagonists than as an explanation of levirate-type obligations.

If the change in fortune of Naomi is a central theme of the scroll, however, it is difficult to agree with Bush regarding the unchanging natures of the book's characters. Neither Bush's contention that Naomi's initial words in 1.8-9 "exhibit only care and concern for her daughters-in-law and none for her own situation,"[342] nor his assertion that "this same concern she expresses throughout,"[343] ring true in the light of the discussion above regarding Naomi's silence in 1.18. Her lack of response there may be ambivalent, but as Linafelt notes, "what does become clear in the verses that follow, however, is that Naomi's "bitterness" (first mentioned in verse 13) is very real, and that she has yet to fully grasp the fact of Ruth's solidarity with her."[344]

Naomi certainly does not arrive home with any faith in the willingness of God or the capacity of *ḥesed* to change her situation. Indeed, she returns to Bethlehem with an accusation on her lips: וַיהוָה עָנָה בִי וְשַׁדַּי הֵרַע לִי ("The LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has done evil to me") (Ruth 1.21). Linafelt notes that Naomi must endure her hardship without the apparent possibility of divine intervention, but goes on to comment that "what Naomi has instead of God's palpable presence is the companionship of Ruth. This is, as we have seen already and will see more fully

[342] Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, p. 45.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Linafelt, Tod & Beal, Timothy K., *Ruth and Esther (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry)*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1999, p. 17.

as the narrative proceeds, no small thing…"[345] Our initial encounters with Naomi are far from the "unremittingly positive characterization"[346] described by Bush, and it is only once Ruth acts that change can become possible for Naomi.

In the midst of Naomi's gloom, Ruth immediately takes control of the situation in Chapter 2. Once the narrator has introduced the character of Boaz into the picture, it is Ruth's initiative to "go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour" (2.2) which leads to the serendipitous meeting between the two. Rashkow points out that "Ruth acts decisively, her speech acts direct and to the point."[347] Ruth's decisiveness and her determination to go and find a solution for their poverty coax some acknowledgement out of Naomi, whose response of לְכִי בִתִּי ("Go, my daughter") (2.2) recognises for the first time in her direct speech Ruth's commitment to her and their new bonds of family. Ruth is here not "the Moabite" but "my daughter", and change has begun.

Boaz appears to start from a very different position, introduced as a character of some power and standing, an אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל ("a mighty man of worth") no less (Ruth 2.1), whose opening dialogue is at least more positive than Naomi's, even if the exchange with his workers in 2.4 is formulaic rather than an indicator of his piety.[348] Boaz also seems to take an immediate interest in Ruth's plight, even if his opening question, "To whom does this young woman belong?" (2.5) is as Trible

[345] Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther,* p. 20.
[346] Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, p. 46.
[347] Rashkow, Ilona, 'Ruth: The discourse of power and the power of discourse' in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth (A Feminist Companion to the Bible),* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, p. 33.
[348] Commentators are split between the two possibilities: cf. e.g. Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 29-30 vs. Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, pp. 40-41 for two equally plausible arguments.

notes, “truly a patriarchal question. After all, a young woman must belong to someone; she is possession, not person.”[349]

After hearing of Ruth’s identity, her connection with Naomi, her petition to Boaz’s servant and her subsequent hard work, Boaz appears to be magnanimous in his offer to Ruth of refreshment and protection from harassment. It is possible to see in Boaz’s response primarily the generous man of wealth, the “relative who offers protection”[350] in Sakenfeld’s view, or the more suggestive motive identified by Fewell and Gunn, who wonder “whether his solicitousness in the matter of touching is to be construed, to put it anachronistically, as a classic case of a Freudian slip.”[351] Linafelt notes that “it is up to the reader to decide if Boaz thinks he is protecting Ruth from sexual advances that are unwanted from her perspective, or if he is trying to protect her from sexual advances unwanted from his perspective because he himself has a romantic or sexual interest in her.”[352] In any event, it is Ruth’s bold initiative that has brought the meeting about, and she now goes further, even as she falls to the ground in a very expressive gesture of thanks, by seizing the initiative in the dialogue again with her first words to Boaz: “Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” (2.10).

[349] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality,* p. 176.
[350] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, p. 43.
[351] Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M., ‘Boaz, Pillar of Society: Measures of worth in the Book of Ruth’ in *JSOT 14(45) - 1989*, pp. 45-59, p. 47.
[352] Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p.34.

Whether in straightforward response to her question, or as cover for his own interest in her, Boaz's response to Ruth affirms again the link between her story and that of Abraham, highlighted as noted above by Trible and Hubbard, as her question elicits from him a very public acknowledgement of her own moral stature: "All that you have done… has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before." (2.11) Boaz goes on to invoke God's blessing upon her for her deeds: "May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" (2.12), to which Ruth again responds graciously. As Rashkow now notes, "the power of Ruth's discourse has drawn Boaz into her story. Significantly, Ruth has the last word."[353] Moreover, the words of blessing in 2.12 elicited by Ruth's initiative will become the means by which she will further effect change in Boaz in the scene on the threshing-floor in Chapter 3.

Boaz's subsequent generosity is provoked by this boldness of Ruth's approach, and Trible points out that Boaz has only now begun to help, despite having heard previously of Naomi's plight and all that Ruth had done for her. "Now the story does not censure Boaz for dereliction of duty, but it does subordinate him to the women."[354] It appears that even Boaz the ostensibly good-natured man of standing needs a spark from Ruth to engage his own capacity for *ḥesed*. Once his generosity is triggered, whatever his initial motives, it in turn triggers a change in Naomi once Ruth returns with a bounty of grain and her story of the lucky encounter in the

[353] Rashkow, 'Ruth: The discourse of power', p. 36.
[354] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 178.

field. Naomi's response in 2.20: "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness [חַסְדּוֹ] has not forsaken the living or the dead!" is the first indication that she is willing to place her faith in the possibility of redemption, and a first indication that the *ḥesed* which Ruth brought with her to Bethlehem is starting to bear fruit and to be reciprocated.

In Chapter 3, perhaps emboldened by the success of Ruth's initiative, Naomi herself attempts to bring about change, with her plan to win over Boaz using Ruth's charms. Although her initial suggestion to Ruth, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you" (Ruth 3.1b), seems to indicate a wholesome motive, the plan which she outlines involves deception, "an outrageous scheme, dangerous and delicate"[355] as Trible puts it, which plays on the stereotype of Moabites as wanton and immoral. As Linafelt describes it, "Naomi is sending an unmarried Moabite woman out in the dead of night to lie down next to a (perhaps drunken) man, to uncover that man in some way, and then to wait and see what he tells her to do."[356] Linafelt notes the reputation of the threshing floor in Hosea 9, commenting that "the place is associated in Israelite imagination if not in fact with illicit sexual activity."[357] Fewell and Gunn argue that the strong allusions to both the story of Lot and of Jacob and Leah in Genesis 29, "suggest that entrapment is the goal. Sexual intercourse, if not pregnancy, will enforce either marriage or a pay-off."[358]

[355] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 182.
[356] Linafelt & Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 48.
[357] Ibid., p. 49.
[358] Fewell and Gunn, 'A Son is Born to Naomi!', p. 106.

Although the text states that "she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her" (Ruth 3.6), this is not the whole story, as Ruth once again takes the initiative, modifying Naomi's plan and initiating, rather than passively reacting to, Boaz's response on the threshing-floor. When a startled Boaz wakes and asks of the woman at his 'feet', "Who are you?" (Ruth 3.9), it is Ruth who tells Boaz 'what he is to do', not the other way round. Trible notes the shift in emphasis of Boaz's question from that in Ruth 2.5: "If their first meeting elicited a question of ownership… the second evokes a question of personal identity,"[359] as Ruth is now recognised by Boaz in her own right. Her response to his question first subtly changes her own status, אָנֹכִי רוּת אֲמָתֶךָ ("I am Ruth, your handmaid") (3.9, rather than the שִׁפְחָתֶךָ ("servant girl") of 2.13), and then offers him a course of action, as Ruth again becomes the agent of change, this time for Boaz.

Ruth's statement: "spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin" (Ruth 3.9), alters Naomi's original plan of obedience to Boaz's instructions, and instead becomes the catalyst for the story's resolution. Linafelt notes, in the midst of the sexually charged innuendo of this whole scene, that "whether or not her instructions to Boaz are a proposal for marriage or an invitation to sexual intercourse is another of the central ambiguities on which the scene turns,"[360] and argues that the ambiguity should be maintained. He goes on to suggest that "it is not just that the reader must decide what to make of Ruth's ambiguous invitation, but that Boaz must as well. In forcing Boaz to decide what to make of this woman

[359] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 183.
[360] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 54.

lying at his feet, Ruth is also continuing to push him past his moral and theological platitudes."[361]

Ruth's instruction is not without context though, and very pointedly recalls Boaz's own words to Ruth in the fields, "May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" (Ruth 2.12). Linafelt suggests that Ruth thus demonstrates "her resolve not to wait around for the Lord but to take a gamble on Boaz and his *kanap* instead,"[362] but this is to miss the implications of the point, made by Trible, that "Ruth recalls and appropriates the language as she challenges Boaz to be the occasion of divine blessing in her life."[363] Ruth is not here showing Boaz's words to be empty, so much as showing him how they might be fulfilled.

Trible's assessment of the situation is unequivocal: "Ruth's utterance conforms to her portrayal throughout the story as the defier of custom, the maker of decisions, and the worker of salvation."[364] Ruth does more than simply dictate Boaz's course of action, however. Her inclusion of the words כִּי גֹאֵל אָתָּה ("for you are a 'kinsman-redeemer'") in 3.9 suggest a way for Boaz to resolve not only her situation, but that of Naomi, in a way which appeals albeit in an unstraightforward manner to Israelite custom. Her words recall Naomi's in 2.20, and suggest both a responsibility and an opportunity for Boaz, but their meaning is uncertain. Sakenfeld points out that "there is a glaring gap between the appearance of the word *go'el* in Ruth 3:9b and

[361] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 55.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 184.
[364] Ibid., p. 184.

its technical usage elsewhere in the Old Testament: nowhere else is the term *go'el* associated with rights or responsibilities pertaining to marriage."[365] Linafelt also points out that "the institutions of the redemption and levirate marriage are never linked elsewhere in the bible… if they are linked here it is a linkage proposed by Ruth herself and not by social custom or legislation."[366] If this is indeed the case, rather than the linkage being simply a convenient plot device, then Ruth is proposing an understanding of Boaz's status which conflates and subtly alters the presentation of tradition elsewhere, and it appears to be an interpretation which appeals to him.

Irmtraud Fischer picks up on the difficulties noted by other commentators in reconciling the concept of redemption in the book of Ruth with the traditions found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and comments on the problems associated with dating the text and its relationship with Torah.[367] She argues that "narratives in the Hebrew Bible that illustrate the law are almost always of halakhic nature"[368] and that "here, Ruth's author lets her protagonist become an exegete: Ruth is creating a halakhah from two legal institutions that guarantee the solidarity of kinship."[369] Fischer goes on to state that "in Boaz, Ruth has found a man who is open for such a halakhah. He is a God-fearing man and recognizes Ruth's kindness, which is similar to that of his God."[370]

[365] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, p. 59.
[366] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, pp. 56.
[367] Fischer, Irmtraud, 'A 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah?' in in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth and Esther (A Feminist Companion to the Bible – Second Series),* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, p. 24-49: p. 39.
[368] Ibid., p. 40.
[369] Fischer, 'A 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah?', p. 40.
[370] Ibid., p. 41.

This interpretation is appealing, and Boaz is indeed provoked by Ruth's words into a further expression of admiration for her acts of kindness. Once again invoking the LORD's blessing on Ruth, בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בִּתִּי ("May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter"), Boaz praises this new act of *ḥesed* in choosing him rather than going after a young man "whether poor or rich" (3.10). Addressing her for the second time as "my daughter" (cf. 2.8), Boaz accedes to her request, and assures her: "I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman." (3.11) Trible draws attention to Boaz's description of Ruth at this point: "'A woman of worth' (*'ĕšet hayil*): that description matches precisely the depiction of Boaz as 'a man of worth' (*'îš gibbôr hayil, 2:1).*"[371] In it she sees a bigger picture: "Female and male; foreigner and native; youth and age; poor and wealthy – all these opposites are mediated by human worth."[372] I suggest that the picture is even bigger still; all of these opposites, and human worth itself, are mediated by divine *ḥesed*, expressed in the *ḥesed* of Ruth, to which Boaz responds, and which will lead to the restoration of Naomi and of Bethlehem in the actions of Chapter 4. Perhaps, as Campbell argues, "Boaz simply hadn't used his *ḥesed*-imagination yet. And so the agents of change needed to work on him."[373] Now he is ready to take the sort of bold action to help Ruth, and by extension Naomi, which seems not initially to have occurred to him.

It is also worth noting that the echoes of our other case studies in the setting for this encounter are fascinating. Linafelt draws attention to the description of Ruth's

[371] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 184.
[372] Ibid., p. 184.
[373] Campbell, 'Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, *hesed* (חסד) and change', p. 74.

approach: וַתָּבֹא בַלָּט ("she came softly") noting that "the closest parallel elsewhere in the Bible to the word's use in our scene is Judges 4, where Jael lulls a trusting Sisera with a skin of milk and then approached him *balla't* [softly]."[374] He goes on to comment on the similar subterfuge involved in Naomi's plan, "of which Boaz has no knowledge and which depends on catching him unawares an in a vulnerable position."[375] Linafelt also comments that the scene takes place "appropriately, in 'the middle of the night'… the term used throughout the Hebrew Bible to indicate a time of ambivalent destiny – the moment of both terror and exhilaration, of promise and threat."[376] He draws parallels with Exodus 11-12 and Genesis 32, but there are also striking echoes of the scene in Exodus 4 at a similarly temporary lodging place in the night-time, when Zipporah unexpectedly takes the initiative and overcomes an imminent threat.

While the resolution of Ruth's situation is less violent than those of Jael or Zipporah, it also takes place in the kind of liminal space where expectations are confounded - in Ruth's case, the expectation of a Moabite woman's behaviour which even Naomi appears to share. In each case, we also see the initiative of an 'outsider', working out the divine will through unexpected means. If Ruth's position as such an 'outsider' is affirmed, then her constant demonstration of *ḥesed*, her determination to take the initiative, and her perseverance and faith in her course of action despite the lack of reassurance of any explicitly expressed divine command

[374] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, pp. 51-2.
[375] Ibid., p. 52.
[376] Ibid.

or favour, are as potentially surprising and threatening to a comfortable insider's view as Zipporah's flint or Jael's tent-peg.

After introducing knowledge of a mysterious nearer kinsman in 3.12, Boaz himself starts to take some initiative. He instructs Ruth to leave early the next morning to preserve her reputation (and of course his), and gives her a gift of barley with which to return to Naomi, thus assuring her of his good will. In the following scene, as soon as the nearer kinsman happens by the gate of the city, Boaz offers the man the chance to redeem Naomi's land. When the man accepts this offer however, Boaz (perhaps inspired by Ruth) begins some creative exegesis of his own, explaining to the would-be redeemer that "The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance." (4.5) The anonymous relative demurs, explaining that he does not want to threaten his own inheritance, and Boaz thus ensures both Naomi's security and his own marriage to Ruth, while citing his desire "to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance." (4.10)

At this point, with all of the story's tensions resolved, the people of the town take an active part in witnessing to and approving of the union between Ruth and Boaz. Their blessing in Ruth 4.11-12 is noteworthy for its content, but also for its omission of both Ruth's name and her ancestry. As Linafelt comments, "the blessing, in keeping with the concerns of this public, male realm, is strictly for Boaz."[377] Nevertheless, as Trible notes, "these words begin and end with Yahweh and Ruth

[377] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 73.

(though the men do not call her by name),"[378] and "comparison of Ruth to the ancient mothers Rachel, Leah and Tamar recalls the parallel between Ruth and Abraham, yet with differences."[379] While, as Sakenfeld also notes, "the final chapter of the story begins in the public setting of the town gate with a primarily if not completely male constituency,"[380] the blessing not only draws our attention back to the parallels with the Tamar story of Genesis 38, but also "locate[s] Ruth the foreigner solidly within the traditions of Israel. Recognition of her worth climaxes here in a public gathering."[381] Ruth is at once celebrated as equal to the great women of Israel's history, while at the same time being anonymised as her name and Moabite ancestry are removed one final time from the narrative.

The blessing at the gate is not the end of the narrative however, and it is followed by only the second explicit mention of divine activity in the scroll, and the only occasion where God is directly said to act,[382] in the description of Ruth's marriage to Boaz, her conception and the birth of their son. Ruth 4.13 is extremely brief in its account of events, and yet contains the extraordinary words וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָהּ הֵרָיוֹן ("the LORD gave to her conception"). Trible notes the implication here that "The gift of life resides neither in male nor female, but in God,"[383] and goes on to suggest that "intercourse between Ruth and Boaz is itself divine activity."[384] This might be going a bit far, but it seems clear that Boaz and Ruth's 'creative activity' is here in synergy

[378] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 191.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, p. 67.
[381] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 192.
[382] Linafelt points out (Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 76) that Ruth 1.6 can be seen as "simply a description of what Naomi has 'heard' God did."
[383] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 193.
[384] Ibid.

with that of the divine. Hubbard talks of God "step[ping] from the shadows… [and] granting Ruth motherhood,"[385] and Linafelt draws a (negative) comparison with Hannah, who "prays fervently for a child,"[386] before suggesting that "the phrase 'the Lord allowed her to conceive' may well be no more than a stock way of saying 'she became pregnant.'"[387] The phrase וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָהּ הֵרָיוֹן is however unique in the Hebrew Bible, and suggests, even more than in the case of Sarah (Gen 21.2) and Hannah (1 Sam 2.21), where – as elsewhere in biblical narrative – וַתַּהַר ("she conceived") is used, that here God is directly and actively involved.

While we are not given an insight within the text itself as to Ruth's desire or otherwise to conceive, the final redemption of Naomi is perceived by the women of Bethlehem in the birth of Obed, described not only using that same term *go'el* which has been used so ambiguously throughout, but as לְמֵשִׁיב נָפֶשׁ ("a restorer of life"). In the birth of Ruth's child, Naomi's life has been restored, and the women of Bethlehem are full of praise not only for the LORD, who it seems has categorically disproved Naomi's contention in 1.20-21 that וְשַׁדַּי הֵרַע לִי ("the Almighty has done evil to me"), but also for Ruth, the source of this new-found fullness.

As Trible points out, "The meaning of that child centers in his mother, a foreign woman who has forsaken all to follow Naomi. Thus the blessing climaxes in the exaltation of Ruth, who herself is set above not just a natural child and not just a male child but even above the ideal number of natural sons: '…for your daughter-

[385] Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 267.
[386] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 77.
[387] Ibid.

in-law who loves you bore him, she who means more to you than seven sons.' (v.15b)."[388] While on other occasions the birth of a child may be celebrated, Ruth is here especially celebrated, because "it is Ruth's faithfulness, kindness, loyalty to Naomi, in a word, Ruth's *ḥesed*, that has led to this outcome."[389]

Ruth, Naomi and Boaz

It is clear that the relationships between the three main characters develop and change over time. Fewell and Gunn seek to retain the bitterness of 'Mara' throughout the text, even after the resolution of the story in Chapter 4: "little wonder that to the message 'your daughter-in-law who loves you is better than seven sons' her response is silence. Oh how we hate to be saved by Samaritans!"[390] This is not borne out by Naomi's own declarations or her chosen forms of address for Ruth however. Glover points to the "recognition… offered by Naomi in Ruth 2.22,"[391] and we might also consider Naomi's repeated use of בִּתִּי ("my daughter") in 2.2, 2.22, 3.1, 3.18, along with her genuine expression of gratitude in 3.19-20 as her fortunes begin to improve. Campbell also comments that "at point after point, the story-teller shows Naomi as the recipient of care, and also as a person on the move, moved along by the actions and words of others… It is interesting that the story-teller chooses in the Ruth story to portray change by focusing on Naomi's

[388] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 194.
[389] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, p. 82.
[390] Fewell and Gunn, 'A Son is Born to Naomi!', p. 107.
[391] Glover, 'Your People, My People', p.302.

circumstances rather than on what she says about Ruth explicitly – her actions have to do the speaking."[392]

As I have already commented, Boaz is also changed by the presence and actions of Ruth, from a person of standing with the potential to demonstrate *ḥesed*, to someone who acts. Campbell notes that "in Chapter 2, he has been generous and solicitous, but he has not really provided a solution to the problem that the two widows face."[393] It is Ruth, and a Naomi sparked into life by Ruth's actions, who begin to change Boaz too. Campbell continues, "the marvellous complexity of the Ruth story is that not only Ruth, change-agent of the first order, but also Naomi, changing and now capable of becoming a change-agent, both have to force Boaz, nominally the pillar of society, to get at his responsibility."[394] By the time we meet Boaz at the city gate in Chapter 4, he is not only ready to act, but is himself making creative use of tradition in the same manner as Ruth in order to achieve his (and her) goals. Such is the effect of this that not only do the worthy people at the gate shower them with blessings, but the women of Bethlehem even take up the same creative approach in their description of Obed as *go'el* to Naomi. Although Ruth may be seen to be relegated to the periphery (and is certainly silent) in parts of Chapter 4, it is nevertheless true as Sakenfeld comments, that "in the course of events the transformation from emptiness to fullness, from sorrow to joy, from death to life, anticipated by God's gift of food (1:6) and Boaz's gifts of grain (2:14-

[392] Campbell, 'Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, *hesed* (חסד) and change', p. 72.
[393] Ibid., p. 73.
[394] Ibid., p. 74.

16; 3:15), comes to rich and overflowing fruition,"[395] as Ruth's gift of *ḥesed* transforms not only Naomi's life but that of the entire community.

The significance of Ruth

The ending of the scroll seems to erase Ruth once again from the story, as the significance of Obed, the 'son born to Naomi', as father to Jesse and grandfather of King David is revealed, and then the final genealogy runs smoothly through from Perez to the great monarch, mentioning only Boaz among our three main actors along the way. As Linafelt bemoans, "there is something… dissatisfying about the fact that the story of Ruth and Naomi seems to be usurped by the same old story of royal (male) succession."[396] It is certainly true that the list of men with which the scroll concludes, having started as the story of a "certain man of Bethlehem in Judah", does not reflect the prominence of Ruth's story (and Naomi's) in the main body of the narrative. Nor however, can the genealogy erase the prominence of Ruth's words and actions in the scenes where she is present; her impact is transformational and long-lasting.

Throughout the scroll, Ruth's actions resonate with some of the more uncomfortable features of divine action that are present in the Zipporah and Jael stories. Ruth takes risks, she seizes control of the situation, and she acts in a way which is at times unpredictable and at times unconventional, to an extent that

[395] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, p. 67.
[396] Linafelt and Beal, *Ruth and Esther*, p. 77.

verges on scandalous. She acts covertly, at night, and even uses deception to achieve her ends, although the ends are always seen as good, and at no point can her faithfulness be questioned. The central feature of Ruth however, as I have outlined above, is her demonstration of *ḥesed*, the means by which she transforms her own situation and God's people in the process.

From the moment of her entrance into Bethlehem, where she is not even mentioned by the bitter and troubled Naomi, Ruth begins to change those around her. Her deeds of *ḥesed* become the catalyst for that change, first in her own situation in the field of Boaz, and that of Naomi as she returns with food and fortuitous news, and then in Naomi herself. Subsequently she provokes change in Boaz, and finally in the entire community as the people of Bethlehem unite to celebrate and bless her obviously auspicious and fruitful union. Throughout the scroll, Ruth models the divine way of doing *ḥesed*; as Campbell puts it: "the impact of the book of Ruth is to portray at least Orpah and Ruth, and especially Ruth, acting toward others in the manner in which YHWH acts – living out the imitation of God."[397] The effect of this is to re-introduce into God's people a right concept of *ḥesed*, in contrast to the expectations of arbitrary reward and punishment with which Naomi begins her journey, but in contrast also to the well-meaning but initially passive and unimaginative approach taken by Boaz the אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל ("mighty man of worth").

[397] Campbell, 'Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, *hesed* (חסד) and change', p. 69.

Nor does Ruth's approach fade from the greater biblical narrative with her disappearance from the story. Although the genealogical conclusion is notable by Ruth's absence, its reference to Perez recalls again the story of Tamar, and its final word is a reminder of David. Ruth's famous great-grandson expresses his own understanding of divine *ḥesed* in his treatment of the people of Jabesh-gilead in 2 Samuel 2.4-7, whose *ḥesed* he commends, and on whose behalf he invokes God's blessing in kind. There are further echoes of Ruth and Naomi's story in David's own relationship with Jonathan, who "loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam 18.1), and it seems that the concepts of loyalty, faithfulness and *ḥesed* brought to Bethlehem by Ruth have long-term consequences for the whole of God's people.

For Christians, Ruth's inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 gives added significance to her actions. Mentioned here alongside Tamar once again, and interestingly following Rahab, another outsider and the presumed mother of Boaz according to the text (Matt 1.5), Ruth becomes the ancestor through whom *ḥesed* is reintroduced to God's people, and as a result of whom the entire Davidic line down to Joseph takes shape. As a result, her story paves the way for Jesus, in whom Christians find the ultimate expression of divine *ḥesed*.

Just as Jael becomes the heroine of Israel in her defeat of Sisera, and Zipporah ensures that Moses will live to fulfill his destiny and deliver Israel from Egypt, Ruth appears at a point where Israel is in need of salvation. With Ruth however, it is not a single act which delivers God's people, and the violence which surrounds the former two encounters is absent (though it is clearly a dangerous possibility in the

field and at the threshing-floor). Ruth's entire story, and her whole portrayal in the text, are a demonstration of a right understanding of divine *ḥesed* and human response, so much so that commentators and exegetes have attempted to assimilate her safely into the community of faith ever since. This is never entirely possible however, and Ruth remains to some extent an outsider throughout, one who can thereby enable and enact the fulfilment of God's will.

This may lend a new possibility to Ruth's opening speech to Naomi in 1.16-17, one which should have profound implications for the way in which those on the 'inside' of faith communities receive the wisdom of the outsider. Ruth appears to be so attuned from the beginning to the divine will, and so perceptive in her acts of *ḥesed*, that she transforms those around her to think and act similarly, and thus to respond appropriately to God. Perhaps Ruth's statement וֵאלֹהַיִךְ אֱלֹהָי ("Your God will be my God") in 1.16 is neither a convenient method of expressing her devotion to Naomi, nor the response of an eager proselyte who becomes assimilated into a tradition, but a prescient if unknowing vision of the transformation which her actions will bring about. In the end, is it not Ruth's God, the God who desires and manifests *ḥesed,* who becomes Naomi's God, rather than the other way round?

Rahab (Joshua 2,6)

Ultimate outsider or archetypal proselyte?

Rahab is an intriguing figure, ostensibly in every way an 'outsider', who becomes not only a heroine of Israel, but also an example of moral rectitude to Jewish and Christian writers down the ages. She is introduced as part of the narrative surrounding the fall of Jericho, the first undertaking of the conquest of the land portrayed in the Book of Joshua. A Canaanite, a woman and a prostitute, she appears to be destined for the utter destruction outlined for the inhabitants of the land in Deuteronomy 7. Instead, Rahab provides assistance to Israel, whilst confessing the greatness of God in terms reminiscent of Deuteronomy 4, and procures for herself and her family not only deliverance from the חרם ("the devotion to destruction") to come, but a place within the community and a reputation which would only grow as her story was retold. Although her background and occupation have occasionally been seen as problematic, these concerns have largely been cast aside by commentators ancient and modern in favour of her lionisation as a heroine of the faith(s), making her a fascinating case study in the context of this investigation.

Rahab's biblical story unfolds over two chapters of Joshua, which bookend the intervening narrative of the crossing of the Jordan and the fall of Jericho. Having elicited assurances of obedience and fealty from the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Chapter 1, Joshua's first act is then to send two men "secretly from Shittim as spies" to view the land, and especially the fortified city of

Jericho (Josh 2.1). The two men do not make it very far in their mission, as their first action on reaching Jericho is apparently to go "into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab" (Josh 2.2). The use of sexual innuendo here is immediate and constant: Spina[398] and Nelson[399] are among those who point out that the householder's very name, רָחָב ('broad') is probably a play on her assumed profession of prostitute,[400] and having "gone in" to the house, the first action of the spies is immediately ambiguous: וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ-שָׁמָּה ("they lay/stayed there") (Josh 2.1) could mean simply that they "lay" there (as lodgers), or that they "lay" with Rahab as customers. The sexual undertones throughout this scene are key to the narrative, as I shall outline below, and allow Rahab to effect her subsequent plan to offer assistance to the spies and by extension to Israel.

Regardless of the purity of their motives in "coming in" to Rahab, the Israelite men are clearly not very effective as spies, as in the very next verse the King of Jericho is warned of their presence and sends word to Rahab demanding that she bring forward the men "who have come to you, who entered your house" (Josh 2.3) as they are spies. The language is again ambiguous, a fact which Rahab exploits. Having hidden the men, she echoes the language of her questioners and admits that בָּאוּ אֵלַי הָאֲנָשִׁים ("the men came in to me," that is, possibly as customers), but argues that she didn't know their origin. Rahab then tells the king's envoys that the two spies left the city at dusk, around the time that the city gate was closing, to

[398] Spina, Frank A., *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, pp. 54-56.
[399] Nelson, Richard D., *Joshua*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, pp. 43-4.
[400] See also Earl, Douglas S., *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010, p. 125.

who knows where, and sends the king's men on a wild goose chase, advising them to "pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them." (Josh 2.5)

Having diffused the immediate danger, it is revealed that Rahab has hidden the spies up on her roof, "with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof" (Josh 2.6), leaving the pursuers to search in vain, the city gate closed behind them. Rahab then goes to see the men before they go to sleep, and in a remarkable speech which begins with יָדַעְתִּי כִּי-נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ ("I know that the LORD has given you the land", thus affirming Joshua's mission), she announces that "dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you" (Josh 2.9),[401] that the people of Jericho have heard of the miraculous passage through the Sea of Reeds, and of the destruction of Sihon and Og, and as a result that "there was no courage left in any of us because of you." (Josh 2.11) She follows this with an extraordinary confession:

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל-הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת

("for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth below") directly echoing the language of Moses in Deut 4.39:

כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל-הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת

("that the LORD, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth below")

Rahab then cites her own act of חֶסֶד towards the spies, and asks them to swear by the LORD that they will return this with their own act of חֶסֶד by promising to deliver her family, and all who belong to them, and by giving her a sign of good faith. They

[401] When read in canonical sequence, these words fulfil the words of Exod 15.15-16...

promise "'Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully (חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת) with you when the LORD gives us the land',"[402] (Josh 2.14) and Rahab then lowers them from her window to avoid the city curfew. As they are making their escape, the spies add the condition to their promise that Rahab must keep her whole family inside the house, and mark it with a crimson cord in the window, for their oath to be valid. She agrees to their conditions, and they escape to the hill country before returning to Joshua with their report.

The next report of Rahab follows the capture of Jericho in Chapter 6, where Joshua tells the two men "'Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.'" (Josh 6.22) The men bring out Rahab's entire household, "and set them outside the camp of Israel." (Josh 6.23) While the city is devoted to destruction, Rahab's family are spared, and we are told that "Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." (Josh 6.25) Although this is the last reference to her in the Hebrew Bible, a number of traditions subsequently grew up around her, including the assertion that she "had been leading an immoral life for forty years, but at the approach of Israel, she paid homage to the true God, lived the life of a pious convert, and, as the wife of Joshua, became the ancestress of eight prophets and of the prophetess Huldah."[403] Rahab is also famously referred to by early Christian writers in three places in the New Testament.[404]

[402] The Greek text varies at this point, which I shall examine further below.
[403] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol. 2,* p. 843.
[404] Matt 1.5, Heb 11.31 and James 2.25, where she follows Abraham as an example of justification by her works.

Rahab's portrayal in the biblical narrative,[405] her subsequent reception, and her incorporation into both Jewish and Christian legend despite her 'triple outsider' status, are all of interest with regard to this enquiry. The plot and language of the biblical story itself are also intriguing, recalling a number of episodes in the Pentateuch while also having echoes elsewhere in Scripture, including the use of analogous themes and of similarly ambiguous language which appear in the stories of Jael and Ruth.[406] I intend therefore to examine Rahab's portrayal, and the significance of her actions and speech, including the approaches which have been used to sanitise her character. I shall assess whether she falls into the category of 'divine agent' which we have seen elsewhere, and the extent to which she remains 'outsider' despite her assimilation into Israel. I shall then discuss the significance of her presence within the overall narrative of Joshua and of the canon as a whole.

Historical and Textual Issues

It is not my intention to explore in depth the historicity of Joshua, other than to acknowledge that there are many indications that Joshua cannot be taken as an accurate portrayal of historical events, and is not historiographical in any modern sense. As Nelson states, "Joshua's account of a large-scale invasion of Canaan by Israel cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence."[407] Adrian Curtis discusses some of the difficulties arising out of archaeological and historical

[405] The issue of variant texts is discussed below.
[406] Rahab is also linked more directly to the person of Ruth in the genealogy in Matt 1, as I shall discuss further.
[407] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 3.

evidence which contradicts the narratives found in Joshua,[408] and concludes that "The book of Joshua is therefore of very limited value for the task of reconstructing the story of what actually happened prior to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel."[409] It is likely that the book in its current form is composite in nature and primarily ideological in intent, and that the text has undergone substantial revision during its formation,[410] possibly by a number of compilers[411] and perhaps at some point by Deuteronomistic editors, it has been argued, given the significant presence of Deuteronomistic language through much of the book.[412] Dozeman disputes earlier assertions that Joshua forms part of a Deuteronomistic History, however,[413] and argues that instead that it "was written as an independent narrative,"[414] which uses source material from Judges and the Pentateuch.[415] Whatever process was involved in the composition and editing of the texts which appear in the MT and LXX, a number of commentators have contended that the book of Joshua has been influenced by Deuteronomistic thinking, in the story of Rahab as elsewhere; as Butler comments, "The one thing that does appear to be clear is that the Deuteronomist has introduced his own theological conception into the mouth of Rahab in [Ch 2.] vv.9-11."[416]

[408] Curtis, Adrian H.W., *Joshua*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, pp. 49-73.
[409] Ibid., p. 75.
[410] See e.g. Butler, Trent C., *Word Bible Commentary: Joshua*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983, pp. xvii-xx, and Nelson, *Joshua*, pp. 22-24 for a brief discussion of the textual variants, some of which are significant here.
[411] See e.g. Curtis, Adrian, *Joshua*, pp. 32-35, Butler, *Joshua*, pp. xx-xxiii.
[412] Ibid., also Nelson, *Joshua*, pp. 5-6.
[413] Dozeman, Thomas B., *Joshua 1-12*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, pp. 18ff.
[414] Ibid., p. 24.
[415] Ibid., pp.25-6.
[416] Butler, *Joshua*, p. 31.

Dozeman "interpret[s] the confession of Rahab in Josh 2.9-11 as composed by one author,"[417] and asserts that "The story of the spies in Josh 2 and the rescue of Rahab in Josh 6 are a literary creation,"[418] rather than the incorporation of an oral legend into the book of Joshua.[419] If true, this would indicate that the whole episode is a late addition to the overarching narrative of Joshua 1-12, and its presence may act as a deliberate interpretative key to the conquest narrative. Regardless of these historical and textual debates, Rahab's story as it now exists raises a number of theological issues regarding identity, 'outsiders' and 'insiders' which I shall now explore.

Rahab the Prostitute

Rahab is identified as אִשָּׁה זוֹנָה ("a prostitute") before she is named, and the initial verses of Joshua 2 are, as I have noted, filled with sexual innuendo. In this way, Rahab is marked immediately not simply as a Caananite, but as a woman, a prostitute. Thus she is identified as a 'triple outsider' even before her name, itself with possible sexual connotations, is revealed. The actions of the two men when they enter her house are also ambiguous: וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ-שָׁמָּה ("they lay/stayed there") (Josh 2.1), but before any dialogue can reveal their motivation, their intent to spy out the land is discovered by the King of Jericho, who sends word to Rahab to bring out the men הַבָּאִים אֵלַיִךְ אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ לְבֵיתֵךְ ("who have come to you, who have entered your house") (Josh 2.3). Having apparently the presence of mind quickly to hide the

[417] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 235.
[418] Ibid., p. 236.
[419] Contra e.g. Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 41 and Butler, *Joshua*, pp. 29-31.

spies, Rahab also has a quick reply for their pursuers. Spina points out that, "the King's agents incorporate a well-aimed barb... But Rahab gives as good as she gets,"[420] replying in kind by picking up the double-entendre and using the possibility as cover for the truth.

As Elie Assis notes, "the apparent sexual intentions of the spies constitute a good alibi for Rahab's claim that she did not know where they came from"[421] and also provide a reason why the Israelite men may already have left, rather than staying for the night. The king's men accept Rahab's explanation at face value, either presuming no reason for her to lie, or perhaps just overcome with the hilarity of their own wit, which allows her then to send them off in pursuit of the spies, whom she claims left "when it was time to close the gate at dark." (Josh 2.5) Once the pursuers have gone out, Rahab can then get back to her uninvited guests and begin her theological discourse.

Throughout the whole first scene, the story relies on the assumptions made around Rahab's profession and consequent character. Not only is she a Canaanite, one of the people whom Israel must 'must utterly destroy' (Deut 7.2), but she is a prostitute, whose very profession symbolises the reason why Israel must not make any covenant with the people of the land, as those "who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods." (Ex 34.16) The scene is set for this entire enterprise to be a disaster. There are similarities

[420] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 55.
[421] Assis, Elie, 'The Choice to Serve God and Assist His People: Rahab and Yael' in *Biblica,* Vol. 85 No. 1 (2004), pp. 82-90, p. 83.

here with the portrayal of Ruth, where as we have seen,[422] sexual innuendo is used to play on suspicions surrounding her Moabite ancestry. As with Ruth, expectations here are reversed by Rahab's subsequent actions, but the opening description of her leaves many difficulties unresolved, to which I shall return.

The incompetence of the spies in immediately being discovered, and of the pursuers who fail to ask anything but the most basic of questions, coupled with the constant innuendo, give the whole tale the air of a farce, but one which has the effect of making Rahab seem substantially more shrewd than those around her. Spina notes, "As we take in the hilarious incompetence of both the spies and the king's agents, it becomes clear to us that the only competent person in the whole narrative is Rahab."[423] Rahab's quick-thinking deliverance of the spies and her subsequent declaration of faith rely for their impact on her liminal and somewhat dubious status, and serve only to bring into sharp relief her identity as foreigner and prostitute. As Bird argues, "The reader does not expect anything from her, or at least not anything of moral strength, courage, or insight"[424] and therefore "the present form of the story builds on a reversal of expectations."[425] Dozeman sees the Rahab episode as a trickster tale, and argues that "Rahab fulfils the definition of the trickster as being marginal, self-reliant, and an agent of change,"[426] further positing that "her actions in deceiving the king of Jericho and in forcing an oath of

[422] Q.v., pp. 120-121.
[423] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 58.
[424] Bird, Phyllis, 'The Harlot as Heroine' in Bach, Alice (ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 99-117, p. 108.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 238.

rescue from the Israelite spies correspond to the self-interest of the trickster, who survives by her cleverness."[427]

While Rahab is undoubtedly portrayed as a shrewd operator in her deception of the king's men and her request for deliverance from the destruction to come, there seems to be much more going on here than the mere survival story of a trickster. Bird points out that "Self-interest alone cannot explain her commitment, for the risk of siding with an unknown force against one's own people is too great to ascribe solely to that motive. Either faith or discernment, or both, is required to explain such unproved loyalty (*ḥesed*), and for that there is no place in the ruling stereotype of the harlot."[428] She goes on to ascribe to Rahab the "romantic antitype... the whore with the heart of gold"[429] but points out that the positive action of such an antitype "does not normally lead to a change in her status, or a change in attitudes towards harlots."[430] Frymer-Kensky also notes that on the surface at least, this is the "familiar antitype" which categorizes this "biblical Suzie Wong,"[431] but argues that "the charm does not explain its prominence as the first of the conquest stories, strongly associated with the triumphal entry into the land."[432] Rather than in the genre of the tale, it is in the language and use of allusion which Rahab's story contains, that her true significance can perhaps be determined, and to which I now turn.

[427] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 239.
[428] Bird, 'The Harlot as Heroine', p. 108.
[429] Ibid., pp. 108-9.
[430] Ibid., p. 109.
[431] Frymer-Kensky, Tikva, 'Reading Rahab' in Cogan, Eichler & Tigay (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997, pp. 57-67, p. 57.
[432] Ibid.

Rahab the deliverer in context

Frymer-Kensky describes Rahab's story as "a masterpiece of allusive writing"[433] and notes that it is "set in the first five chapters of the book of Joshua, which contain numerous pentateuchal allusions designed to have readers keep in mind the activities of Moses as they read Joshua."[434] She notes the comparison between Moses' sending out of twelve spies with very specific instructions (Num 13.18-20), and Joshua's spies who are given a very vague commission. "They are not special men and never give any impression of initiative or daring throughout the story"[435] and yet "these two ordinary men come back with the report that only the exceptional Joshua and Caleb could give before: that God has given the land to Israel."[436] It is only through the instigation of Rahab, consistently the most active character and the agent of change in the narrative, that this outcome becomes possible, and the descriptions of her method and actions draw immediate and significant parallels with turning points elsewhere in Israel's story.

Frymer-Kensky points out echoes of the deliverance of Joshua's predecessor:

> when Rahab hides the spies, the author uses the relatively rare word *ṣpn: watiṣpĕnô* 'and she hid him'. The knowledgeable reader will think immediately of the story of Moses' birth, when Moses' mother saved him by hiding him: *watiṣpĕnēhû* 'and she hid him'. This phrase occurs only twice in the whole Bible, and the reader, alerted by the manifold

[433] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 58.
[434] ibid.
[435] Ibid., p. 59.
[436] Ibid.

> allusions to Moses in Joshua 1-5, may catch the resonance: as the "hiding" of the infant Moses started the Exodus events, so Rahab's "hiding" of the representatives of the infant Israel begins the process of the conquest.[437]

For Frymer-Kensky, the links to that story go further, with Rahab's defiance of the king's men and the deception which she uses to spare their lives. "She reminds us of... the two midwives in Egypt who defy the Pharaoh's orders to slay the Hebrew children. Once again, the beginning of the conquest echoes the beginning of the Exodus."[438]

There are also echoes of other deliverance stories in the Rahab narrative. Nelson identifies "the similar story of the two angels who visit Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19:1-23). Threatened by the men of the doomed city, whose blind groping parallels the futile pursuit of the king's men, these two angels/messengers (compare Josh 6:25) become the objects of Lot's attempts to protect his guests."[439] It is interesting to note in the Rahab tale however, that she not only plays Lot's role of the host, but also that of delivering from danger which the *malakhim* assume in the Genesis story.[440] As Frymer-Kensky comments, "Lot is hesitant and tentative as the angels save him; in Joshua, the visitors are saved by the assertive, proactive Rahab."[441] Another parallel, identified by Nelson[442] and explored in depth by Assis,[443] is the

[437] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 59. Note also the puzzling singular suffix in Josh 2.4, which may indicate a previous version of the text, but may also be a deliberate echo of Ex 2.2.
[438] Ibid., p. 60.
[439] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 43.
[440] Despite her disreputable status, Rahab also does this without compromising the safety of her own household to protect her guests in the morally dubious manner of Lot. (Gen 19.8).
[441] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 61.
[442] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 43.

story of Jael and her defeat of Sisera. Assis describes eight analogous details in the two narratives: gentiles who unexpectedly assist Israel;[444] fugitives seeking shelter with a sympathetic woman who 'hides' them;[445] the offer of help which involves trickery or deception;[446] a pursuit, the outcome of which is determined by the woman;[447] the domestic setting in the women's residences;[448] the use of sexually charged and ambivalent language;[449] the ironic presentation of helpless/pathetic behaviour by the men compared to that of the women;[450] and the fact that "both stories deal with wars of Israel and the Canaanites."[451]

The outcomes of the two stories of course, while both advantageous to Israel, are radically different for the men who come to seek shelter in these sexually-charged domestic settings, yet in both cases the outcome for their guests (and for the Israelites) is determined by the immediate decision, the quick thinking and the convincing deceptions of the women involved. The difficulties surrounding Jael's perceived abuse of the usual expectations of hospitality[452] are replaced here by the difficulties surrounding Rahab's profession and ethnicity, but the 'otherness' and unexpected nature of the women's actions in both tales is striking. Where the two stories also diverge is in the source of the 'oracles' which declare Israel's victory. In the Jael narrative it is Deborah, who "was judging Israel" (Judges 4.4) at the time,

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[443] Assis, 'Rahab and Yael'.
[444] Ibid., p. 82.
[445] Ibid., p. 82.
[446] Assis, 'Rahab and Yael', pp. 82-3.
[447] Ibid., p. 83.
[448] Ibid., p. 83.
[449] Ibid., p. 83-4.
[450] Ibid., p. 84-5.
[451] Ibid., p. 85.
[452] Q.v., pp. 83-84.

who declares that "this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand" (Judges 4.14), having first revealed that this will not bring glory to Barak "for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4.9). In the Joshua narrative, it is Rahab herself who declares what God has done and will do for Israel, and who makes the declaration of faith to which I now turn.

Rahab the confessor

Once the king's men have departed on their futile mission to pursue the spies, Rahab delivers "what may be taken as nothing short of an Israelite confession of faith."[453] Her statement in Josh 2.9-11 can be seen in one regard as simply the prelude to her request of an oath of assurance from the spies that Israel will spare her household, and yet it also, as Dozeman writes, "explores the relationship between Rahab and Yahweh through her confession that Yahweh is giving the land to Israel (v. 9a) and that he is the God in heaven (v. 11b)."[454] Regardless of the arguments about whether this speech is a late addition by a Deuteronomistic editor[455] or a series of connected clauses appended through literary expansion, the history of which is difficult to recover,[456] we are left only with the text in its current form, and which should be read with full imaginative seriousness in its own right. The significance of the extant text is to make Rahab "the oracle who declares that God has given Israel the land."[457] Assis points out that "the narrator shapes Rahab's

[453] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, pp. 58-9.
[454] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 243.
[455] Q.v., 'Historical and Textual Issues', pp. 139-141. Cf. Butler, *Joshua*, p. 31 and Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 46, who refers to "the DH version of her speech."
[456] Cf. Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 243.
[457] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 62.

words as a combination of two quotations from the Pentateuch, one from the Song of Moses at the sea of Reeds and the second from Deuteronomy."[458] The allusions to these accounts, and the significance therefore of Rahab as one with knowledge of the divine plan would be very clear to the knowledgeable reader: the direct echoes of Ex 15.15-16 and Deut 4.39 are striking and obvious, and the declaration in Josh 2.11, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת ("the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth below") is especially significant. Spina notes that "Moses and Solomon are the only other characters who make the same acclamation (Deut. 4:39; 1 Kgs. 8:23)"[459] and comments that it "is nothing short of astonishing that Rahab utters this formula..."[460]

This decidedly 'insider' language in the mouth of Rahab ostensibly confirms on behalf of 'her' people, the Canaanites, "that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you," (Josh 2.9) which is the information which Joshua himself apparently needs to have confirmed by the messengers in Josh 2.24, along with the first part of her declaration, "I know that the LORD has given you the land." (Josh 2.9) Rahab's accompanying explanation for her knowledge and her summary of Israel's progress thus far are equally significant in this context however. In recounting the events of Exodus, Spina notes that "there is more than Rahab's general awareness of the exodus from Egypt; she specifies the exact name of the body of water that YHWH dried up, the Yam Sûp, or Sea of Reeds... In fact she is the only non-Israelite ever to use this geographical

[458] Assis, 'Rahab and Yael', p. 87.
[459] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 60.
[460] Ibid. Spina also notes that the Masoretes "mark the other two uses in the margin of this text."

name."[461] The close similarities with Pentateuchal accounts not seen elsewhere give Rahab an air of authority which is difficult to reconcile with her status: as Spina goes on to exclaim, "Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, is familiar with this Israelite theological language as though she has graduated from an Israelite religious academy!"[462] Rahab is thus clearly portrayed in the world of the text as someone who has preternatural knowledge of the acts of God, and as the figure through whom knowledge of the divine plan is imparted to the 'elect'.

Furthermore, in recounting "what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, *whom you utterly destroyed*" (Josh 2.10), it is Rahab herself who introduces the concept of חרם in response to Deuteronomy 7, which will subsequently recur throughout the book of Joshua, and which is used extensively in the description of the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6. As Dozeman comments, "It is noteworthy that the Canaanite Rahab introduces the theme of the ban in her opening speech to the spies, given its social and religious ideology."[463] He goes on to describe how in Joshua 2, "Once the theme of the ban is introduced, the chapter explores how Rahab and her family might be an exception to the law, which creates narrative tension, since, as noted, the ban is absolute in its requirement."[464] There is much to be said on the resolution of this tension, and its significance for understanding the concept of חרם with regard to insiders and

[461] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 59.
[462] Ibid., p. 60.
[463] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 223.
[464] Ibid., p. 224.

outsiders,[465] but for our present purposes it is sufficient simply to point out the significance of Rahab as the figure who introduces the concepts with which Israel and Joshua will work in the remainder of the Book of Joshua. This takes place in the context of Rahab's confession, in which as Spina notes, "Rahab, the quintessential outsider, has gone a long way toward transforming herself into an Israelite insider capable of making an exemplary Israelite statement of faith."[466]

Rahab and *ḥesed*

Having saved the two spies and given her testimony regarding God and the mission of the Israelites, Rahab immediately begins her petition to save her entire household from the destruction that is to come. Rahab recalls her demonstration of *ḥesed* towards the men, and asks for *ḥesed* in return, in the form of an oath to "spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." (Josh 2.13) Dozeman notes that "The request for an oath (with the Niphal form of *šāba'*) is a judicial expression... The story of Rahab and her exemption from the absolute requirement of the ban represent a qualification of the teaching of Torah and make her story a legal precedent."[467] He goes on to comment that "The central role of *ḥesed* in fashioning an exemption to the divine law of the ban is not surprising, since it is the one virtue that is able to

[465] See e.g. Rowlett, Lori, 'Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginality in the Book of Joshua' in Exum, J. Cheryl (ed.), *The Historical Books: A Sheffield Reader*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, pp.63-82, Earl, *Reading Joshua*, pp. 197-203, and Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, pp. 63-71 for further discussions on this.
[466] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 61.
[467] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 247.

change divine commands in the Pentateuch."[468] On the contrary, I would argue that in the mouth of this triple outsider, the concept of *ḥesed* and the way she uses it is *very* surprising, and almost unparalleled. Dozeman goes on to discuss the spontaneity of (undeserved) divine *ḥesed* and notes that "The same spontaneity characterizes Rahab's *ḥesed* towards the spies,"[469] in contrast to the legal context of *ḥesed* as "loyalty within the context of making an oath or establishing a covenant... [which is] what Rahab requests from the spies as an oath (v. 13). Thus both aspects of *ḥesed*, as spontaneous mercy and as legal loyalty, function in the exchange between Rahab and the spies."[470]

This spontaneous show of undeserved *ḥesed* draws us back once again to the Moabite Ruth, and her own demonstration to Israel of the nature of *ḥesed*.[471] Like Ruth, Rahab represents all that is foreign, dangerous, not to be trusted, and even legally proscribed. As with Ruth, the language of the encounter with Rahab is saturated in allusions to sexual activity which does not actually take place, thus playing on assumptions about ethnic identity. At the same time, like Ruth, Rahab demonstrates herself to be more familiar with Israel's God than might be expected, and Rahab's demonstration of *ḥesed* is closer to the divine outworking of the concept than the human notion of legal or moral obligation. While Frymer-Kensky argues that "This request for *ḥesed* is the formal arrangement by which Rahab seeks to join Israel,"[472] in truth her request is for liberation from the destruction to

[468] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 247.
[469] Ibid. (!)
[470] Ibid.
[471] Q.v., 'Ruth and *hesed*', pp. 111-115.
[472] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 63.

come, rather than 'conversion', a fact which is acknowledged in the spies' reply (Josh 2.14): "'Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land.'"

Interestingly, there is a notable variant here in the Greek text, to which Nelson draws attention.[473] He argues that "MT expands the spies' speech, anticipating v. 20 and converting their agreement into a carefully guarded promise contingent on the behaviour of Rahab and her family."[474] The LXX changes voice after the men swear "Our life for yours, even to death" (Josh. 2.14) and it is Rahab who replies: ως αν παραδῳ Κυριος υμιν την πολιν, ποιησετε εις εμε ελεος και αληθειαν ("When the Lord will have handed over the city to you, you will deal mercifully and truthfully with me"). The difference in emphasis may be slight, but here it is once again the Canaanite rather than her uninvited guests who emphasizes that the LORD will hand over the city, leaving the Israelites' only reference to divine action in their report to Joshua (Josh 2.24), where they paraphrase Rahab's words. In Ruth, the people of Bethlehem confidently invoke the name of God in their day-to-day transactions and complaints without understanding the nature of divine action.[475] In Joshua 2 by contrast, the Israelites are practically silent on the subject of their divine mission, while its meaning, the assurance of its success, and even a legal challenge to it are all expounded by the 'outsider' who has delivered them from the hands of their enemy and thus demonstrated (like Ruth) what *ḥesed* really looks like.

[473] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 39.
[474] Ibid., p. 39.
[475] Q.v., p.110.

Rahab the divine agent

As is clear from the discussion above, it is Rahab throughout this encounter who seems to know what God is about to do in the conquest of Jericho and indeed the land as a whole. Although she appears to fit two of Dozeman's three criteria for the 'trickster' character[476] in that "(1) The trickster has marginal social status... and (3) is an agent of change,"[477] the other, that the trickster "relies on himself or herself"[478] requires qualification here. Dozeman notes that "Farmer adds the theological perspective that the trickster's reliance on self is in contrast to faith in divine rescue."[479] While Rahab is clearly very resourceful, and as has been noted easily outshines the incompetence of both the king's envoys and the spies, she secures her household's future through explicit reference to divine action, and through appeal to the concept of *ḥesed*, so central to the relationship between God and the people of Israel. Whether or not, as Dube suggests, we should not "overlook that Rahab is a literary creation of the author of Joshua, the colonizer,"[480] the Rahab with whom we are presented in the canonical form of the text is clearly theologically literate (more so than her Israelite guests), has seemingly preternatural knowledge of the divine will and of the actions of God, and is sufficiently confident of her position to hide the spies and effectively declare her hand before she has extracted the oath from them to spare her household.

[476] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 238.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 238.
[479] Ibid., citing Farmer, K. A., *The Trickster Genre in the Old Testament.* PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978, p. 22.
[480] Dube, Musa W., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000, p. 80.

The Rahab of the biblical narrative is not simply a bystander who seizes the opportunity for salvation at the hands of Jericho's enemies (whose representatives are seemingly incompetent, at least where espionage is concerned). Rather, she acts as divine herald and actively *claims* an oath of protection for her household as a result of both her testimony and her act of *ḥesed*. I have already noted the similarities between the stories of Rahab and Jael, as outlined in detail by Assis;[481] he also points out that Jael's motives remain unfathomable, but argues that part of the purpose of this is to highlight the role of Deborah as prophetess.[482] In Joshua 2, it is Rahab who acts in assisting the spies, but who also acts as prophet. Frymer-Kensky sums up Rahab's significance in this regard:

> She is the first of the prophets who appear in the historical books to announce to Israel the paths of their history and the first of the women who declare and pronounce the will of God. The lines of women and prophets begin with Rahab and converge again at the end of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles in the figure of Huldah the prophetess, who announces the destruction of Judah.[483]

Despite Rahab's action in hiding the spies, and the similarity to parts of Jael's story in Judges 4, it is Rahab the outsider who also takes on the role of Deborah in Joshua 2 through the oracle which she delivers to Joshua's messengers. It is left then to another messenger, the שַׂר-צְבָא-יְהוָה ("commander of the army of the Lord") of Joshua 5.14, to deliver on God's promises in Joshua 6.

[481] Assis, 'Rahab and Yael', pp. 82-85.
[482] Ibid., pp. 88-9.
[483] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 62.

Rahab the Canaanite

I have argued that Rahab acts as prophet, and this is the basis of my categorisation of her as 'divine agent', a position which is supported by the language used by Rahab during her speech to the spies. The problem of whether or not Rahab remains an 'outsider', however, hinges on the extent to which she is assimilated into Israel. There is no doubt at the beginning of her story that Rahab is strongly identified as being outside the people of Israel, not least by her profession and the sexual innuendo which plays upon it. She is also, however, a Canaanite, a person (however liminal) of the land, and it is this which marks her out as subject to the ban, and creates the narrative tension to which Dozeman draws attention.[484] The situation is complicated by the resolution to this tension: the pact which she enters into with the spies, and which is honoured by Joshua in Chapter 6.

Dozeman points to the significance of the repetition in Josh 2.15 of Rahab's location "upon the wall" and argues that "the details of the window as a threshold to Rahab's home and its liminal location in the wall of Jericho are crucial to the narrative."[485] He contends that the "image of a woman in the window"[486] draws attention once again to Rahab's profession, and also goes beyond this "to provide commentary on Rahab's liminal status as a resident of Jericho who will survive the ban."[487] The red cord which is to be the sign of her deliverance, and the command that her whole household must be within her house when Jericho is taken (Josh

[484] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 223.
[485] Ibid., p. 248.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Ibid.

2.18-19) are "reminiscent of the ritual of Passover during the exodus... the red thread in the window of Rahab's house serves a function similar to that of the blood on the doorpost of the Israelite homes in Egypt."[488]

This further echo of the Exodus narrative would not be lost on those who had already picked up on the resonances within Rahab's confession, and Frymer-Kensky goes further in her assessment of its significance: "Once again, the saved are to stay inside the house marked in red: Rahab's family is to be rescued from Jericho, as the Israelites were from Egypt. This resourceful outsider, Rahab the trickster, is a new Israel."[489]

To what extent, however, is Rahab incorporated into Israel? Earl points out that "Whilst Joshua 6 supplies the resolution of Rahab's story, the ending retains ambiguity. Rahab and her family are placed *outside* the camp of Israel (6:23)... Joshua's speech makes clear that it is in accordance with *the spies'* oath that Rahab is spared (6:22-23), perhaps implying a distancing of Joshua from the decision to spare her."[490] If this is true, then the implication is that Joshua has not failed to enact the ban, but rather has kept an oath on behalf of the spies, having regard to the overriding importance of *ḥesed* discerned by Dozeman in all matters relating to divine/human interaction.[491] Earl goes on to outline more positive aspects of Josh 6.25, suggesting that "the narrator implies in every way that Rahab is, or ought to be, part of 'true Israel', and is characterized as an Israelite, although without saying

[488] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 248.
[489] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 61.
[490] Earl, *Reading Joshua*, p. 144.
[491] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 247.

so explicitly."[492] As Bird puts it, "Rahab is here the pagan confessor, the one who discerns what others fail to see, and the one who commits her life to the people of Yahweh."[493]

There remain questions surrounding Rahab's status however, and it is worth examining her treatment in subsequent literature. Despite accounts of her marriage to Joshua and subsequent life as a "pious convert",[494] Baskin argues that the "elaboration of Rahab from courageous Canaanite prostitute to righteous convert to Judaism is curious, considering the biblical evidence the rabbis adduce for Rahab's conversion is weak at best,"[495] arguing that Josh 2.11 and 6.25 "had no connotations of conversion in the biblical setting."[496] Nevertheless, Rahab was incorporated within Jewish tradition as a model proselyte, with a variety of methods used to neutralise or sanitise her status as outsider. Baskin identifies a number of main strands in Rabbinic literature: "those which emphasize her repentance and her sincerity as a convert; a second and related group [which] details her many distinguished descendants and the honor she received in Israel"[497] and even "another rabbinic tradition that maintains that Rahab was not a harlot at all, but was rather involved in innkeeping or some other trade."[498] As she goes on to comment, "To launder her past, however, seriously undercuts the main tradition

[492] Earl, *Reading Joshua*, p. 144
[493] Bird, 'The Harlot as Heroine', p. 109.
[494] See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol. 2,* p. 843.
[495] Baskin, Judith, 'The Rabbinic Transformations of Rahab the Harlot' in *Notre Dame English Journal, Vol. 11. No. 2, 'Judaic Literature: Critical Perspectives' (Apr. 1979)*, pp. 141-157, p. 143.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid.
[498] Ibid., p. 147. See also Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol. 2.*, p. 844, note 12 on this interpretation in Josephus' *Antiquities*, V.12, and Targumic sources.

of the warm reception Judaism offered the repentant harlot."[499] As I have already noted, Bird and others also point out that Rahab's story depends completely upon her designation as prostitute and therefore outsider. Bird posits that "An Israelite lineage... traces its ancestry to this heroine. The harlot designation of its eponym suggests an outcast status for the group, which requires explanation. The story provides the explanation: it was because of the *ḥesed* of Rahab toward our ancestors that her clan dwells among us today."[500]

While attempts to sanitise Rahab certainly arose in reaction to distaste at her profession,[501] and have persisted albeit in a minority of commentaries,[502] the more well-trodden path has seen her as someone who abandoned her previous life and profession following her escape from Jericho.[503] To make her 'repentance' all the more exemplary, Rabbinic literature sometimes went to extreme lengths in interpreting her statements and actions in Joshua 2, including the extraordinary notion that Rahab's knowledge of the LORD's actions in Josh 2.10ff was because "There was no prince or ruler who had not possessed Rahab the harlot: She was ten years old when the Israelites departed from Egypt, and she played the harlot the whole of the forty years spent by the Israelites in the wilderness."[504] Although such interpretation was intended to portray Rahab as one who was profoundly changed by her escape from Jericho and her encounter with the Israelites (and thus to

[499] Baskin, 'Rahab the Harlot', p. 147.
[500] Ibid., p. 109.
[501] Ibid., pp. 147-151.
[502] See e.g. Charles, Ronald, 'Rahab: A righteous whore in James' in *Neotestamentica,* Vol. 45, No. 2 (2011), pp. 206-220, pp. 206-7.
[503] Baskin, 'Rahab the Harlot', pp. 144-145.
[504] *B. Zebah. 116a-b.* quoted in Baskin, 'Rahab the Harlot', p. 144.

provide an example both to sinners in Israel and to potential proselytes), a further effect arose from what was seen as the quality of Rahab's confession.

As Baskin comments, "In the minds of the rabbis, a reward truly worthy of such heartfelt embracing of the LORD would be Rahab's numbering priests and prophets of Israel among her descendants."[505] Rahab was consequently accounted the ancestor of such luminaries as Baruch, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Huldah,[506] and a tradition which sought to reconcile the many notable prophets among her apparent progeny itself led to the account of her marriage to Joshua.[507] At this point, Rahab has not simply been incorporated into Israel, made an 'insider'; she has become an integral part of the whole history of Israel, and this perhaps explains the unusual and repeated references to Rahab in early Christian writings, including her three appearances in the New Testament. Rahab is mentioned as an example of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews in direct connection to Jericho's fall: "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace." (Heb 11.31) She also makes an appearance in the Epistle of James, where her faith in action is compared to that of Abraham: "Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?" (James 2.25)

Perhaps the most curious appearance of Rahab is as an ancestor of Jesus in Matthew 1.5, where she is listed as the mother of Boaz by Salmon, and hence

[505] Baskin, 'Rahab the Harlot', p. 145.
[506] Ibid.
[507] Ibid.

becomes Ruth's second mother-in-law (somewhat less famously than Naomi). Baskin points out that "There is no basis in the New Testament for Matthew's inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of the house of David. Nor is this a known rabbinic tradition."[508] She goes on however to speculate that early Christians may have followed in the traditions of their Jewish forebears and incorporated Rahab as a heroic figure into their own story: "The rabbis were not stymied by a lack of direct textual evidence to prove Rahab's marriage or distinguished progeny; there is no reason why the early Christians should have been. In fact, the feeling that Rahab was Boaz's forebear might also have been current in Jewish circles in early Christian times, only to be suppressed after the notion's championship by the new religion."[509] Christian writers picked up on many of the Rabbinic themes and developed or appropriated them, seeing Rahab as a repentant sinner, Rahab's house as indicative of the church, and the 'red cord' as the saving blood of Christ.[510]

It would seem from the subsequent reception of Rahab's story that she is perceived as having crossed a boundary from 'outsider' to 'insider' at the point where she crosses from Jericho to "outside the camp of Israel" in Josh 6.23, despite Joshua's own apparently rather cooler interpretation of what is happening, which ties her escape firmly to her assistance in the war effort: "Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers we sent." (Josh 6.17) Thus Spina, for example, concludes that "She has been the quintessential Canaanite; nonetheless, she becomes an Israelite... if not a

[508] Baskin, 'Rahab the Harlot', p. 151.
[509] Ibid., p. 152.
[510] Ibid., pp. 152-3.

quintessential Israelite, at least an exemplary one."[511] This is perhaps true of the 'memory' of Rahab in later tradition, but the biblical account of her words and actions (e.g. Josh 2.9ff) seem to emphasise her role as an 'outsider' with knowledge of God, rather than assuming either her 'conversion' or her (immediate) welcome into the community.

It is worth noting again, that the idea of the formal 'conversion' of Rahab, similarly to such a reading of Ruth, appears to be anachronistic,[512] but even the notion that Rahab becomes part of Israel or that her identity is transformed by the actions which take place in Joshua 6 seems to be misleading. Earl notes that "There is no explicit evaluation supplied, and nothing to indicate that Rahab 'becomes' an Israelite,"[513] and perhaps her survival might be better imagined in terms of her successful legal 'appeal' against the terms of the edict in Deuteronomy 7 which she herself introduces as a theme in this narrative. Thus for Dozeman, her "insight and the rescue of the spies are the basis for her negotiation to be exempted from the absolute claims of the ban"[514] and this is enough to explain why "her family has lived in Israel ever since." (Josh 6.25) There is indeed good evidence to indicate that the text itself struggles with the matter of Rahab's identity in Joshua 6, judging by the way she is addressed, both by the narrator and by Joshua, as the chapter progresses, but her unique identity as 'other' in relation to the divine 'Other'

[511] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 63.
[512] e.g. Eskenazi, Tamara Cohn and Frymer-Kensky, Tikva, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011, p. xliii.
[513] Earl, *Reading Joshua*, p. 144.
[514] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 337.

cannot be overlooked given the startling nature of her revelation of the divine plan in Joshua 2.

Joshua's statement in Josh 6.17, "Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live," sits between the declaration of the total destruction of the city in the first half of the verse, and the reason for her exemption which completes it. This is simple identification, and yet Rahab retains her seemingly indelible epithet הַזּוֹנָה ("the prostitute") even here. When Joshua gives the actual order to save her, it is again tied to the oath which the spies have made, and Rahab has lost even her name, though not her profession: "'Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.'" (Josh 6.22) Thus Joshua appears to be distanced even further from Rahab and the decision to spare her.[515]

It is only when the narrator describes her actual rescue that Rahab is finally described by name, without reference to her profession, in Josh 6.23.[516] This verse seems to me to be significant, in its description of how the spies "brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her" – here and only here, do we see Rahab stand alone, as a 'free agent', briefly shorn of her identity as Canaanite and as prostitute, and instead, as Rowlett comments, "described as a head of household in patriarchal language, almost as though she

[515] Cf. Earl, *Reading Joshua*, p. 144.
[516] She is also referred to simply as "Rahab" in Josh 2.3, again by the narrator, but this is somewhat undermined by the immediate innuendo which comes out of the mouths of the king's envoys...

were a man."[517] In that one verse (Josh 6.23), Rahab's identity appears to be at a crossroads, identified simply by name, brought out of Jericho with "all who belonged to her", and set "outside the camp of Israel". Perhaps this places her in the position of the ultimate outsider, one who cannot be categorised as 'us' or 'other' by conventional terminology? This status does not persist however, and by verse 25, she is once again רָחָב הַזּוֹנָה ("Rahab the prostitute") whom *Joshua* has saved, along with her *father's* household. Rahab, it seems, is still an outsider by the time her story ends, albeit one afforded special status, exempt from the destruction of חרם and allowed to live (outside the camp) among the Israelites. This is perhaps unsurprising, her status as an outsider being almost as important as her declaration of faith and her act of *ḥesed* in understanding her subsequent reception, and the impact which she has within the Joshua story as a whole.

Rahab the collaborator?

Stratton draws attention to the fact that it is possible to read Rahab's story very negatively, as one of capitulation rather than challenge to the dominant narrative.[518] Thus, for Dube, Rahab "is portrayed as one who totally believes in the superiority of the colonizer,"[519] and Mbuwayesango describes Rahab as "traitor to her own people,"[520] and sees the book as a whole as a salutary warning, arguing that "the ideology of divine entitlement is a dangerous one. Yet, the book of Joshua

[517] Rowlett, 'Inclusion, Exclusion and Marginality', p. 70.
[518] Stratton, Beverly J., 'Consider, Take Counsel, and Speak: Re(Membering) Women in the Books of Joshua and Judges' in Scholz, Susanne (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect: I. Biblical Books*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013, pp. 80-109, pp. 84-85.
[519] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation,* p. 78.
[520] Mbuwayesango, Dora, 'Joshua' in Patte, Daniel et. al. (eds.), *Global Bible Commentary*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004, pp. 64-73, p. 66.

can help the people of God to construct its identity in a sound way, namely by acknowledging and making explicit the revulsion we have for its narratives."[521] Lori Rowlett draws parallels between the Rahab episode and Disney's version of the Pocahontas story, arguing that "in both cases, the 'good native' who takes to the colonizers immediately is a woman who later marries into the community. In both cases, she serves as a savior, protecting the men from her own people, effectively allowing them to colonize her native land, and herself."[522] Kwok Pui-lan, picking up on Rowlett's work, "read's Rahab's story 'from the perspective of women compelled to provide sexual labor as an integral part of global markets and military build-up... [where] prostitution [is] a new form of colonization... [and where] larger societal forces and global structures... join hands to keep her in her place.'"[523]

In this reading, Stratton argues that "perhaps Rahab is a survivor."[524] Such a reading also leads Fewell and Gunn to question whether "when Rahab speaks of Yahweh's power, is she a survivor, just telling the spies what they want to hear?"[525] The difficulty with this reading is that it takes away Rahab's agency entirely, and portrays her (similarly to Fewell and Gunn's reading of Jael)[526] as primarily a victim of circumstance who is left with few options, rather than as a figure who makes her

[521] Mbuwayesango, 'Joshua', p. 69.
[522] Rowlett, Lori, 'Disney's Pocahontas and Joshua's Rahab in Postcolonial Perspective' in Aichele, George (ed.), *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible (JSOT Supp 309)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, pp. 66-75, p. 66.
[523] Kwok Pui-lan, 'Sexual Morality and National Politics: Reading Biblical "Loose Women"' in An, Choi Hee and Darr, Katheryn Pfisterer (eds.), *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, pp. 21-46, pp. 38-39, quoted in Stratton, 'Consider, Take Counsel, and Speak', p. 86.
[524] Stratton, 'Consider, Take Counsel, and Speak', p. 86.
[525] Ibid., p. 84, referencing Fewell, Danna Nolan, and Gunn, David M., *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993, pp. 120-1.
[526] Q.v., 'Jael as outsider', p. 90.

own choices and acts in accordance with the preternatural knowledge of the divine will which she appears to have been given. Nor does this reading appear to take into account the humour within Joshua 2, and the portrayal of Rahab as someone who has superior knowledge and initiative to both the spies and the king's men.

A convincing alternative to this reading of Rahab as victim or survivor is given by Daniel Hawk, who points out that "as a whole, the story subtly evokes one of the most disconcerting texts in the Bible, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29),"[527] an association also noted, as we have seen, by Frymer-Kensky[528] and Nelson.[529] Hawk remarks that both stories are "linked by a remarkable correspondence in structure, vocabulary, atmosphere, and character,"[530] and goes on to describe the parallel structures of the two texts, noting that

> corresponding roles match the symmetry of structure shared by the two stories: the Israelite spies parallel the angelic visitors to Sodom, and Rahab coincides with Lot. However the *traits* of the characters in the two stories are reversed. Rahab dictates the course of events and moves the action forward with the same urgency as the angels display in Sodom. Like the angels, she proclaims the deeds of YHWH and dispels the group of citizens who come seeking the visitors. The spies, on the other hand, exhibit traits

[527] Hawk, L. Daniel, *Joshua (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry)*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 36.
[528] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 61.
[529] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 43., q.v. p. 146.
[530] Hawk, *Joshua*, p. 36.

reminiscent of Lot. They appear passive and powerless throughout their encounter with Rahab.[531]

Hawk argues that "the dark mood rendered by the association [of the two narratives] suggests that something is seriously wrong in Jericho. Second, the reversal of character traits confuses issues of guilt and punishment." Elsewhere, Hawk posits that "the bringing together of the two stories also elicits a significant challenge to exclusivist notions of salvation."[532] In this reading, it is again Rahab as 'outsider' who takes the initiative, and provides for her own salvation and that of Israel. Taking into account the allusions to Genesis 19, the Joshua narrative in its canonical context may even suggest that Rahab, a liminal 'triple outsider' in a city which evokes the memory of the utterly violent, inhospitable and irredeemable Sodom, is someone who takes the opportunity to bring down the whole oppressive system of Jericho, demonstrating *ḥesed* and furthering the cause of the Israelites in the process, while simultaneously securing her own escape. Asking how "a narrative presumably first preserved by the house of Rahab, in which Israelites serve as hapless pawns of her clever plot, could have become popular enough in Israel to emerge as part of their own history of conquest,"[533] Nelson also posits a "social and political reading of the story"[534] in which "the landless Israelites, their

[531] Hawk, *Joshua*, p. 39.
[532] Hawk, L. Daniel, 'Strange Houseguests: Rahab, Lot, and the Dynamics of Deliverance' in Fewell, Danna Nolan (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992, pp. 89-97, p. 96.
[533] Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 44.
[534] Ibid. Nelson also draws attention to such readings in Newman, M., 'Rahab and the Conquest' in Butler, James t., Conrad, Edgar W. and Ollenburger, Ben C. (eds.), *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson (JSOT Supp 37)*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985, pp. 167-181, and in Horn, P., 'Josue 2:1-24 im milieu einer "dimorphic society."' in *Biblische Zeitschrift Vol 31 (1987)*, pp.

peasant descendants, and the clan of Rahab stand together in a social sense as marginalized groups over against Jericho's king, who represents the centralized power of the royal establishment. Viewed according to such a paradigm, this narrative reveals itself as a typological antiestablishment story..."[535] Thus it is possible to see in Rahab a figure, comparable to both Jael and Ruth, who turns every expectation of the 'outsider' upside down, who has a better understanding of the divine will than the 'elect' community, who takes the initiative and drives the action, and through whom, similarly, the divine plan is advanced.

Rahab's challenge

Although Rahab may be seen by some as a construct designed to fulfil "the colonizer's ideal dream,"[536] it is possible, therefore, to take a much more optimistic view of the extant figure of Rahab in the canonical text as one who escapes and transcends this portrayal. Earl, additionally, notes that Rahab "is characterized by the very qualities that are at the heart of the covenant between YHWH and Israel (2:10-12), despite being a Canaanite prostitute."[537] This allows her to stand as witness against those who fail to live up to the Israelite ideal such as Achan (Josh 7), but also as a comparison with those such as the Gibeonites who through trickery also escape destruction (Josh 9). Yet, these comparisons are only possible because of the reversal of expectations in Rahab's own story. Although Spina argues that

264-70, which Nelson notes "illustrates this sort of social reading with parallels from Mari and the Code of Hammurabi."
[535] Nelson, *Joshua,* pp. 44-45.
[536] Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation,* p. 78.
[537] Earl, *Reading Joshual,* p. 198.

"Rahab's story is a conversion story of the first order,"[538] I contend instead that she stands alongside Ruth and Jael as an awkward outsider, present within Israel, celebrated perhaps and even lionised within tradition, and yet never fully assimilated, always רָחָב הַזּוֹנָה ("Rahab the prostitute"), and always, to some extent, 'other'.

It is this status which allows Rahab's story and her testimony to be used, as Earl comments, to develop "the identity of Israel and her perception of and relations with outsiders, perhaps 'pushing' the conventional understanding of what it means to be Israel."[539] Ultimately, Rahab challenges Israel's notions of what it means to be an 'insider' at the very point where such notions seem most fixed. Perhaps as a result she stands as a challenge, divinely inspired by her own knowledge of the acts and will of God, to the idea that either the identity of God's people or the nature of salvation can be easily described or contained. This is an optimistic reading of her story, but one which Frymer-Kensky also identifies: "Her name, Rahab the broad, is emblematic of God's inclusion of the many and of permeable boundaries of the people of Israel."[540] Perhaps it is this optimistic understanding of religious identity which has led to Rahab being seized upon as a paragon of the faith by subsequent generations, and which still gives her story power today.

[538] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p.71.
[539] Earl, *Reading Joshua*, p. 199.
[540] Frymer-Kensky, 'Reading Rahab', p. 67.

The Queen and the Matriarch: the 'decontamination' of Vashti and Asenath.

The books of Esther and Genesis contain two further problematic foreigners, Vashti and Asenath, the first of whom is written out of the storyline prior to the arrival of the eponymous Jewish heroine, and the second mentioned only briefly in passing as the matriarch of the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 41:45, 41:50-52). Nevertheless, as easy as it would be to gloss over their supporting roles in the stories of Esther and Joseph, both figures have exercised interpreters and commentators over the centuries due to their foreign status and, in Vashti's case, actions, and it is to these two figures that I now turn, in order to examine the ways that they have been received and 'made safe' through the years.

Vashti: conscientious objector or architect of her own downfall?

Vashti has been a controversial figure for interpreters, and there is disagreement regarding the details of her story in the extant texts of the Book of Esther. At the end of lavish drinking parties thrown by King Ahasuerus/Artaxerxes and the Queen in Chapter 1, the latter is summoned by the King, at this point under the influence of six months' worth of alcohol, to appear before his guests. Vashti[541] does not follow this instruction; in his anger, and following the suggestion of his advisers, the King decides that Vashti should be put aside, and her position given to one who is "better" (Esther 1.19). This sets the scene for the beauty pageant through which

[541] Referred to as 'Ουαστιν' in the Greek A-Text, and as 'Αστιν' in the Greek B-Text, but hereafter referred to as Vashti for the sake of clarity and brevity.

Esther is subsequently appointed Queen and afforded the opportunity to save the Jewish people from destruction. Part of the reason for Vashti's punishment is the courtiers' horror at the idea that Vashti's actions might be made known in the wider kingdom, where women might see them as an example to follow, but Vashti's fate and the reasons for it have been interpreted very differently by commentators from early times.

The precise nature of Vashti's offence in Esther 1.12 varies even across the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts; so in the MT she 'refused to come at the word of the King' (וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ), whereas in the A-Text she 'did not wish to do the desire of the King' (ουκ ηθελησεν… ποιησαι το θελημα του βασιλεως) and in the B-Text the Queen 'did not listen to him' (ουκ εισηκουσεν αυτου). These variations may be subtle, but hint at underlying disagreement about the difficulties which Vashti is seen as triggering in the Persian court. Day draws attention to other differences in Vashti's portrayal across the three texts, such as the emphasis placed on her royalty rather than her beauty in the A-Text,[542] the way in which the B-Text "stresses the importance of Vashti's action of speech. Her speaking is itself the basis of the King's displeasure with her (1.13),"[543] and the emphasis on her exceptional beauty in the MT, which, Day argues, "makes Vashti a more sympathetic character, for she refuses to be part of what would more likely be a degrading display."[544]

[542] Day, Linda, *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterisation in the Books of Esther (JSOT Supp 186)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, p. 210.
[543] Ibid., p. 211.
[544] Ibid., p. 212.

These variations of Vashti's story do not help to resolve, and perhaps highlight, a key difficulty in interpreting her actions. As Day also notes elsewhere, commenting purely on the MT, "Vashti, though a key player, is not heard throughout this entire episode… Nor is any explanation given as to *why* Vashti does not come at her husband's request."[545] While a variety of possibilities have been suggested, she goes on to suggest that "As understanding Vashti's motivation is quite a large gap for the reader to fill – one might argue that it is essential to understanding this character – it is curious why the author chose not to reveal her thoughts."[546] As large an interpretive gap as the author has left, this has not stopped commentators from filling it, and indeed overfilling it, with a variety of their own interpolations, to which I now turn.

Vashti's refusal

The context for the King's 'request' that Vashti appear before him is a drinking party of epic proportions, in which only men have been present, the women having been entertained at Vashti's own feast. Levenson notes the peculiarity of this setting: "Why Queen Vashti gives a banquet for the women (1:9) is a bit puzzling. Elsewhere in the book and in Herodotus (5:18), we find women partying with men at Persian banquets."[547] He goes on to comment that the "absence of women at Ahasuerus's banquets enhances the perception that these were really just overdone "stag parties," with all the licentiousness and disrespect the term

[545] Day, Linda M., *Esther*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, p. 30.
[546] Ibid.
[547] Levenson, Jon D., *Esther: a commentary*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, p. 46.

implies."[548] The inference that the King's request is therefore ill-judged and improper is widely made by commentators from the beginning, and most suggest that Vashti's refusal to appear is due at least in part to her distaste at the likely audience which awaits her. Thus, for example, Fox argues that "reluctance to display herself to a gathering of bibulous males, whom the author finds ridiculous, is enough to explain her refusal."[549]

The King requests that Vashti be brought before him בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת ("in the royal crown") (Esther 1:11) to show off her beauty to the assemblage. The significance of appearing in "the royal crown" has also been frequently dissected. For Day, "What he desires to show them is especially Queen Vashti's beauty, but also her royalty... [which] suggests that Vashti's beauty is not fully intrinsic to her but augmented by her political power."[550] Much earlier commentary seems to have interpreted the detail more salaciously however, as Carruthers notes: "A tradition that becomes remarkably pervasive is that the queen is asked to appear naked: taken literally to mean that she must appear *only* in her crown."[551] This is certainly the explanation given in the Targumim; indeed, in Targum Sheni, the request arises out of "a dispute and strife... concerning indecent matters" (Targum Sheni 1:10), during which King Xerxes maintains that Babylonian women are the most beautiful in the world. He therefore commands Queen Vashti: "Arise from your royal throne and strip yourself nude, place the crown upon your head... and appear before me and before 127 kings... so that they may see you, that you are more beautiful than all

[548] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 46.
[549] Fox, Michael V., *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther,* Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001, p. 20.
[550] Day, *Esther*, p.33.
[551] Carruthers, Jo, *Esther Through the Centuries*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, p. 62.

other women." (Targum Sheni 1:11)[552] This portrayal of events is one which casts Vashti's refusal to appear before the King as an appropriately dignified response for a woman to make to an unreasonable request from a drunken man, but which therefore creates its own problems for interpreters who seek to explain Vashti's subsequent demise and the elevation of Esther in her place.

The two Targumim demonstrate the ambivalence towards Vashti which developed in Jewish interpretation, while offering different explanations for her fate. Targum Sheni gives voice to the Queen, who argues first that the King's request is "disgraceful! Go tell your foolish master that you are also fools like him. I am a queen, the daughter of kings who are kings of Babylonia since ancient times. My ancestor drank as much wine as a thousand people, yet the wine did not confuse him into saying words which are improper like yours." (Targum Sheni 1:12) After the King angrily threatens her with execution, Vashti responds by again outlining her royal pedigree, before arguing that if "I were to appear before you and before the 127 kings... they would kill you and take me as a wife." (Targum Sheni 1:12) She is then encouraged by a Persian noblewoman who declares that even under threat of execution "you should still not publicly disgrace your name and the name of your ancestors, and not display your body to everyone except to the king alone." (Targum Sheni 1:12)

This somewhat sympathetic portrayal of Vashti nevertheless introduces the idea of her royal heritage, "I am Queen Vashti, daughter of Evil-Merodakh, daughter of the

[552] Grossfield also draws attention to several similar accounts in the Talmud and elsewhere: cf. Grossfield, Bernard, *The Two Targums of Esther*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, p. 128.

son of Nebukhadnezzar, king of Babylonia" (Targum Sheni 1.12), with the attendant negative connotations of this connection for a Jewish audience. Targum Rishon also asserts this association, but by contrast paints Vashti as a villain from the beginning. She is referred to as "the sinful Vashti... [who] did not permit the rebuilding of the Temple" in the opening verse of the book, and as "the wicked Queen Vashti" (Targum Rishon 1:9), before the explanation for her degrading treatment is given: "Because she used to make Israelite girls work in the nude and made them beat wool and flax on the Sabbath day, therefore it was decreed upon her to be brought out in the nude." (Targum Rishon 1: 11)

Ginzberg assimilates the depictions of Vashti from the two Targumim into his account, but adds into the mix later traditions which further attack her character, recounting that "Vashti recoiled from the king's revolting order. But it must not be supposed that she shrank from carrying it out because it offended her moral sense. She was not a whit better than her husband... But God sent the angel Gabriel to her to disfigure her countenance."[553] In this account, it is merely her (divinely originated) physical affliction and her vanity which account for her refusal to degrade herself before the King and his drinking party. This reading is taken further elsewhere, and Carruthers notes that Ginzberg "leaves out the Talmudic alternative that 'Gabriel came and fixed a tail on her' (*Meg* 12b)."[554] Such interpolations relating to Vashti's motives attempt to some extent to justify the seemingly unjust treatment which Vashti receives in the text, though as Carruthers goes on to state,

[553] Ginzberg, Louis, *The Legends of the Jews*, translated from the German Manuscript by Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin, Philadelphia: JPS, 2003, Vol.2 p. 1135.
[554] Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries,* p. 71.

this is often linked to her heritage as much as her actions: "She is condemned as the *Persian* Vashti, underlining Jewish supremacy, and for her immodesty."[555]

Such a negative portrayal of Vashti's refusal eventually abates to some extent, as Carruthers recounts: "In the seventeenth century, the Jewish exile Delgado departs from his predecessors in defending Vashti's actions... her sedition for him is unremarkable, and is even the response the king 'must expect'."[556] From this point, the reception of Vashti's actions is more varied, "disconnected from the authoritative condemnation of the rabbis."[557] Carruthers goes on to explore the obsession of later Christian commentators with the concepts of modesty and rank,[558] through the lens of which the question of 'appropriate' behaviour becomes a contest between the assumed feminine virtues of modesty and obedience. This led to a more mixed reception, but perhaps the more interesting question posed by modern commentators is that of the prudence and *utility* of Vashti's actions. Robert Stevenson and Thomas Scott, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, both point out the 'imprudence' of Vashti's decision to "persist in a refusal," given that it would certainly lead to "most fatal effects."[559] This is an assessment shared by some more recent commentators, with Levenson noting that while "some may wish to make her a feminist heroine... Queen Vashti's absolute and uncompromising refusal to comply with her husband renders her powerless

[555] Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries,* p. 71.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid.
[558] Ibid., pp. 71-78.
[559] Stevenson, Rev Robert, *Scripture Portraits*, London: for J. Harris, 1817, Vol. 2, p 234, and Scott, Thomas, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, according to the Authorized Version; with explanatory notes, practical observations, and copious marginal references,* London: L. B. Seeley & Son, Hatchard & Son, and Baldwin, Cardock & Joy, 1823, p. 409, both quoted in Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, p. 75.

and ineffective and ultimately sweeps her from the scene."[560] Even Fox, who engages in a deeper and more complex analysis of Vashti's character, concludes that "Vashti is an example of how *not* to do things, as well as a demonstration of the dangers of running afoul of the king. Her blatant self-assertion, whether or not it is praiseworthy in the abstract, is simply not the way to get along in the Persian court."[561]

Facing the consequences, *or*, *in vino stultitia...*

The perceived 'imprudence' of Vashti's action in refusing Ahasuerus' request is seen in the light of the king's consequent anger and the advice given by his councillors on how to deal with the Queen's disobedience. The King is immediately enraged (Esther 1:12), and as Day comments, "the effect that his abundant drinking has had upon him becomes evident; instead of thinking logically, he reacts in haste and with his emotions only."[562] At this point it is worth noting how ridiculous and degraded the drunken Ahasuerus and his court appear in the sight of readers, as he immediately looks for a solution in law to what appears to be a domestic disagreement. As Levenson notes, "Rather than handling the matter through quiet diplomacy and with a personal touch – Vashti is, after all, his wife and not some upstart courtier – King Ahasuerus characteristically and somewhat comically summons the 'sages in learned precedents' (1:13)."[563] Day comments that here "another characteristic of the king is revealed: he prefers not to make decisions for

[560] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 48.
[561] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, p. 169.
[562] Day, *Esther*, p. 33.
[563] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 50.

himself, but rather to have others make them for him."[564] Having thus abdicated responsibility for his wife's fate, as Levenson goes on to point out, "The question that Ahasuerus poses to his councillors in 1:15 is redolent of legalism and altogether lacking in feeling."[565] It seems that even in a drunken rage, Ahasuerus is so inept at inter-personal communication that he resorts to the machinery of state to deal with an argument with his wife.

Ahasuerus' inadequacies as a result allow his personal dispute to be abused by his drunken courtiers and turned into a major crisis of sexual politics. In the opening statement of Memucan's response in the MT, the supposed transgression is transformed into a national emergency: "'Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but also to all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus." (Esther 1:16) He goes on to argue that Vashti's example of disobedience will be made known throughout the kingdom, inciting a rebellion of women everywhere against their husbands, resulting in "no end of contempt and wrath!" (Esther 1:19) This is quite the extrapolation from Vashti's simple refusal to come and parade herself at a drinking party, and as Fox notes, "In Memuchan's frantic misinterpretation, Vashti's act signals a universal crisis, a rebellion against the sexual and social order... As he sees it, female contempt is always lurking just below the surface, waiting to pop up whenever the opportunity arises."[566]

[564] Day, *Esther*, p. 34.
[565] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 51.
[566] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, p. 21.

Modern commentators pick up on the irony in the ensuing edict, issued throughout the Kingdom, following Memucan's advice "that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus," (Esther 1: 19) with the intent that "all women will give honour to their husbands, high and low alike." (Esther 1:20) Fox notes that "What the decree actually achieves is to broadcast to the entire empire the very news they thought so threatening."[567] As Levenson points out, there is also tremendous irony in the punishment of being banished from the king's presence for refusing to come into the king's presence: "Unless we are to understand that the sentence entails death or imprisonment as well, we may rightfully suspect that Vashti greeted the edict with something other than grief."[568] Perhaps the vilification of Vashti in subsequent tradition can therefore best be thought of as a method of safely neutralising what might otherwise appear a brave and triumphant stand by a woman, and a foreigner at that, against what Ginzberg refers to as "the prototype of the unstable, foolish ruler... [who] sacrificed his wife Vashti to his friend Haman-Memucan, and later on again his friend Haman to his wife Esther."[569]

The irony employed and the mocking portrayal of the Persian court, outlined by Fox,[570] seem obvious to many modern commentators. Fox argues that "The opening sets a tone of humour, even farce,"[571] in contrast to the serious threat of Jewish annihilation which is to follow. He also notes that "the king issues an

[567] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, p. 24, picked up also by Day, *Esther*, p. 35. cf. also Clines' remark: "the royal decree to all the provinces announcing Vashti's dismissal will give more publicity to Vashti's deed – and her cause – as well as to the king's embarrassment than could ever have been achieved by the mere rumour his courtiers had feared" (Clines, David J.A., *The Esther Scroll (JSOT Supp 30*), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984, p.33, quoted in Levenson, *Esther,* p.51).
[568] Levenson, *Esther,* pp. 51-2.
[569] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol 2. p. 1138.
[570] Fox, *Character and Ideology,* p. 24.
[571] Ibid., p. 25.

unenforceable command that every man shall be boss in his own house and shall speak his own people's language. As R. Huna put it, this decree showed Xerxes to be 'completely stupid.' (Est. Rab IV 12)[572] Historically commentators have not seen the wisdom of such a view however, and such has been the similar obsession with the 'problem' of perceived female disobedience for some, that the decree issued by the king was seen, not as showing his foolishness, but as a wise legislative response to Vashti's act of rebellion.

Carruthers outlines some of the (disturbing) responses from the seventeenth century onwards, including the approving assessment by a nineteenth century Bishop of Ely that "none would dare to disobey, when they heard that the greatness of the queen could not preserve her from such a heavy punishment."[573] Carruthers describes the tortuous interpretative routes by which in commentators' eyes the king's decree variously showed the appropriate penalty for disobedient wives, the wisdom of monarchs who listen to their advisors, the superiority of the submissive British wife, and even the superiority of ancient Persian custom over modern 'oriental' barbarity.[574] Such responses mirror (albeit unconsciously) the foolishness of the king in assuming that it is possible to legislate away contempt for a ridiculous husband, but at the same time highlight the seriousness of the problems created by bruised male egos down the centuries.

[572] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, p.23.
[573] Patrick, Symon, *A Commentary on the Books of the Old Testament,* London: William Tegg & Co., 1813, p. 686, quoted in Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, p. 85.
[574] Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, pp. 85-91. A special mention must also go to the seemingly serious assertion in the second half of the twentieth century that "if other wives of lesser rank follow the example of the defiant queen, the empire will be thrown into anarchy." (Buttrick, George Arthur (ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures, Vol. III: Esther*, New York and Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1954, p. 838, quoted in Carruthers, *Esther Through the Centuries*, p.88).

The Targumim once again introduce their own explanations for Vashti's fate, diverging however regarding the source of the advice given to the king. Whereas Targum Rishon argues that the "descendents of Issakher refused to render that judgment" (Targum Rishon 1:14) and the Jewish sages therefore remained neutral,[575] Targum Sheni introduces the idea that the Memukhan who offers the king advice is the eponymous hero of the book of Daniel, and that "on account of Daniel it was decreed by heaven that Queen Vashti be executed." (Targum Sheni 1:14) Extraordinarily, Targum Sheni then makes the claim that Daniel (Memukhan) sees the opportunity to admonish his own wife, saying to himself "Now a pretense had been found to force wives to honour their husbands." (Targum Sheni 1:16) This tradition is recounted by Ginzberg, who adds that "a personal antipathy existed between Daniel and Vashti"[576] and goes on to ascribe to Daniel Vashti's reticence in appearing before the assembled nobles, and even the disfigurement which prevented her from doing so.[577] "In consequence of all this, Daniel advised, not only that Vashti should be cast off, but that she should be made harmless forever by the hangman's hand."[578]

Vashti remembered...

Despite these attempts to justify the king's punishment of Vashti (be it banishment or execution), the final reference to her in the scroll itself presents difficulties for

[575] Ginzberg explains their reasoning thus: "If we condemn the queen to death, we shall suffer for it as soon as Ahasuerus becomes sober... But if we admonish him unto clemency now, while he is intoxicated, he will accuse us of not paying due deference to the majesty of the king." Ginzberg, Louis, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 2, p. 1136.
[576] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 2, p. 1137.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.

such a reading. At the beginning of Chapter 2, once the king has sobered up and his anger abated, we are told simply that "he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her." (Esther 2:1) The Greek of the LXX renders things rather differently: ουκ ετι εμνησθη τες Αστιν, μνημονευων οια ελαλησε, και ως κατεκρινεν αυτην ("he did not mention Astin/Vashti, remembering what she had said, and how he had condemned her") (LXX Esther 2.1), suggesting that the King was trying to forget Vashti, having remembered his own culpability in her downfall. The MT and most subsequent traditions however suggest that upon sobering up and reflecting on what had happened, Ahasuerus not only regretted his decision as he "remembered Vashti", but also distanced himself from it in the use of the passive וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ ("what had been decreed against her") (Esther 2:1), as though regarding the Queen's fate in the abstract as something that had simply happened to her (perhaps as a result of the poor legal advice given by his courtiers), rather than the King's own poorly-taken, drunken decision.

This 'remembering' of Ahasuerus' is expressed as bitter remorse in the Targum Sheni account, where he laments: "I am not angry at Queen Vashti but I am angry at you. As for myself, I said thing(s) under the influence of wine, (but) as for yourselves, why did you make me decree to execute Queen Vashti and that I should remove her name from the kingdom?" (Targum Sheni 2:1) As a consequence the king resolves to kill those who gave him such bad advice, which again leaves us wondering at the extent to which Vashti can possibly be said to receive justice. This is resolved in the Targum with an explanation from the younger men of the court (who are still alive), that "she was not worth the judgement decree of death;

except that it was (decreed) from Heaven, that the descendants of Nebukhadnezzar, king of Babylonia, should come to an end." (Targum Sheni 2:2) Ginzberg, also recounting the King's anger upon sobering up and learning what he had done, suggests instead in concordance with the Targum Rishon account that the "death of Vashti was not undeserved punishment, for it had been she who had prevented the king from giving his consent to the rebuilding of the Temple."[579] The above accounts highlight the contortions which must be undertaken to reconcile the drunken, swaggering fools portrayed in the Persian court in Esther 1, and Vashti's seemingly justified refusal to appear before them, with the vindication of her punishment, while simultaneously allowing that even the King regretted his actions in the cold light of day, and that the punishment was unwarranted in the biblical text itself. While arguing that "It is hard not to sympathise with Vashti"[580] and noting that "some may wish to make of her a feminist heroine,"[581] Levenson contests that "[the] narrator, however, has no interest in her after this brief passage. Queen Vashti's absolute and uncompromising refusal to comply with her husband renders her powerless and ineffective and ultimately sweeps her from the scene."[582] This argument that Vashti's bravery simply diminishes her influence or provides a foil for Esther is picked up in Fox's final words on the Queen, arguing that "Vashti's example thus provides something of a justification for Esther's pliancy in her early years and for the obliquity and manipulativeness of her later actions."[583]

[579] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 2 p. 1137.
[580] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 48.
[581] Ibid.
[582] Ibid.
[583] Fox, *Character and Ideology,* p. 170.

While some feminist interpreters agree that Vashti simply serves as a warning to others in an ultimately androcentric tale,[584] for many others Vashti and her actions are not so easily dismissed. Far from fading into insignificance due to her resistance, she becomes for Lucinda B. Chandler "conspicuous as the first woman recorded whose self-respect and courage enabled her to act contrary to the will of her husband. She was the first 'woman who dared.'"[585] For Butting, the Queen's actions succeed in exposing the injustice of totalitarian and sexist structures of society, and provide a lasting lesson: "Vashti's opposition and the panic-like resistance of the wise men show that this is *not* a natural order, but an order established again and again by force. The protest of women can undermine the powerful system based on masculine arbitrariness."[586] Shemesh outlines the parallels which have been drawn between Vashti's opposition to the King and that of Mordechai to Haman, the response to both of which "triggers larger political developments,"[587] and the more positive light in which Vashti may therefore be seen.[588] She goes on to note the favourable and unfavourable comparisons between Vashti and Esther which have been drawn by feminist commentators over the years, centring on their contrasting approaches to the king.[589]

[584] See Shemesh, Yael, 'The Stories of Women in a Man's World: The Books of Ruth, Esther and Judith' in Scholz, Suzanne (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect – Volume I: Biblical Books*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013, pp. 248-267, pp. 258-9, especially on Esther Fuchs and Susan Niditch.
[585] Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, (ed.), *The Woman's Bible – Part II: Comments on the Old and New Testaments from Joshua to Revelation*, New York: The European Publishing Company, 1898, p. 86-7.
[586] Butting, Klara, 'Esther: A New Interpretation of the Joseph Story in the Fight against Anti-Semitism and Sexism' in Brenner, Athalya (ed.), *Ruth and Esther (A Feminist Companion to the Bible – Second Series)*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, p. 239-248: p. 242.
[587] Shemesh, 'The Stories of Women', p. 259.
[588] Ibid., pp. 259-260.
[589] Ibid., pp. 260-262.

Rejecting the argument that Vashti acts merely as a foil for Esther, Sakenfeld argues that "the Book of Esther presents us with two models of resistance to wrong."[590] While acknowledging that "Vashti exercised personal direct dissent that led to her banishment and efforts at further societal repression,"[591] Sakenfeld nevertheless recognises the bravery of Vashti's stance, and places it in a universal context which extends to the present, finding it difficult to enjoy the humorous depiction of Ahasuerus' court, "for Vashti's story has too much ancient and contemporary truth for comfort."[592] Aligning Vashti with those who continue to say 'No!' to current injustices, Sakenfeld argues that despite the real risks and consequences involved, "many do overcome their fear, and their 'No,' despite accompanying pain, may make a positive difference for themselves and sometimes for others as well."[593] She goes on to conclude that "Vashti's 'No!' is a model for women and men alike."[594]

This is also a conclusion which Linda Day reaches:

> in certain situations persons need to stand up against what they perceive to be immoral or unjust, to speak for righteousness without regard for the consequences. Freedom can prove to be expensive. But there are moments in life when enduring enslavement, in whatever guise it presents itself, is no longer an option, and one becomes willing to pay that price. At such turning

[590] Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob, *Just wives?: stories of power and survival in the Old Testament and Today*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, p. 64.
[591] Ibid., p. 64.
[592] Ibid., p. 63.
[593] Ibid., p. 64.
[594] Ibid.

> points, one can only maintain personal integrity by standing up and taking the risk.[595]

In this reading Vashti, despite the personal consequences of her refusal, and being 'written out' of the Book of Esther at the beginning of Chapter 2, is not simply 'swept from the scene' in the manner in which Levenson suggests that the author intends,[596] but becomes an enduring standard bearer for conscientious objectors to misogyny and patriarchy who follow. Thus she became for Chandler "the prototype of the higher unfoldment of woman beyond her time. She stands for the point in human development when womanliness asserts itself and begins to revolt and to throw off the yolk of sensualism and of tyranny,"[597] and Stanton was able to trumpet "the virtues of Deborah, Huldah and Vashti"[598] which cannot be overshadowed by what she found to be the troublesome depictions of other biblical women.

The portrayals of Vashti within the biblical text(s) and subsequent literature highlight again some of the perceived difficulties with 'outsiders' in the Hebrew Bible, and the way in which such outsiders are subsequently (re-)interpreted, with the intention of 'making safe' that which falls outside the norms of acceptable behaviour. This, we have seen, can be done by interpolating mitigating or exceptional circumstances which negate the value of the protagonist as role model

[595] Day, *Esther*, p. 43.
[596] Levenson, *Esther*, p. 48.
[597] Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, (ed.), *The Woman's Bible – Part I: Comments on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, New York: The European Publishing Company*, 1895, p. 87.
[598] Ibid., p. 86-7.

or exemplar, or by regarding as moral or practical failure that which in the primary text is not described as such. In Vashti's case, both strands of the latter approach can be seen. Her refusal to appear before the king, at first sight an ethical and principled refusal to be dragged into the drunken depravity of the preposterous Persian court, is reinterpreted by some as a hypocritical attempt to cover her own guilt and iniquity with moral pretence, and by others as an inappropriate and ultimately futile response to authority, which failed to bring about effective change to the structures against which she protested. More recently her actions, whether or not they are deemed to be 'successful', are at the very least seen as paving the way for the introduction of Esther as queen and her subsequent success in negating the threat to the Jewish people, and often as influencing the approach which Esther as protagonist chose to take in achieving her aims.

Initially vilified or even ridiculed for her approach, it is only more recently that Vashti's refusal is seen as having lasting consequences and as a pattern for subsequent resistance to tyrannical authority. In this respect, Vashti's reception is comparable to modern figures such as Emily Wilding Davison, whose legacy has been assessed more positively in recent times in the context of continuing moves towards equality and universal suffrage, and the recognition that what is seen widely as historically justifiable protest often achieves only retrospective legitimacy. In terms of our current enquiry however, it is perhaps the extent to which Vashti's actions are interpreted as 'inappropriate' or 'unsuccessful' (and therefore not to be imitated) which has most bearing on our interpretation of the other 'outsiders' upon whom I have focussed, to which I shall return.

Asenath: matriarch of Ephraim and Manasseh

The figure of Asenath appears only fleetingly in the Hebrew Bible. She is introduced as one of the honours bestowed upon Joseph by Pharaoh in Genesis 41: "Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt." (Gen 41.45) Asenath is subsequently mentioned only briefly in relation to Ephraim and Manasseh, whose lineage is denoted almost identically in Genesis 41.50, אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה-לּוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת-פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אוֹן ("whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him") and subsequently in Genesis 46.20:
אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה-לּוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת-פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן. On each occasion, while she is described as "daughter of Potiphera, priest of On," no further comment is made within the biblical text, and her atypical and somewhat anomalous religious and ethnic origins may have remained an interesting footnote in the story of Israel, were it not for the obvious difficulties that they appear to have presented to interpreters, highlighted by the extensive treatment of Asenath in secondary and apocryphal literature.

While it is not unusual for minor characters in biblical narratives to have their stories embellished in the Targumim, rabbinic accounts and subsequent 're-imaginings' of salvation history, Asenath appears as the main character in a book bearing her name, the versions of which have proliferated to such an extent through the centuries that even the possibility of discerning an original text is controversial.[599] Additionally, she appears in rabbinical accounts of several other

[599] See Humphrey, Edith M., *Joseph and Aseneth,* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, pp. 17-27 for a brief review of the variant texts, and Chesnutt, Randall D., *From Death to Life: Conversion in*

incidents in the Joseph narrative, and even has her own remarkable origin story which seeks safely to negate the possibility of Egyptian ancestry for the half-tribes of whom she becomes matriarch. It is not my intention here to pursue an in-depth analysis of the text of *Aseneth*,[600] such an undertaking being the work of an entire volume in itself, but rather to survey the ways in which the perceived threat of Asenath's 'otherness' is dealt with both in *Aseneth* and in rabbinic tradition, in order to assess the parallels between her treatment and that of the other biblical characters whom I have examined thus far.

The book(s) of Aseneth

Burchard describes how "*Joseph and Aseneth* is extant in sixteen Greek manuscripts, falling into at least four groups, and eight versions translated from the Greek, running to a rough total of seventy manuscripts."[601] Chesnutt notes that the tale "first became widely known in the West in the mid-thirteenth century through an abridged Latin version in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum histiorale.*"[602] Translated into numerous languages over the following centuries, interest in the work was revived in the latter half of the twentieth century due to its potential value in

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Joseph and Aseneth – JSP Sup 16, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 65-93 for a discussion of some of the issues surrounding text, provenance and dating of the book.

[600] Commonly referred to as *Joseph and Aseneth;* see e.g. Kraemer, Ross Shepard, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, New York: OUP, 1998, p. 3, and Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth,* pp. 64-65 on the difficulties surrounding even the name of the book(!)

[601] Burchard, C., *'Joseph and Aseneth'* in Charlesworth, James H. (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha – Volume Two: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works,* Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983, pp. 177-248, p. 177. I shall quote from Burchard's translation in the remainder of this chapter.

[602] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 20.

"illuminating the Jewish origins of Christianity."[603] More recent scholarship has continued to debate the book's possible origins, textual variants and purpose, while also considering new issues in interpretation, notably around gender,[604] including the possibility of female authorship.[605]

Aseneth comprises two stories about the figure of Asenath, the first an account of her meeting with and subsequent marriage to Joseph, and the second a tale of her attempted kidnap by Pharaoh's son, abetted by Joseph's brothers, Dan and Gad. Upon the happy resolution of the latter, shorter story, Joseph and Asenath are installed as regents of Egypt for a period of forty-eight years. Without attempting a detailed analysis of the story itself, I shall draw attention to a number of features which are pertinent to our examination of the role of the 'outsider', while commending the work in its entirety for further reading![606]

In the opening chapters of the book, Asenath is presented both as markedly, almost archetypically 'other' and yet simultaneously as somehow not. In Chapter One, where she is described as the daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis, an "exceedingly rich and prudent and gentle man" (Aseneth 1.3), Asenath is remarkable not only because of her beauty, "very tall and handsome and beautiful to look at beyond all virgins on the earth" (Aseneth 1.4), but because of her

[603] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 30, discussed in pp. 30-35.
[604] E.g. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth,* pp. 64-79 ('Feminist Readings') and Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, pp. 191-221 ('Why is Aseneth a woman?').
[605] E.g. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 91-92, Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, pp. 77-8.
[606] *Aseneth* is not only a ripping yarn in itself, but contains a great deal of complex imagery and is rich in possibility for study and debate, as the recent revival of scholarship on the book attests, not least around issues of gender and 'otherness' more generally.

Hebrew appearance, in which she apparently "had nothing similar to the virgins of the Egyptians, but she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was as tall as Sarah and handsome as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel." (Aseneth 1.5) Thus, the virgin daughter of the Egyptian priest is immediately identified as "like one of us" from Joseph's perspective, marking her at least physically as an acceptable, even worthy match for our Hebrew hero. Despite many suitors, "Aseneth was despising and scorning every man, and she was boastful and arrogant with everyone." (Aseneth 2.1) Indeed, no strange man had ever seen her, due to her life as a secluded virgin, during the description of which the problem of Asenath's 'otherness' is then defined purely in terms of her religious life. Within her chamber "gods of the Egyptians who were without number were fixed to the walls, (even gods) of gold and silver. And Aseneth worshipped them all and feared them and performed sacrifices to them every day." (Aseneth 2.3)

Clearly there is work to be done if this heathen is to become a suitable mother to Manasseh and Ephraim. Initially, even when it is announced that "Joseph the Powerful One of God is coming to us today" (Aseneth 4.7) and a potential match is suggested, Asenath becomes angry, and refers to the incident between Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39 among her objections to the marriage: "Is he not the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught in the act (when he was) sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him into the prison of darkness." (Aseneth 4.10) Despite this disdain, and her ambition to marry the son of Pharaoh, Asenath is immediately undone upon seeing Joseph arrive, launching into a lament in which she repents of her previous arrogance: "I, foolish

and daring, have despised him and spoken wicked words about him, and did not know that Joseph is a son of God. For who among men on earth will generate such beauty, and what womb of a woman will give birth to such light?" (Aseneth 6.3-4) This rather hasty turnaround is made complete with a prayer: "And now be gracious on me, LORD, God of Joseph, because I have spoken wicked words against him in ignorance. And now, let my father give me to Joseph for a maidservant and slave, and I will serve him for ever (and) ever." (Aseneth 6.7-8)

This remarkable reversal in attitude sees the erstwhile devout worshipper of Egyptian gods transformed by the mere presence of Joseph, to whom she apparently now desires to be betrothed without reservation. Here, the empty power of the Egyptian deities to hold sway with Asenath in the face of the God of Joseph serves to negate the power of Asenath's religious 'otherness', and to remove the perceived threat that she will be able to sway Joseph from his own religious identity. This however is not enough to enable a match to be made between the two, and indeed, despite initially warm words between them, Joseph will not consent even to be kissed in greeting by Asenath, insisting that "It is not fitting for a man who worships God... to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols..." (Aseneth 8.5)[607] Instead, seeing her distress, and "[having] mercy on her exceedingly" (Aseneth 8.8), Joseph intercedes on her behalf and prays for her conversion (Aseneth 8.9):

[607] Kraemer draws attention to the fact that in Joseph's speech here, "the Self and the Other are clearly differentiated with respect to food, worship, and physical contact, both sexual and filial" (Kraemer, *When Joseph met Aseneth*, p. 194).

> *Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High, the Powerful One of Jacob, who gave life to all (things), and called (them) from darkness to the light, and from the error to the truth, and from the death to the life; you, Lord, bless this virgin, and renew her by your spirit, and form her anew by your hidden hand, and make her alive again by your life, and let her eat your bread of life, and drink your cup of blessing, and number her among your people that you have chosen before all (things) came into being, and let her enter your rest which you have prepared for your chosen ones, and live in your eternal life for ever (and) ever.*

Thus Joseph asks not only that Asenath be turned away from the error of worshipping idols, but that she *become,* "in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews" (Aseneth 1.5), not only in appearance but *in toto*. Joseph's desire is for Asenath's entire identity to be transformed from 'outsider' to 'insider'. Kraemer, considering the lengthy passage detailing Asenath's 'conversion' which follows, describes "Aseneth's Transformation from Dangerous Foreign Woman to *Theosebēs Gynē*"[608] thus: "the story of Aseneth recounts her transformation from the Other to the Self, viewed of course from the perspective of the author(s)."[609] This indeed appears to be the intention of Joseph's prayer, which leaves Asenath in a confused state, but one which leads almost immediately to her apparent desire for conversion: "she wept with great and bitter weeping and repented of her

[608] Kraemer, *When Joseph met Aseneth*, p. 193.
[609] Ibid., p. 194.

(infatuation with the) gods whom she used to worship, and spurned all the idols, and waited for the evening to come." (Aseneth 9)

The next day Asenath puts on garments of mourning (Aseneth 10.9), throws her finery through the window "to the poor" (Aseneth 10.12), grinds to pieces her idols and throws them from the window of her chamber (Aseneth 10.13), and dons sackcloth and ashes for seven days (Aseneth 10.16-17). There then follows a series of soliloquies, in the first of which Asenath laments her idolatry, proclaims what she has heard about God, and resolves to give her confession: "I have heard many saying that the God of the Hebrews is a true God, and a living God, and a merciful God, and compassionate and long-suffering and pitiful and gentle, and does not count the sin of a humble person, nor expose the lawless deeds of an afflicted person at the time of his affliction. Therefore I will take courage too and turn to him, and take refuge with him, and confess all my sins to him." (Aseneth 11.10-11) Further speeches follow in which Asenath first plucks up the courage to address God, and then addresses a lengthy plea to the LORD, for mercy and for refuge from the gods of Egypt, and finally utters a prayer regarding Joseph, repeating her plea to be given "to him for a maidservant and slave", adding "And I will make his bed and wash his feet and wait on him and be a slave for him and serve him for ever (and) ever." (Aseneth 13.15)

Asenath's problematic status as the daughter of an Egyptian priest is thus solved on one level by her ardent desire for conversion, and her putting away of idols. Kraemer points out that in Aseneth 8.5-7, "the Self and Other are clearly

differentiated with respect to food, worship, and physical contact, both sexual and filial,"[610] and that "at the conclusion of the story, Aseneth worships the living God, eats proper food, and wears pristine, primordial garments devoid of idolatrous images."[611] Humphrey notes that for Chesnutt, "Aseneth's own actions provide the turning point of the piece."[612] Chesnutt himself concludes that in *Aseneth,* "To renounce idolatry, worship the God of Israel, and live faithfully as a Jew, is to partake of the food of angels in paradise and thereby to gain immortality and enjoy an angelic sort of existence."[613]

While Asenath's repentance and confession[614] may seem to be sufficient, *Aseneth* goes on in some detail to describe her subsequent encounter with the "chief of the house of the LORD and commander of the whole host of the Most High" (Aseneth 14.8) during which she is given instruction, changes her appearance, and undergoes a mysterious ritual involving a honeycomb made "from the dew of the roses of life that are in the paradise of God" (Aseneth 16.14) which promises immortality to those who eat of it.[615] It is clear in this passage that Asenath's confession has not only been accepted, but has attained for her a particular place among the children of God. She is told by the angelic visitor: "your name was written in the book of the living in heaven; in the beginning of the book, as the very first of all, your name was written by my finger, and it will not be erased forever" (Aseneth 15.4), along with

[610] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 194.
[611] Ibid.
[612] Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, p. 53, referring to Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* p. 137.
[613] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 255.
[614] These are reminiscent of the sort of confessional language exhibited by e.g. Rahab.
[615] Chesnutt analyses six references to the 'bread, cup, ointment and honey' of life/immortality/incorruption which accompany Aseneth's transformation: Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, pp. 128ff.

the news that "I have given you today to Joseph for a bride." (Aseneth 15.5) Most intriguing of all, however, is the title and role which she is given next, and through which she becomes an agent of divine salvation for God's people (Aseneth 15.7):

> And your name shall no longer be called Aseneth, but your name shall be City of Refuge, because in you many nations will take refuge with the Lord God, the Most High, and under your wings many peoples trusting in the Lord God will be sheltered, and behind your walls will be guarded those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance.

This extraordinary transformation, through which the double outsider Asenath becomes herself the personification of divine refuge, is followed by the mysterious honeycomb passage, during which she is given promises of strength and youth, and again described as "like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages." (Aseneth 16.16) Asenath's seven virgin companions are then blessed as the "seven pillars of the City of Refuge" (Aseneth 17.6) before the visitor's departure in a "chariot like a flame of fire, and the horses like lightning." (Aseneth 16.8)[616]

Burchard notes the fact that "Aseneth does not choose a name [as a proselyte], she is given one from above like others in biblical tradition, in particular those who have

[616] Humphrey draws attention to the "echoes with the mysterious 'man' encountered by both Daniel and Ezekiel" (Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, p. 96), pointing out that 'ανθρωπος' is used in the LXX of Daniel 10.5 and Ezekiel 1.27 as well as in Aseneth 14.9 to describe the fiery shining figure.

a significance for God's people as a whole,"[617] and this renaming does indeed seem to be significant. Chesnutt, arguing that *Aseneth* is not a missionary text, points out that Joseph does not "show any interest in converting Aseneth's family, and even the narrator seems unconcerned with the conversion of Pharaoh or Pentephres."[618] *Aseneth* appears rather to be concerned with the specific status of the protagonist herself ("Only after her conversion is Aseneth acceptable as a mate for Joseph"[619]) and perhaps more widely with the status of converts within the community. Chesnutt goes on to argue that "the opposition to exogamy is not abandoned but confirmed in this story; Aseneth can marry a 'son of God' only because she has become a 'daughter of the Most High' (21.4)."[620]

As Burchard suggests however, the conversion and transformation of Asenath goes much further than her acceptance as an 'insider'. Kraemer contends that

> It is fairly obvious here that Aseneth here functions as a salvific figure, not only for her reversal of Eve's actions but also for the role she will play as City of Refuge. Female saviours are fairly rare in the religions of the Greco-Roman world, with the important exception of Isis, so that this portrait of Aseneth may be quite significant precisely for its presentation of a salvific female. And it is also

[617] Burchard, *'Joseph and Aseneth'*, p.226, footnote l, in particular the comparison to Abram, Jacob, and Joseph himself, as well as to the City of Jerusalem and to Peter in the New Testament.
[618] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 261.
[619] Ibid., p. 263.
[620] Ibid., pp. 263-4.

> obvious that Aseneth is depicted in all versions of this story as the recipient of divine mysteries and wisdom.[621]

In the text of *Aseneth,* the figure who receives only a passing mention in the Genesis account of Joseph's adventures becomes a significant and exemplary agent of the divine, who even lives out her new vocation as "city of refuge" within the text, when the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah see their swords reduced to ashes and realise that "The LORD fights against us for Aseneth," (Aseneth 28.1) consequently prostrating themselves before her and begging for mercy. Asenath duly and successfully intercedes on behalf of the would-be kidnappers and murderers, arguing with Simeon that "By no means brother, will you do evil for evil to your neighbour. To the LORD will you give to punish the insult by them." (Aseneth 28.14)

Despite the elevated status achieved by Asenath in the book which bears her name, the text is not without difficulties for modern (and for different reasons it appears, mediaeval) readers. Kramer discusses many of the difficulties surrounding the portrayal of gender from a feminist perspective, starting with the fact that "it is the Other, the Egyptian, who is here represented by a woman, while the Self, the one who reveres God, is represented by a man."[622] She goes on to note that "It is the female Aseneth who is foolish, ignorant, and lacking in self-discipline; and the male Joseph who is wise and self-controlled."[623] Despite the fact that subsequently "the authors are able to portray the transformation of Aseneth from foolish and ignorant

[621] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 209.
[622] Ibid., p. 194.
[623] Ibid., p. 212.

to wise and discerning, from Other to Self, from mortal human to angelic immortal,"[624] it is ultimately Asenath's desire to be subordinate to Joseph, her compliance and her humility, which are celebrated. As Kraemer earlier points out in her reading of the longer text, "its subliminal message is that Paradise is restored when women are properly obedient to their husbands."[625] Humphrey points out some of the conflicting conclusions which have been reached as a result regarding the possible authorship of *Aseneth*, remarking that "those who highlight the 'feminist' tendencies of the romance, or versions of it, have tended to entertain the possibility of female authorship; those who have been offended by its pervasive hierarchical view have denied this. Some, such as Ross Kraemer, have been wise enough to realize that even a patriarchally conceived narrative could have been written by a woman, since this world-view was general in the ancient world, and not limited to the male imagination."[626]

Regardless of these arguments, and without wishing to comment further on the original *purpose* of the book itself,[627] the effect of *Aseneth* is to remove the perceived difficulty which attends the daughter of an Egyptian priest becoming both the wife of the towering Joseph and the matriarch of the two half-tribes, with all the concomitant difficulties surrounding election and identity which arise as a result. It is intriguing in the context of our wider investigation that this is achieved

[624] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 214.
[625] Ibid., p. 209.
[626] Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, p. 77.
[627] Chesnutt for instance argues that "the concern to enhance the status of Gentile converts in the Jewish community was the central purpose of *Joseph and Aseneth*" (Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, p. 264, whereas Kraemer finds herself "more and more resigned to our inability to pin the texts down to a particular interpretation and a particular context." (Kraemer, *When Joseph met Aseneth*, p. 294).

not by minimising the importance of this outsider, but by constructing an identity for her as newly adopted 'insider' and indeed as divine agent. The number of extant texts and their variation suggest that such an approach has certainly caught the imagination at various points in history, but it has not been the only method of making the character 'safe', and a different direction was taken in many of the rabbinical texts, to which I now turn.

In his synthesis of the Asenath legends, Ginzberg includes in four sections of his narrative a fairly straightforward retelling of the account provided in *Aseneth*,[628] containing only minor embellishments but with one key difference. In Ginzberg's account, he says of Asenath that "Her father was Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's magnets, ranking among the most distinguished of them by reason of wisdom, wealth and station."[629] This conflation in a number of sources of the figure of Potiphar from the earlier biblical Joseph narrative (Gen 37.36; 39) with that of Potiphera, his father-in-law (Genesis 41:45, 50; 46:20), referred to as Pentephres in the *Aseneth* account, seems to have led to a number of exegetical difficulties which in turn produced a number of traditions relating to Asenath's origins. Kraemer comments that "Despite the similarity of their names in Hebrew, nothing in the Hebrew narrative explicitly suggests such an identification, and the simplest reading of the Hebrew is that they are different characters. In the Greek translation

[628] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol. 1,* pp. 423-4 ('Asenath'), pp. 424-5 ('The marriage of Joseph'), pp. 425-6 ('Kind and Unkind Brethren') and pp. 426-7 (' Treachery Punished').
[629] Ibid., p. 423.

of the Hebrew Genesis, though, the names of the two men are no longer similar but essentially identical."[630]

Tracing the development of this identification of Potiphar with Potiphera, and the suggestion that Potiphar may have been a eunuch,[631] Kraemer concludes that "although it is hard to say precisely when, the transfer of Potiphar's characterization as a eunuch to Potiphera creates exegetical difficulties that various rabbinic Asenath stories appear to address and resolve in differing ways."[632] One of these ways, which Kraemer argues is a later tradition than those contained in *Aseneth*,[633] was to posit a completely different lineage for Asenath herself, who became instead the long-lost daughter of Dinah and Shechem, a theory which is included in Ginzberg's account of her origins.[634]

According to this theory, Asenath's conception was a result of the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, and "When this daughter was born to Dinah, her brethren, the sons of Jacob, wanted to kill her, that the finger of men might not point at the fruit of sin in their father's house."[635] Instead, Jacob "took a piece of tin, inscribed the Holy Name upon it, and bound it about the neck of the girl, and he put her under a thorn-bush and abandoned her there."[636] The infant is promptly carried to Egypt by

[630] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 314.
[631] Ibid., pp. 314-5.
[632] Ibid., p. 317.
[633] Ibid., pp. 316-318.
[634] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol 1, p. 348.
[635] Ibid.
[636] Ibid.

an Angel,[637] where she is adopted by Potiphar, only years afterward to come across the path of Joseph, who reads the amulet around her neck. "Thus Joseph became acquainted with her lineage, and he married her, seeing that she was not an Egyptian, but one connected with the house of Jacob through her mother."[638] Another version of this story is recounted by Ginzberg later in his account of Joseph as the 'The Ruler of Egypt'.[639] Here, Asenath is similarly abandoned and once again found by Potiphar, but is also portrayed as the one through whom Joseph escapes with his life following the accusations of Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39: "When Joseph was accused of immoral conduct... and his master was on the point of having him hanged, Asenath approached her foster-father, and she assured him under oath that the charge against Joseph was false."[640] Accordingly, she was divinely appointed as Joseph's future wife: "Then spake God, 'As thou livest, because thou didst try to defend Joseph, thou shalt be the woman to bear the tribes that he is appointed to beget.'"[641]

Kraemer concludes that these accounts of Asenath's Hebrew heritage through Dinah, "appear likely themselves to be late responses to the exegetical dilemmas posed by the identification of Potiphar and Potiphera."[642] Nevertheless, the

[637] In the account in Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer, Aseneth was already marked out at this stage as the future matriarch: "Everything is revealed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and Michael the angel descended and took her, and brought her down to Egypt to the house of Potiphera; because Asenath was destined to become the wife of Joseph." (Friedlander, Gerald (tr. and ed.), *Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1916, p. 288).
[638] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol 1, p. 348.
[639] Ibid., pp. 367-370.
[640] Ibid., p. 368. There are obvious difficulties reconciling this account with Asenath's own use of the same incident to question Joseph's character and suitability as a spouse in Aseneth 4.10, q.v. p. 191.
[641] Ibid., p.368, as Ginzberg notes, "from Abkir in Yalkut I, 146 and, in abridged form, Origen on Gen. 41.45."
[642] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 317.

traditions which arose seem to have taken on a life of their own, and as Kraemer also notes, "the Dinah traditions must have other (or additional) concerns... Because they have the effect of making Aseneth an Israelite, they may have been prompted by concerns over Aseneth's foreign birth."[643] Clearly the Dinah traditions do indeed 'solve' the problem of an Egyptian priest's daughter's appearance at the root of the family tree of Ephraim and Manasseh, although it is interesting that the same texts which remove Asenath's 'outsider' ethnic status now sit alongside a tradition in which her religious conversion was the prime concern.

Asenath revisited

From her brief mentions in the Book of Genesis, Asenath's story has grown and developed through a considerable variety of portrayals in secondary literature. As we have seen above, in the *Aseneth* text she is the haughty (but hauntingly beautiful) Egyptian virgin brought low by the sight of Joseph the 'son of God', who becomes the perfect convert, and is anointed as the "City of Refuge" for those who seek the LORD, no less. In this tale her 'otherness' is nullified by her total rejection of her Egyptian religious heritage, and her initial 'boastful and arrogant' behaviour (Aseneth 2.1) replaced by submission to her future spouse. Indeed, as Kraemer notes, "it is Aseneth's obedience to the angelic double of her husband, Joseph, that obtains immortality for her."[644] In this way, the danger of Asenath's 'outsider' status is made completely safe, although in the course of her transformation she is

[643] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 316.
[644] Ibid., p. 209.

also given a prominent status within God's people, as a chosen daughter at whose wisdom and understanding even the angels smile.[645]

In the later, contrasting traditions, wherein Asenath is supposed the daughter of Dinah, the threat to Israel's 'insider' status posed by the presence of a potentially religiously compromised Egyptian as the matriarch of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh is neutralised by the suggestion that Asenath is after all 'one of us', despite her unusual upbringing, and that her marriage to Joseph is a matter of keeping things in the family, thanks to her albeit unusual pedigree. For the avoidance of doubt, the father of the twelve tribes himself even "engraved the story of her parentage and her birth upon a gold plate fastened around her neck."[646] Unlike the oft-maligned Vashti, whose reputation is diminished by later interpretation so that her protest might be silenced as it is in the Persian court, the threat of Asenath's outsider status is made safe by removing it from the story altogether, ensuring that even her miraculous transformation at the hands of the divine messenger is no threat to the elect status of God's chosen people.

An interesting feature of the treatment of Asenath is the lack of difficulties with the biblical text perceived by the earliest commentators. Kraemer summarises thus: "Early exegetes... took Genesis 41 and 46 at face value. Aseneth, the daughter of Potiphera, married Joseph, and their sons are the eponymous ancestors of the half-tribes Manasseh and Ephraim. Demonstrably early Greek Jewish authors such as Philo and Josephus and the authors of 'rewritten' Bible such as Pseudo-Philo show

[645] Aseneth 16.12: "And the man smiled at Aseneth's understanding..."
[646] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* Vol 1, p. 368.

no interest whatsoever in Joseph's marriage to Aseneth."[647] Combined with the relatively sympathetic treatment of Vashti in the actual text(s) of Esther, perhaps one might discern the glimpse of an inviting thread which indicates that the 'otherness' which attends the influence of the 'outsider' is a phenomenon which has not always been, and so need not necessarily be, perceived as a danger or a threat to the community of faith, and may indeed on occasion be a divinely appointed opportunity to strengthen the faith of the community itself.

[647] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 317.

Pulling the threads together

In assessing the significance of our case studies, it is worth reflecting on the categorisation of each with regard to their status as 'outsiders', before examining the ways in which they interact with the elect in each of the narratives in which they appear. I intend to draw together the strands which particularly stand out across the stories of the individuals whom I have considered, before determining the extent to which their treatment in the text departs from that which might be expected. This in turn will allow me to describe what might be discovered regarding the place of the 'outsider' in the development of communities of faith, and how the two might be related.

Election revisited

In terms of Kaminsky's categorisations of election,[648] each of Zipporah, Jethro and Jael may be said to have some kinship ties with God's people. Although they are not Israelites, Jethro and Zipporah as Midianites are descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25.1-2), and as such are perhaps numbered among the offspring by whom "all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves." (Gen 22.18) By association, Jael "the wife of Heber the Kenite" (Judg 4.17) may also be said to possess some kinship ties to the Israelites, although her own origins are unclear in the text, and subject to speculation.[649] These three may be said to fall at worst

[648] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, p. 109.
[649] Q.v., 'Jael as outsider', pp. 88-91.

within the category of the 'non-elect' who "were always considered fully part of the divine economy"[650] in Kaminsky's terminology.

The status of Aseneth and Vashti is somewhat more complicated, as both are members of nations who are imperial powers at points in Israel's history. The relationship between Israel, Egypt and Persia is ambiguous however; despite the debauched and farcical depiction of Ahasuerus' court in the Book of Esther, it is Cyrus the Persian, under whom Daniel prospered (Daniel 6.28), whose spirit is 'stirred up by the LORD' (2 Chronicles 6.32, Ezra 1.1, 1 Esdras 2.2) to decree that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt, and who famously is described as the LORD's anointed in Isaiah 45.1. The work of the rebuilding is then said to continue by command of God and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and even of King Artaxerxes. (Ezra 6.14, cf. 1 Esdras 7.4) Indeed, such is Cyrus' association with the cause of the Israelites that in the Greek additions to Daniel, the people of Babylon "conspired against the king, saying 'The King is become a Jew'." (Bel and the Dragon 1.28)

As for the Egyptians, despite a later Pharaoh's subsequent dealings with Moses, and repeated references to the events of the Exodus in the prophets, echoing the opening of the ten commandments, אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם ("I am the LORD your God, who delivered you from the land of Egypt") (Exodus 20.2), Joseph himself had flourished in Egypt at the time when he married Asenath, whose own background appears only to have become a problem for later interpreters. There are also signs of hope elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for the

[650] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob,* p. 109.

ultimate reconciliation of Egypt,[651] and despite the fundamental nature of the Exodus narrative to Israel's self-understanding, Deuteronomy 23 contains a specific dispensation relating to those of Egyptian heritage: "You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land. The children of the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD." (Deut 23.7b-8) There is clearly scope for Asenath's descendants to be welcomed into the community, even if her own status is an interesting anomaly which has received much subsequent attention as we have seen.

The same passage is very clear, however, regarding the treatment of Ruth's people: "Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD." (Deut 23.3) Despite the various attempts by interpreters to assimilate Ruth into the community as a convert, or to dispense with the Deuteronomic prohibition because of Ruth's gender, I have argued that she remains throughout the biblical account a Moabite, a member of one of those groups "deemed to be enemies of God and whom Israel is commanded to annihilate."[652] So also, Rahab, as I have discussed, is one of the people whom the Israelites are to "utterly destroy" (Deut 7.2), and of whom it is specifically commanded "make no covenant with them and show them no mercy," (Deut 7.2) despite the fact that this is exactly what the Israelites choose to do in the case of Rahab. Both Ruth and Rahab therefore appear to be members of Kaminsky's 'anti-elect', and ostensibly irredeemable – utterly unsuitable, in other words, for the role

[651] E.g. Isaiah 19.18-25.

[652] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p.109. This idea in itself, as Kaminsky notes, poses "a serious challenge to any biblical theologian or scholar" (*Yet I Loved Jacob,* p.109), and he discusses the issue of the 'anti-elect' in pp. 111-119.

of divine agent for which they appear to be chosen. Perhaps this lends weight to Lohr's contention that, as Kaminsky acknowledges, "there is gradation and fluidity within these categories and that actions result in consequences, at times modifying one's position with God."[653]

It appears therefore, that God chooses to work through all three categories of person: the 'kinship' groups, or descendants of Abraham; the 'non-elect', those whose role in the divine economy is to be worked out separately to that of the chosen people of God; and even the 'anti-elect', those whose aims and even very existence seem to be contrary to the divine purpose for the 'elect' community. The generally positive treatment of our case studies in the texts in which we meet them, and the positive outcomes which obtain from their interactions with the elect,[654] appear to go beyond the idea that the non-elect find their own fate in their treatment of Israel as result of God's words to Abraham in Genesis 12:3,[655] including even those previously seen as enemies in the outworking of the divine promise.

There is clearly something much more complex happening however in the portrayal of Zipporah, Jethro, Jael, Ruth and Rahab than simply an economy of reciprocal blessing in which they receive 'just deserts' for their treatment of the elect, regardless of their initial status with regard to God's people. In each case, the individual concerned brings a form of 'blessing' on the elect which fundamentally

[653] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 43.
[654] Vashti aside, who does not directly interact with God's people.
[655] Q.v. pp. 38-40.

affects the direction of the community itself. In the case of Zipporah, Rahab and Jael, this takes the form of the physical salvation of God's people, at an individual and corporate level respectively, through the protagonist's direct action, in a way which is seen to be in concordance with God's will.

In the case of Jethro, Ruth and Rahab, the 'non-elect' or 'anti-elect' individual is able to further the divine plan by encouraging changes to the structure (Jethro) or theological understanding (Ruth) of the elect community, or by enabling divine promise to be fulfilled (Rahab), through advice and interaction with the 'chosen'. It is through Asenath and Zipporah and their descendants that God's people continue to exist and thrive, and from Ruth that David is descended. According to many traditions, Rahab also "as the wife of Joshua, became the ancestress of eight prophets and the prophetess Huldah."[656] Our 'outsiders', who, as I have argued, often remain unassimilated in the biblical text despite the best efforts of interpreters to 'neutralise' the impact of their foreign status, appear not as peripheral characters who interact on the fringes with God's people, but as people of fundamental importance to the lives and even survival of many of the most notable figures in Israel's history.

Relationships with the Divine

Along with the relative prominence of these 'outsiders' among the community of the elect when their influence on Israel's history is considered, there are three

[656] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol 2*, p. 843.

factors which are shared across some our case studies which appear to signify a deeper relationship with the divine. The first of these is a pre-existing relationship with God or a knowledge of God that exists apart from their dealings with the elect, which is present in the biblical text in the case of Jethro[657] (and thus perhaps by implication Zipporah)[658] and of Rahab,[659] and is introduced in secondary literature in an attempt to understand or ascribe motive, in the case of Ruth[660] and Jael.[661]

As Moberly points out, it is a feature of the patriarchal narratives that 'outsiders' might have knowledge of God,[662] and we might therefore be unsurprised that Jethro and perhaps Zipporah have some such knowledge in their initial Exodus appearances. It is more striking that, following the theophany of Exodus 3, Jethro is still the one who seems to have the knowledge and authority required to 'host' the worship of Exodus 18.12, and similarly surprising that it is Rahab who seems to have all of the theological insight in her encounter with the spies in Jericho. The interpretative additions to Ruth's and Jael's narratives perhaps function simply to address the worrying impenetrability of their motives, but that in itself is a telling indication of the fear that surrounds such 'outsiders' acting apparently incomprehensibly as their own, or more worryingly as divine, agents.

[657] Q.v. the discussion in the Jethro chapter, 'Exodus 18: "I will give you counsel, and God be with you!"', pp. 58-73. This is the case potentially in the description of Jethro as the "priest of Midian" (Exodus 2.16), and also in his knowledge "of all that God had done for Moses" (Exodus 18.1), but most specifically in his sacrifice described in Exodus 18.12.
[658] This is made explicit in secondary literature, e.g. *The Chronicles of Moses* - cf. Gaster, M., *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel: or, The Hebrew Bible Historiale*. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1899, p. 120.
[659] Cf. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 59-60.
[660] E.g. in the interpolations introduced by Targum Ruth to Chapter 1.
[661] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol 2*, pp. 868-869, recounting the tradition that Jael asked for the Lord to give her a number of signs prior to taking Sisera's life.
[662] Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament,* pp. 87-88.

Divine Instincts?

A second and related feature, which is seen in the narratives concerning Jethro, Zipporah, Ruth, Jael, and Rahab, is an *instinctive* knowledge of what constitutes the divine will in a given situation. On multiple occasions, where the 'elect' seem unaware or unsure of how to proceed, the figures in our case studies take the initiative and act from some insight which only they appear to possess. This is seen both in the case of Jethro's declaration of praise and sacrifice (Exodus 18.10-12), and more pertinently in his subsequent advice to his son-in-law, which begins with the words "'What you are doing is not good'... 'Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you!'" (Exodus 18.17,19) and concludes with the declaration "'If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.'" (Exodus 18.23)

As we have seen, Childs argues that this passage is not incongruous with Jethro's status,[663] but significant of the value of learned experience through which wisdom may be gained. Childs goes on to describe how Origen and others "found in this openness a warrant for seeking knowledge from non-Christians, who likewise had access to divine truths,"[664] and himself considers the way in which revelation (through Moses) and wisdom (through Jethro) are balanced to be "the most fruitful theological dimension of this text for today."[665] While I agree with Childs' assessment, I think that the significance of Jethro's 'wisdom' is amplified when viewed alongside the insights of our other protagonists.

[663] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 332.
[664] Ibid., p. 334.
[665] Ibid.

In Exodus 4.24-26, as I have previously noted, it is precisely at the most theologically complex and troubling point of the story, where even the text itself is most difficult to comprehend[666] that Zipporah takes control of the situation, and appears *instinctively* to know the appropriate reaction to a terrifying and unforeseeable threat of divine origin. Here again we see innate wisdom from an 'outsider' save a situation in which the 'elect' (in this case the elect of the elect!) are left otherwise helpless and overwhelmed. It is also worth revisiting in the context of this enquiry Levenson's words that "those chosen, like Abraham, for exaltation, are able to pass the brutal tests to which God subjects them and thus to vindicate the grace he has shown them."[667] Here it is undoubtedly Zipporah rather than Moses who 'passes the test', which may cause us to revisit our notions of the role of the 'non-elect' in the success or failure of the 'chosen' people.

Where Ruth and Rahab are concerned, while only the latter makes, in Spina's words, an "exemplary Israelite statement of faith,"[668] both women demonstrate great insight into the divine concept of *ḥesed* in a way which seems to elude their interlocutors among the elect. This concept is central in *Ruth*, and Frymer-Kensky contends that "no book better models what it means to love the stranger and what it means to demonstrate *ḥesed*…"[669] I have argued that Ruth's oath in Ruth 1.16-17, made with no expectation of reciprocity and in response to no divine promise, is itself an expression or reflection of divine *ḥesed*.[670] It is due to Ruth's initiative and

[666] Q.v., pp. 58, 74.
[667] Levenson, *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son,* p. 139.
[668] Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, p. 61.
[669] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, p. xv.
[670] Q.v., p. 115.

her own demonstration of *ḥesed*, that Boaz, Naomi, and the people of Bethlehem come to a proper understanding of how God is at work. It is Ruth's instinctive knowledge of the divine principle of *ḥesed* which transforms those around her and ultimately effects the restoration of Naomi, Boaz and the whole community. Yet all of this is achieved by a consummate 'outsider', who is portrayed throughout as "the defier of custom, the maker of decisions, and the worker of salvation."[671] Rahab, despite again representing all that is 'anti-elect', as a Canaanite and a prostitute, and herself introducing the concept of חרם in Joshua 2.10, is the character who displays both divine and human *ḥesed* in her dealings with the Israelite spies. Dozeman, in considering the spontaneity of (undeserved) divine *ḥesed*, notes that "the same spontaneity characterizes Rahab's *ḥesed* towards the spies,"[672] which is coupled with her subsequent more formal and 'human' request for a show of good faith from the spies in return for her co-operation with the invading army of the elect. For Dozeman therefore, "both aspects of *ḥesed*, as spontaneous mercy and as legal loyalty, function in the exchange between Rahab and the spies."[673] It is important to note however, that Rahab's decisive action to save the spies and to declare her own understanding of God's plan for the elect is taken *before* she shows any concern or extracts any promises for her own or her family's safety. This is seemingly based on her own instinctive discernment of the divine will and the 'right' response to it, something of which the 'elect' themselves seem to be very unsure.

[671] Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*, p. 184.
[672] Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, p. 247.
[673] Ibid.

In Jael's case, I have highlighted the way in which her actions are associated with God's in the use of language in Judges 4, as highlighted especially by Ellen van Wolde,[674] and in the theophanic language of her initial words to Sisera, highlighted by Matthews.[675] As I have also noted, the lack of explicit motive for Jael's actions in the biblical text have led to widespread and divergent speculation as to her true intentions.[676] Nevertheless, I maintain that it seems to be straightforward in the biblical narrative that Jael is acting in a way which is, though terrifying to many observers and interpreters, instinctively in concordance with the divine will. While commentators have argued through the centuries to decry or defend the propriety of Jael's actions, the original account of them leaves no doubt that she has taken the initiative to deliver on God's prophecy to Deborah in complete concordance with the divine plan to rescue the elect: "So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites." (Judg. 4:23)

All of these instances of special insight or instinctive knowledge of what is required by God chime with Kaminsky's observation (commenting on the Balaam narratives) that "Israel is aware that certain non-Israelites may have greater insight into God's plans for Israel than many Israelites do. Far from being derogatory towards outsiders, these texts indicate that Israel needs the theological insight of non-Israelites to help her realize her unique status and fulfil her destiny."[677] What is perhaps surprising is the extent to which this 'outsider' theological insight appears

[674] Q.v., pp. 94-95; see van Wolde, 'Ya'el in Judges 4'.
[675] Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 71.
[676] Q.v., pp. 87-91.
[677] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, pp. 125-6.

key to the flourishing and even survival of the elect at so many key points in the narrative of Israel's history.

Chosen or unchosen?

This leads on to the third aspect which must be considered with regard to the relationship between God and the 'non-elect', which may be expressed as the 'chosenness of the unchosen.' In examining the actions of Zipporah, Jethro, Rahab, Ruth and Jael, it seems clear from the case studies I have undertaken that each of these individuals is more than either a 'supporting actor' or simply a foil for the 'chosen' protagonist in the biblical account.[678] In each case, the 'outsider' can be seen to take the initiative and act in accordance with some divine plan which is not apparent to the 'insider'. Sometimes this is spontaneous and instinctive, as in Zipporah's actions in Exodus 4.24-26, or Rahab's decision to save the lives of the spies in Joshua 2.4-7. On other occasions it appears to be a considered response to circumstance, as in the case of Ruth as she is portrayed from 1.16 onwards, or of Jethro's advice to his son-in-law, on the most appropriate way to execute his own responsibilities, and the best structure for the Israelite community, in Exodus 18.14-23. In Jael's case, the extent of her premeditation is just as unclear as her motivation, and yet she actively decides how to resolve the situation before her, in a way which proves to be the fulfilment of divine promise.

[678] I would contend that this is true of Vashti too, but her story takes place without direct interaction with the Jewish characters of Esther and I have therefore treated her reception as an 'outsider' as a separate though related issue.

In each case, despite the best efforts of subsequent interpreters to remove their agency or the threat of their otherness, our 'outsiders' have agency themselves in the biblical text, and also act as divine agents, taking the initiative where their 'chosen' counterparts are unwilling or unable to do so. Their perception of what is an appropriate response in a given situation, while often transgressing 'acceptable' boundaries of conduct, displays a deeper knowledge of the divine will, which may be as a result of revelation,[679] instinctive reaction[680] intuitive knowledge,[681] experiential wisdom,[682] or a combination of each factor which allows the 'correct' action to be taken, by which they become themselves a blessing or salvific figure for the elect, who are unable succeed or to make the appropriate choice without such intervention from outside.

While the actions of these figures are almost entirely positively received in their own narratives, they have often proved problematic to subsequent commentators, who see in the agency of these outsiders a threat either to the privileged position of the elect, or to the faith community's understanding of proper and appropriate boundaries of behaviour, both human and divine. What does it mean for our understanding of the integrity of the community, if God repeatedly 'chooses' the 'outsider' to save and transform the elect through a series of disruptive interventions?

[679] Such as Rahab's seemingly authoritative knowledge of God's plan in Joshua 2.9-11.
[680] E.g. Exodus 4.24-26.
[681] Such as that displayed by Ruth and to some extent Rahab in their treatment of *ḥesed*.
[682] E.g. Exodus 18.14ff.

The treatment of Asenath is interesting in this context, as her initially uncomplicated introduction into the community as mother of Ephraim and Manasseh clearly becomes problematic enough for some interpreters to require her complete assimilation as a 'chosen' figure. As a result, the implications of her 'outsider' status are abrogated by her transformation at the hand of the mysterious heavenly visitor in *Aseneth* – in Kraemer's words, the "transformation from the Other to the Self, viewed of course from the perspective of the author(s)."[683] In portraying such a transformation however, Asenath becomes not only one who is 'chosen', but a "salvific figure... for the role she will play as City of Refuge."[684] An attempt to annul the significance of the 'outsider' instead places such a figure at the very heart of the community, with an explicit role not only as the matriarch of the two half-tribes, but as "the recipient of divine mysteries and wisdom,"[685] and the divinely appointed "walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God." (Aseneth 16.16) This suggests that the distinctiveness of the elect can only be maintained, even in secondary literature, if the borders of the community are porous enough to allow the 'outsider' an honoured place when God so dictates.

From our case studies of Zipporah, Jethro, Ruth, Jael and Rahab, there emerges a pattern in which some existential threat to the elect individual or group is addressed and resolved, not by the 'chosen' themselves, but by the elevation of an 'outsider' to the role of divine agent, with whom and through whom God acts in a

[683] Kraemer, *When Aseneth met Joseph*, p. 194.
[684] Ibid., p. 209.
[685] Ibid.

way which is disruptive to the cultural norms of the community. In the case of a perceived threat, such as the foreignness of Aseneth, a similar route is inadvertently taken by interpreters to nullify the presenting problem, while simultaneously highlighting the way in which the divine will constantly confounds expectations of where and with whom wisdom and the knowledge of God rest.

Given the repeated instances of such individuals, there appears to be, not some deficiency in the way in which the elect interact with God, but a distinct means by which God introduces new information or acts outwith the boundaries of the community's perception of 'acceptable' behaviour, in order to shape, direct, and preserve that community. It would be perfectly possible for each of the roles played by our 'outsider' protagonists to be fulfilled by 'insiders', and yet both before and after the theophany of Exodus 3 we find disruptive 'outsiders' who are essential to salvation history. This suggests that the influence of such figures is in some way an essential method by which the divine plan is enacted, rather than, as may be assumed in individual cases, simply an exception to an otherwise consistent rule that salvation originates within the community of the elect through its relationship with God. We are thus confronted in a different way by one of the mysteries of election itself to which I have already made reference, that "God is still free to choose, and God's choosing cannot be second-guessed."[686]

While the figures I have examined constitute only a tiny proportion of the narrative protagonists in the Hebrew Bible (unsurprisingly, given that the texts are written

[686] Q.v., p. 31.

from the perspective of the 'insider'), upon them depend the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Moses, the Exodus, Israel's legal system, the conquest of the land of Canaan, deliverance from the Canaanites, and the Davidic line, along with, one could argue, the right understanding of *ḥesed*, one of the central pillars of divine and human interaction. Taken together, their contributions and their influence are huge, and while not the central figures in Israel's history, they are characters upon whom that history depends in a variety of circumstances, at points where the community of the elect is most at risk.

Reception and the sanitisation of the other

As we have seen, a variety of methods have been used in order to nullify the potential threat of the 'other' in such situations, and by extension the threat posed to the community's concept of God by seemingly incomprehensible or disturbing divine action. In the case of Zipporah, not only is the identity of the 'threat' subtly shifted in interpretative works,[687] but she and Jethro are suggested by some commentators as being at fault - the very *cause* of the threat to Moses, rather than in Zipporah's case his salvation![688] Two figures whose behaviour is not questioned in the text therefore become questionable in later tradition, a move which we have also seen in later commentary on Jael's actions against Sisera,[689] especially following the rise of the Puritans in Christianity. It may be noted that such methods of undermining or re-presenting the motives of these figures also obfuscate the

[687] Q.v., pp. 51-52.
[688] Cf. e.g. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol.1 p. 496.
[689] Q.v., 'Reception of Jael's actions', pp. 80-84.

extent to which disturbing actions portrayed in the biblical narrative are directly attributable to divine action, thus avoiding the need to confront the challenge which they pose. Similar methods of discrediting Vashti's motives and actions[690] also suggest that this is one of the methods by which the integrity of the 'other' is undermined if it is seen as being in competition with the integrity of the dominant group.

Another method by which the 'outsider' is contained as a potential threat is by assimilation; that is to say, those who are presented consistently, even unproblematically, as outsiders in the biblical text, becoming appropriated as 'insiders' in subsequent interpretation, in a way which reduces the threat that divine knowledge and action can be seen as disruptive, 'outsider' forces. The prime example of this in my case studies is Ruth, who, I have argued, remains a Moabite throughout the narrative, and yet has been presented in later interpretation as a 'model convert', whose disruptive influence on the life of Bethlehem can therefore be seen as the action of an 'insider'. This same interpretative move is seen, for example, in the 'conversion' of Jethro in Tg. Ps-J's additions to Exodus 18.6[691] and in the incorporation of Rahab into Israel, either as simple convert or even as the wife of Joshua, despite the sparse evidence for this in the biblical text.[692]

[690] Q.v., 'Vashti's refusal', pp. 172-177.
[691] Interestingly, the same move is applied in reverse by proponents of the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis, by turning Jethro into the original 'insider', e.g. Rowley, H. H., *From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical traditions in the light of archaeology*, London: British Academy, 1950, p. 150, and Blenkinsopp, J., 'The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah' in *JSOT 33 (2008)*, p. 134.
[692] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol 2*, p. 843.

This method of assimilation and therefore decontamination of the 'outsider' is also, of course, seen in its extreme form in the extended conversion narrative in *Aseneth*, written in response to the protagonist's briefest of appearances in Genesis 41.45, 50 and 46.20, and in the attempts to present Asenath as an ethnic 'insider' through the legends regarding her supposed Hebrew heritage.[693] These attempts to limit the extent to which 'outsiders' can be seen as disruptive influences acting in concordance with divine will and action, despite the evidence of the biblical text, should give communities of faith pause for thought in considering similar methods which are applied today to negate the voice of the 'other' or to resist challenge from 'outside' voices.

"Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you!"

The common themes running through each of the case study narratives, and the methods used to safely contain the 'outsider' have major repercussions for the way in which faith communities who treat the Hebrew Bible as sacred Scripture might expect to discern and ascertain what God might be saying to the community. If our case studies represent a method by which the divine will shapes and transforms a community of faith, then 'outsiders' such as Zipporah, Jethro, Jael, Ruth, Rahab and Asenath are not simply interesting footnotes in the history of divine/human interaction, but an integral feature of the divine economy, through whom the community itself is brought closer to a right relationship with God.

[693] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews Vol 1*, p. 348.

For Christian communities, the New Testament also contains similarly disruptive figures, through whom new teaching is imparted, which is particularly striking in the Gospels given that Jesus is physically present at the time(!) The Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman whose story is recounted in Mark 7.24-30 and Matthew 15.21-28, of whom Jesus says "'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'" (Matthew 15.28) springs immediately to mind, along with the Samaritan Woman at the Well in John 4, in the face of whose honesty and probing theological questions Jesus responds, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." (John 4.23)[694] These and other New Testament figures would make further interesting case studies, and indicate that the same disruptive 'outsider' figures are to be found here too.

If this is true, then listening to the voice of the outsider becomes obligatory for any faith community which seeks to 'know' God, rather than either a dangerous potential stumbling-block, or an interesting but ultimately optional and peripheral engagement with those who do not share the same faith. None of this can negate the multitude of references within the Hebrew Bible to maintaining communal identity or integrity, and we may as a result think in terms of a constantly maintained tension between the divinely commanded orthodoxy and orthopraxis of the elect on the one hand, and on the other, the disruptive influence of a God

[694] The Woman at the Well in particular has also been subject to some of the same interpretative issues as our case studies – a definite 'outsider' who has often been depicted as a 'sinner' or 'fallen woman' in Christian commentary, despite the absence of evidence in the biblical text. See e.g. Day, Janeth Norfleete, *The woman at the well: interpretation of John 4:1-42 in retrospect and prospect*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, for a history of interpretation.

whose choices cannot be constrained, and who frequently 'chooses' the 'unchosen' through whom to reveal the divine will. In the following chapters I shall explore some the implications of this feature of the divine economy, along with the consequent obligation to listen to the disruptive voice of the 'outsider', in terms of internal and external dialogue and engagement, beginning with dialogue between faith traditions.

Some implications for Dialogue

One area in which this revised view of the 'outsider' may have implications is interfaith dialogue. It is not my intention here to give a comprehensive survey of the history of such discourse, but rather to draw out certain key developments which have informed the current situation, and to assess how the conclusions which I have reached from my case studies may be applied. In particular I shall examine how methods used in and motives behind interfaith 'dialogue' have shifted, and to explore some of the more recent developments in dialogue which have particular resonance with the view of the 'outsider' which I have explored. Over the centuries, interactions between faith communities have often been overtly hostile, motivated both by the desire to maintain communal integrity, and by the desire to convert 'outsiders' to the 'truth' of a community's theological position. These two motivations may be seen in early Christian writings such as the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which develops a defensive supersessionist theology[695] and Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, in which a supposed 'dialogue' with a "Hebrew of the circumcision, a refugee from the recent war"[696] is used as a vehicle to propose the philosophical superiority of Christianity and the messiahship of Jesus.[697]

[695] Epitomised in Ch. XIII, which specifically argues that Christians and not Jews are the 'true heirs' of the covenant.

[696] Dialogue with Trypho 1.3 in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Falls, Thomas B. (tr.), Halton, Thomas P., (rev.), Slusser, Michael (ed.), Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, p. 4.

[697] For a discussion of the polemical tone and potential audience of *Dialogue with Trypho,* see e.g. Rajak, Tessa, 'Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*' in Edwards, Mark, Goodman, Martin, and Price, Simon (eds), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians*, Oxford: OUP, 1999, pp. 59-80.

'Monological Dialogues' such as *Trypho* were not exclusive to Christianity, and countless examples such as the 12th Century *Kuzari,*[698] Ramon Llull's 13th Century *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis*[699] and Ibn Taymiyya's 14th Century *Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*[700] may be found across the Abrahamic traditions throughout the centuries. While such works of often polemical apologetics persist today, substantial attempts at real dialogue between faith communities have also been made, especially since the end of the 19th Century. One early such attempt at fruitful and productive dialogue can be seen in the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, which took four years to plan, and brought together representatives of a number of the major world faith traditions.

Its instigator, Charles C. Bonney, wrote that the "supreme object of the festival was to end religious strife and persecution and to secure to every human being, as far and as rapidly as possible, the sacred right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience."[701] While the World's Parliament sought to "set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom,"[702] the rules in place explicitly prevented any attempt to reach a conclusion on the respective merits of the positions held by the various traditions

[698] See Korobkin, N. Daniel (tr.), HaLevi, Yehudah, *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith*, Nanuet, NY: Feldheim, 2009.
[699] See Mayer, Annemarie C., 'Chapter 6: Llull and Inter-Faith Dialogue' in Austin, Amy M. and Johnston, Mark D., *A Companion to Ramon Llull and Llullism*, Leiden: Brill, 2018, pp. 146-175 for a discussion of Llull's genuine interest in and interactions with those of other faiths. His work remains, however, evangelistic in intent.
[700] See Thomas, David and Mallett, Alexander (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History: Volume 4 (1200-1350)*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 834-844.
[701] Bonney, Charles C., 'The World's Parliament of Religions' in *The Monist, Vol. 5, No. 3 (April, 1895)*, pp. 321-344, p. 324.
[702] Ibid., p. 330.

which were represented. As Bonney states, "by far, the most important of all these rules and regulations was that which excluded controversy and prohibited strife."[703] As a result, though doctrinal statements were expounded, discussion of contentious differences was set aside in order better to achieve the goals of the Parliament, amongst which were "to indicate the impregnable foundations of theism, and... To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace."[704]

While the World's Parliament, with its often triumphalist rhetoric regarding the superiority of theism and the great strides of progress being made in interreligious dialogue, expected this work to continue and grow, the Parliament of the World's Religions was not formally reconstituted until the centenary of the first gathering, in 1993. The effect of the huge disruption and conflict of the intervening century was evident in the aims of this new Parliament, as a result of which was issued *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions,*[705] based largely around the work of Hans Küng.[706] The declaration and the Parliament's subsequent vision seek to find common ground in practical action to address the problems of conflict and oppression, arguing that "our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary."[707] This new emphasis on peace-making and interreligious harmony, one

[703] Bonney, 'The World's Parliament of Religions', p. 333.
[704] Ibid., p. 330-1.
[705] Küng, Hans and Kuschel, Karl-Josef (eds.), *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions,* New York: Continuum, 1993.
[706] cf. Küng, Hans (tr. John Bowden), *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic,* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991.
[707] Küng and Kuschel, *A Global Ethic*, p. 18.

difficulty of which may be seen as a focus on ethics, perhaps at the expense of theology, reflects the inevitable shift in motivation for dialogue precipitated by the conflicts of the 20th and 21st Centuries, and most notably by the horrors of the Shoah.

The rupture of the Shoah and Vatican II

It is not possible to address here, in depth, either the shameful history of Christian anti-Semitism, or the response of the Church to the rise of fascism and the events of the Shoah, which subjects are themselves the work of many lifetimes. It is notable however, that it took some twenty to thirty years following the end of the Second World War for Christians to begin to grapple with the implications of the acts of profound horror and deliberate genocide which took place during the Holocaust, perpetrated directly by and with the complicity of so many who aligned themselves with the churches. That modern anti-Semitism grew from the roots of 'traditional' Christian polemical teaching on Judaism, and out of the soil of works such as Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies,*[708] and resulted in such devastating consequences, could not be ignored by the churches, and yet stunned silence was the only initial response, followed in some quarters by a sense of existential challenge to Christian belief and doctrine.[709]

[708] See e.g. Probst, Christopher J., *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012.
[709] See e.g. Eckardt, Alice L., 'The Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Responses' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 42, No. 3* (Sep., 1974), pp. 453-469 and Drinan, Robert F., 'The Christian Response to the Holocaust' in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 450,Reflections on the Holocaust: Historical, Philosophical, and Educational Dimensions (July 1980)*, pp. 179-189 for two surveys of responses to the events of the Shoah.

One of the ground-breaking changes brought about by this challenge of the Shoah to Christian supersessionist theology and its accompanying anti-Semitism arose in the midst of the Second Vatican Council. Michael Barnes describes how "the documents of Vatican II are primarily inspirational in tone... the documents do not seek to define doctrine by closing off avenues of exploration; they open up new spaces where the church can interact with a wider world which is itself understood as shot-through with the life-giving Spirit of God."[710] In this context, two key documents, *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate,* were promulgated which opened the way to a new form of dialogue between Christians and those of other faiths. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium,* promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21st November 1964, whilst focusing primarily on the nature and structure of the Roman Catholic Church, contains a single paragraph in its chapter 'On the People of God' which recognises those of other faiths, along with the possibility of their salvation.[711] Of particular relevance are four sentences, relating to Jews and Muslims: "In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers *this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues*. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of

[710] Barnes, Michael, 'Opening up a Dialogue' in Ford, David F. and Clemson, Frances (eds.), *Interreligious Reading After Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism (Directions in Modern Theology)*, *Modern Theology Vol. 29.4*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

[711] Admittedly this is nevertheless in the context of Christian evangelism and mission.

Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind."[712]

Lumen Gentium was followed in 1965 by the far-reaching *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,*[713] which states that "One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth," (§1) and goes on to discuss the ways in which various religious traditions seek God, crucially stating in relation to Hinduism and Buddhism that "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men." (§2) The document also goes on to declare that "The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,"(§3) urging "all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom." (§3)

By thus opening the way for dialogue, and the possibility that something of God's purpose may be found in other faith communities, *Nostra Aetate* paved the way for a new way of speaking to and with other faiths, to which I will return. The most substantial and dramatic shift effected by the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* was

[712] *Lumen Gentium,* Ch. 2 §16., my italics.
[713] Promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 28th October 1965.

however to be found in its specific section on Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations. Whilst acknowledging the New Testament view that "Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews in large numbers, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading," (§4) the declaration repeats the words of *Lumen Gentium,* that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues."[714] It also addresses explicitly the historical anti-Semitic charge of 'deicide' relating to the death of Christ: "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." (§4) The declaration specifically directs that "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures," arguing that the Church "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone." (§4)

New motives and opportunities for dialogue

Barnes links the pastoral importance of the words decrying anti-Semitism, and the theological importance of the assertion that "Jews still remain very dear to God, whose gift and call are without regret," arguing that "the two points are inseparable, the one implying the other, and vice-versa."[715] The effect of this declaration is to open up the possibility of fruitful dialogue, wherein it is deemed possible for communities to learn with and from each other. Barnes goes on to

[714] §4, cf. *Lumen Gentium,* Ch. 2 §16 above.
[715] Barnes, 'Opening up a Dialogue', p. 21.

argue that "the legacy of DV[716] does not lie with some ready-made missiology for a pluralist age but, at a prior stage, with the recovery of a more properly Catholic sense of the *single* source of revelation: God's 'dialogue of salvation' with humankind,"[717] so that in such a context sacred texts "make the proper hearing of the Word possible by forming a discerning community sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit."[718] He contends that as a result "interreligious dialogue is not a matter of looking for some analogous 'message' in other places but of **working with other communities in order to *learn together* something of the gracious and surprising ways of the Divine Other.**"[719]

This concept of being able to 'learn together' something of the Divine Other fits with the findings of our case studies, wherein the community of faith is able to learn something of God from the 'outsider', without compromising the integrity of the community. This shift in emphasis from the Roman Catholic Church was eventually mirrored in the Protestant churches, and Martin Forward notes that six years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate "*a Sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faith and Ideologies was founded within the World Council of Churches... [which] soon promoted guidelines that were actively endorsed by many of its member churches."[720] Forward recalls that for (especially Protestant) Christians, "this emphasis upon dialogue could look puzzling, and actually did so to many very suspicious members of the WCC's committees. Words like 'mission' and

[716] *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 18th November 1965.
[717] Barnes, 'Opening up a Dialogue', p. 30.
[718] Ibid.
[719] Ibid., my emphasis (italics in original).
[720] Forward, Martin, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2001, p. 11.

'evangelism' have a long pedigree in Christian history, but 'dialogue' looked like a newcomer to the table, an alien intruder and not an old and trusted friend."[721] In defining dialogue, Forward argues that it is "challenging and open-ended. Participants are risk takers because they themselves learn and change; dialogue does not allow them just to inform and transform others. They are aware that the process of their engagement with the 'other' provides space for Transcendence to make his or her or its or their presence available to all who participate in the enterprise of dialogue."[722]

The more open attitude of the Christian churches, coupled with the changes in doctrine brought about by responses to the events of the Shoah, undoubtedly led to a more open approach to dialogue between members of different faiths and between their institutions. As we have seen, an openness to the idea that other faiths may have some insight to offer, or that at least 'learning together' may be a possibility, seems to run through many of the early declarations or documents relating to interfaith dialogue, a phenomenon which suggests that such learning may be one of the motivations for dialogue with the 'other'. In reality however, dialogue between faith traditions and between individuals has often had more pragmatic concerns, and has been motivated by the inescapable context of a pluralist world.

[721] Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue*, p. 11.
[722] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

Responses to a changing global context

The changing motives of the ecumenical movement in relation to engagement with other faiths demonstrate this underlying concern of how to deal with a global religious landscape. Israel Selvanayagam maps out the shifting sands of interfaith approaches, beginning with the world missionary conference of 1910, which "provided the setting for the first ecumenical discussion of other religions."[723] The Commission on 'The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions' concluded at Edinburgh, having elicited responses to a questionnaire from missionaries and converts alike, that "(1) the proper Christian approach to other religions is one of appreciation and love; (2) training is necessary for such an approach; (3) the theology of the churches should be reformulated in the light of the theologies found in other religions; (4) the study of religion is urgent for theological education."[724] These recommendations seem entirely laudable, and in keeping with the concept of remaining attentive to the value of 'outsider' wisdom, and yet they were motivated entirely by a desire to evangelise and convert, and by 1938, these recommendations had been overturned in favour of Hendrik Kraemer's view (informed by Barth and Brunner), that "every religion is a living and indivisible unity, with distinctive myths, rituals and ethics. It is thus inappropriate to try to establish 'points of contact' with them."[725]

[723] Selvanayagam, Israel, 'Interfaith Dialogue' in Briggs, John, Oduyoye, Mercy Amba and Tsetsis, Georges (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: Volume 3 – 1968-2000*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004, pp. 149-174, p. 150.
[724] Ibid., p. 151.
[725] Ibid.

The first assembly of the WCC, in its discussion on "The Approach to Other Faiths", heard that "all we need to know about God's purpose is already revealed in Christ; it is God's will that the gospel be proclaimed to all people everywhere; God is pleased to use human obedience to fulfil his purpose."[726] Thus the motivation for any form of 'dialogue' waxed and waned, and was entirely related to the current philosophy regarding the most effective form of evangelism. It was perhaps only in the wake of the seismic shift in approach signalled by Vatican II that the World Council of Churches began to consider other valid *reasons* for engaging with other faiths, and Selvanayagam recounts that as early as 1967 an ecumenical consultation on the Living Faiths in Kandy, Sri Lanka, produced a statement which "affirms one common humanity and acknowledges the possibility of Christ speaking through Christians to neighbours of other faiths *and vice versa...* Transcending simple coexistence, it calls for 'a positive effort to attain a deeper understanding of the truth through mutual awareness of one another's conviction and witness'."[727]

The acknowledgement on the part of Christian Churches of the possibility that the Holy Spirit might be at work in other places continued to be a theme in Christian approaches to interfaith encounter and dialogue. The sixth WCC assembly in 1983, for example, produced a report which described as one of the expected outcomes of dialogue, "to discern more about how God is active in our world, and to appreciate for their own sake the insights and experiences people of other faiths

[726] Selvanayagam, 'Interfaith Dialogue', p. 151, quoting Visser 't Hooft, W.A. (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches,* London: SCM Press, 1949, p. 64.
[727] Ibid., p. 153.

have of ultimate reality."[728] While this statement appears to recognise the 'validity' of the 'insights and experiences' of others however, it is important to note that this statement, and many others like it, were made both in the context of an approach to mission and evangelism, and as a response to religious and political conflict.

Response to conflict, both historical and current, has been a major motivational factor in engagement, both between individuals and representative faith groups, since the inception of more widespread dialogical interaction following the change in emphasis from Christian churches in the 1960s. Notwithstanding the broader approach to revelation and tradition found in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council,[729] *Nostra Aetate* and other documents which arose out of it are in many respects a direct response to the events of the Shoah, the somewhat oblique reference to "hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone"[730] referring most obviously to the very real and recent persecutions undertaken at the hands of the Nazis. While National Socialism had its own secular ideology, it cannot be denied that many of its crimes were undertaken by those who (at least initially) professed to be Christians. Equally, the incredibly understated admission that "in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems" in Chapter 4 of *Nostra Aetate* is a recognition not only of the sorry history of the Crusades, but that conflict between individuals and states claiming allegiance to the two faiths lie

[728] Gill, David (ed.), *Gathered for Life: Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the WCC*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983, p.31.
[729] Barnes, 'Opening up a Dialogue', p. 18 remarks that "*[Dei Verbum]* reminds the church that at the heart of her life is the mystery of the self-revealing God himself..."
[730] *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

behind much of the emphasis on bridge-building in this and subsequent statements on interfaith relations.

Starting points for dialogue

Examples of interfaith dialogue with a huge diversity of method, motive and objective now exist, born often out of practical concern for how to live well together in a diverse global context. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli note the variety of reasons "for the importance of Christian-Muslim relations and for the necessity of engaging in dialogue. These can be categorized as sociological, pragmatic and theological."[731] At the same time, they acknowledge that "the sheer numbers of Christians and Muslims in the world make Christian-Muslim dialogue imperative."[732] This is also true to some extent of the relationships between Christianity, Islam and other faith traditions with large numbers of adherents who are likely to come into contact on a regular basis. One approach to dialogue has as a result been that undertaken by the most recent incarnation of the Parliament of the World's Religions, with a vision that "seeks to promote interreligious harmony, rather than unity"[733] and endorsing the goals contained within its 1993 declaration *A Global Ethic* as commitments which "can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether they are people of faith or not."[734] This approach commits to

[731] Fitzgerald, Michael L. and Borelli, John, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*, London: SPCK, 2006, p. 86.
[732] Ibid.
[733] Parliament of the World's religions, 'Our Mission', www.parliamentofreligions.org/about/mission (Accessed: 15th February 2019).
[734] Parliament of the World's religions, 'Global Ethic', www.parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/global-ethic/about-global-ethic (Accessed: 15th February 2019).

laudable goals of joint action, but (deliberately) omits issues of doctrine and theology to avoid creating dissent, encouraging religious differences to be put aside in the process.

Christian-Jewish dialogue must necessarily start from a different place, given the troubling and one-sided history of oppression and persecution which marks the historical relationship between the two faiths. From the inception of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in 1942, for example, the desire to "promote mutual understanding and goodwill between Christians and Jews in all sections of the community"[735] has always sat alongside the acknowledgement of anti-Semitism and a prior aim to "check and combat religious and racial intolerance."[736] The reality that historical Christian anti-Semitism, contemporary Christian doctrine, and a very large number of Christians, were directly *to blame* for the events of the Shoah has also created an asymmetrical relationship,[737] where despite the more open approach to dialogue from Christians following *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent WCC declarations, Jewish individuals and groups have quite understandably been wary of such dialogue.

Christian-Jewish dialogue in the modern sense had in fact taken place, alongside ecumenical and other interfaith dialogue, prior to the events of the mid-twentieth

[735] Braybrooke, Marcus, *Children of One God. A History of the Council of Christians and Jews*, London: Valentine Mitchell, 1991, p. 14.
[736] Ibid., p.14.
[737] Stephen Smith notes that "For Jews the personal impact of the Holocaust on Jewish identity is virtually inescapable and is somewhat exacerbated in the presence of the Jewish-Christian relationship. Christian theological and cultural identity on the other hand is not shaped or even distinctly molded by the Holocaust experience." (Smith, Stephen D., 'The effect of the Holocaust on Jewish-Christian Relations' in Aitken, James K. and Kessler, Edward (eds.), *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*, Mawhah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2006, pp. 137-152, p. 147.

century, and was therefore definitively ruptured by, rather than initiated in response to, the Shoah, which subsequently overshadowed many of the previous endeavours to understand emerging relationships in an increasingly global society. Aitken and Kessler note that an "analysis of Jewish-Christian relations is... a complex enterprise, which cannot be reduced to simple theological or historical narratives, as some studies have tended to do. It must take into account politics, sociology, education, language, history, biblical studies, hermeneutics, and, of course, theology."[738] Nevertheless, legitimate concerns of Jewish interlocutors must be heard for such dialogue to bear fruit, especially regarding Christian proselytism in the wake of the Shoah. As Emil Fackenheim argued, "The Jewish stance toward Christian missionizing attempts directed at them... cannot be what it once was. Prior to the Holocaust, Jews could respect such attempts, though of course considering them misguided. After the Holocaust, they can only view them as trying in one way what Hitler did in another."[739] While this rhetoric is extreme, it must be acknowledged that following the Shoah, the evangelism of Jews by Christians is often perceived as something deeply offensive. For Fackenheim, even the *intent* of evangelism is inappropriate: "for Christians to stay with the idea of mission-to-the-Jews in principle, even if suspending it altogether in practice – is either to ignore the Holocaust, or else sooner or later to reach some such view as that mission-to the-Jews 'is the sole possibility of a genuine and meaningful restitution (*Wiedergutmachung*) on the part of German Christendom'."[740]

[738] Aitken & Kessler, *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*, 2006, p. 5.
[739] Fackenheim, Emil, 'The Holocaust: A Summing up after Two Decades of Reflection' in Colin, Amy D., *Argumentum e silentio/International Paul Celan Symposium,* Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987, pp.285-295, p.291.
[740] Fackenheim, 'The Holocaust: A Summing up', p. 291.

Developments in Jewish-Christian dialogue

How then might Jewish-Christian dialogue be most fruitfully pursued under these circumstances? One of the Jewish responses to the developments in Christian doctrine and dialogue following *Nostra Aetate* can be found in the statement *Dabru Emet*, first published in the New York Times on September 10, 2000.[741] While not without its critics, including notably those such as Levenson who condemned what he referred to as a "self-defeating model based on conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation,"[742] *Dabru Emet* was an attempt by notable Jewish scholars (to which several hundred others added their names as co-signatories), to address several contentious areas in Jewish-Christian dialogue, and in addition to outlining areas of broad (if contended) agreement on the nature of God and scripture, along with the issue of Nazism and the Holocaust, the document asserted that "neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community." Crucially, it also argued that "an improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity." While not universally accepted, the document sets out a framework in which dialogue may take place without threatening the fundamental integrity of the Jewish community. I contend that this framework is one which also allows each tradition to listen for the voice of the

[741] The original advert can be found at https://icjs.org/sites/default/files/Dabru%20Emet%20-%20PDF%20copy.pdf (Accessed: 16th February 2019). The authors were Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs and Mighael Signer.
[742] Levenson, Jon D., 'The Agenda of Dabru Emet' in *Review of Rabbinic Judaism Vol 7 Issue 1-2 (Jan 2004)*, pp. 1-26, p. 2.

disruptive 'outsider' I have discussed in this thesis without the fear that doing so will pose an existential threat to the faith community itself.

Scriptural Reasoning

Peter Ochs argues that current Jewish-Christian dialogue - at least that in which he is participating - belongs "to the beginnings of a third epoch, in which Jews and Christians reaffirm the separate religious identities but not through the device of mutual exclusion."[743] For David Ford, in undertaking such dialogue today, "the concern is to face the terrible evils, sufferings, and breakdowns of our world, and to try to contribute to healing them, to repairing them. So the concern for healing and mending is primary."[744] Ochs remarks that "Jewish-Christian dialogue is a theological event. This means it is not a mere instance of some generally good thing – like human dialogue or friendship among peoples... Beyond care for the other, this dialogue requires a NEED of the other."[745] He goes on to say, crucially, that "there is something wrong with our mainstream religions, and JewishChristian dialogue may actually contribute to the repair of each religion on its own terms."[746]

This recognition that dialogue may be a means through which each faith tradition can repair and renew itself has resonances with the divine use of the disruptive

[743] Ochs, Peter and Ford, David. F., 'A Third Epoch: The Future of Discourse in Jewish-Christian Relations' in Aitken and Kessler (eds.), *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations,* pp. 153-170, p. 155.
[744] Ibid., p. 156.
[745] Ibid., p. 157.
[746] Ibid.

'outsider' in our case studies, and points to a way forward in which dialogue may be seen as internally vital to a community of faith. Ford notes Ochs'

> insistence that each community within itself and in dialogue with the other should bring together philosophy and scripture... This core dialogue, called *textual reasoning* or *scriptural reasoning*, embodies a triple commitment: first, to ever-renewed engagement with scripture; second, to engaging scriptural interpretation with a range of intellectual discourses, past and present; third, to each community doing its textual/scriptural reasoning not only 'at home' but also in thorough dialogue with each other in the interests of mending our terrible history. At root these commitments are not an instrumental method: they spring from the heart of faith in a God who communicates in history...[747]

It is in particular the last two of these statements which I wish to affirm; the idea that each community should do its scriptural reasoning "in thorough dialogue with each other" and that the commitments espoused "spring from the heart of faith in a God who communicates in history."[748] Herein lies an acknowledgement, while having its roots in the primary intention of bringing healing to the *relationship*, that dialogue is in itself beneficial to each community involved, a necessary step in its interaction with a God who communicates in history in unexpected ways.

[747] Ochs and Ford, 'A Third Epoch', p. 159-60.
[748] Ibid., p.160.

Moreover, such dialogue can be a method by which God communicates, bringing a disruptive influence from 'outside', not to challenge the integrity or even existence of the community, but to renew it from within. Ochs explores one of Ford's images from *Self and Salvation,*[749] and recounts how "Ford summons Christians to see the face of the Jew as the face of the Jew Jesus Christ. It is at once the face of Jesus as a boy – a face in which to rejoice – and the face of Jesus Christ dead on the cross – a face for which to care and to give thanks – and the face of Christ risen – a face in which to hope and through which to bring healing."[750] As Ochs argues, "one miracle of Ford's text is the way that his facing the Jew as Jesus affirms the particular mission of the church without compromising recognition of Israel's enduring covenant."[751] I would go further, and contend that part of Ford's challenge is also that Christians might see in the person of Jesus Christ that same disruptive 'other' through whom God is often seen to work in the biblical narratives I have examined, so that effectively Christ stands as the fulfilment for Christians of the presence of the Other seen in the agency of the 'other' in those biblical texts, without diminishing the agency or importance of those figures in their contexts.

Paul Murray, examining the three practices of Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism, describes these as "self-consciously postliberal strategies which eschew approaches premised on commonality and the priority of coming to an agreement, in favour of taking seriously the particularity and plurality

[749] Ford, David, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge: CUP, 2009.
[750] Ochs and Ford, 'A Third Epoch', p. 164.
[751] Ibid.

of traditioned commitment."[752] Murray argues that "the inter-faith goal is not the overcoming of radical difference but learning to live it well. This extends beyond seeking increased mutual understanding and points of connection to asking what can be appropriately learned *from* the other."[753] Murray argues that in the approach of Receptive Ecumenism, the "recalibration of ecumenical expectations is itself opening the way to some fruitful strategic learning from the best of inter-faith engagement as the latter is exemplified by the commitment of Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology to learning *from* and *across* long-term difference."[754] This results in what Murray calls a "committed pluralism"[755] and the realisation, in Francis Clooney's words, that "in our religiously diverse context, a vital theology has to resist too tight a binding by tradition, but also the idea that religious diversity renders strong claims about truth and value impossible."[756]

In these current approaches to dialogue, there is a determined moved away from the concept of dialogue as a form of, or precursor to, 'conversion', either to a faith tradition or to a doctrinal point of view. Additionally, and despite the concerns of critics, dialogue is not seen as simply a method of conflict resolution, wherein the lowest common denominator can be found upon which to agree, and substantial differences in approach and opinion cannot be held in tension. Rather, it seeks to build on the insights, in Clooney's words, both "that God is present, even fully, in

[752] Murray, Paul D., 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology, and Receptive Ecumenism' in Ford and Clemson, *Interreligious Reading After Vatican II,* pp. 76-92, p. 76.
[753] Murray, 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning', p. 78.
[754] Ibid.
[755] Ibid., p. 79.
[756] Ibid., quoting Clooney, Francis, X., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 8, also p. 111.

one tradition does not preclude God's presence in other traditions"[757] and that "God can speak to us in and through a tradition other than our own, even if we do not, cannot, embrace as our own the whole of that tradition."[758]

Challenges and motives in Jewish-Christian engagement

It is not the goal of 'living well together' in its broadest sense which raises difficulties for individuals and communities of faith; in the wake of centuries of conflict, and most especially in light of the events of the twentieth century, most people of faith can at least agree on the desirability of this outcome.[759] It is rather the more specific purposes and the motivation for dialogue and encounter between traditions which present difficulties. The preferred model of dialogue put forward by Levenson, for example, is one which, in his own words:

> seeks good relations and requires each community to confront its misunderstandings of the other and the often-grievous results that these have had. At the same time, however, it also insists on the importance of the theological core of each tradition and requires both dialogue partners to reckon with the full import of the other's theology, even when it not only contradicts but also critiques one's own.[760]

[757] Clooney, *Comparative Theology,* p. 115.
[758] Ibid.
[759] There are, of course, very notable exceptions in every major tradition, who see only the complete submission of the 'other' as acceptable, but such parties are generally uninterested in any form of dialogue with 'outside' groups.
[760] Levenson, 'The Agenda of *Dabru Emet*', p.2.

This is not in reality far from the very model of dialogue between traditions in which some of those whom Levenson seeks to critique are engaging; though many who engage in dialogue would suggest that one might seek to learn something of God from the 'outsider', without first having either to explore and elucidate each point of disagreement, or at the other extreme come to a 'common mind' and in the process ignore the 'full import of the other's theology.'"[761] The very real concern which Levenson and others have regarding the dangers of a syncretistic approach, or one which appears to dilute the significance of disagreement (and thus blur the boundaries and distinctions between faith traditions) nevertheless remains.[762]

The true difficulty with all costly and potentially rewarding dialogue is that the motives of the 'other' are always to some extent impenetrable. This fact in itself leads to heightened suspicion, not only of the 'outside' party, but of those who are perceived as threatening the integrity the 'home' community, by exposing it either to potential corruption or to the undoubted and yet unquantifiable vulnerability which openness to the influence of the 'outsider' might bring. This is particularly true if one partner in dialogue has justifiable historical reasons for being suspicious of the purpose of the exercise, but is also the case if the motives for engagement are themselves seen as 'compromising' the values of a tradition. It is worth therefore outlining some of the motives and purposes of current dialogue, from

[761] Levenson, 'The Agenda of *Dabru Emet*', p.2.
[762] Levenson's 'The Agenda of *Dabru Emet*' is itself a 'monological dialogue' which presents a number of challenges to interfaith engagement, by highlighting areas of theological and ontological disagreement which, he argues, cannot be ignored. Many of the points of disagreement in his critique, however, relate to areas of contested theological territory within Christianity itself, which fact, I would argue, has the potential to complicate matters further.

which point I shall argue another underlying motive and purpose which might reasonably underpin such dialogue on the basis of our case studies.

Certainly, one of the motivations for dialogue is to build good relationships, and to work as a result for peace between communities. This is an underpinning principle of the Parliament of the World's Religions, with its declared *purpose* being to "foster... engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world."[763] In pursuing this purpose, *theological* engagement is, however, deliberately eschewed in favour of *practical* engagement on issues of shared importance to communities. Such an approach takes seriously the framework of global interconnectedness with which almost all communities now have to grapple. As Andrew Wingate argues, "relating to other faiths, and especially in the contemporary world to Muslims, is not an optional extra, it is an inevitable part of our context."[764] Speaking then of the positive motivations for active dialogue and encounter, Wingate goes on also to speak of a number of 'encounters of the Spirit,'[765] encounters through which there is an opportunity to enrich one's own faith in engagement with the 'other'. He sees such engagement as "deeply biblical,"[766] recalling the truth of all humankind made in the image of God, the two great commandments, and the pattern of ministry of Jesus.[767]

[763] Parliament of the World's Religions: 'Our Mission', parliamentofreligions.org/about/mission (accessed: 17th February 2019).
[764] Wingate, Andrew, 'Why engage in this work at all?' in Wingate, Andrew and Myrelid, Pernilla (eds.), *Why Interfaith*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2016, pp. 6-9, p. 7.
[765] Ibid., p. 7.
[766] Ibid., p. 8.
[767] Ibid.

Graham Jarvis, answering the same question, finds his motivation "in Jesus' teaching. The Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) 'whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them', and the second of the great commandments (Luke 10:27), to love 'your neighbour as yourself', give a strong incentive for work with dialogue."[768] Making clear that neither evangelism nor syncretism (two of the perceived threats which we have already discussed in relation to dialogue), are goals to be pursued, Jarvis goes on to argue that "Dialogue is not about convincing one another that we are right, or that we 'own' the truth, but rather about seeking understanding together... Our aims have to do with understanding, relationship-building and co-operation."[769] For him, the purposes of engagement fall into categories of friendship, understanding, challenge and co-operation.[770]

These examples of what might be called 'practical' or 'pastoral' motivations for dialogue and engagement sit alongside the philosophical and theological motives behind more structured forms of engagement. Nicholas Adams remarks that "both Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism are explicitly reparative practices. They identify particular problems in existing practices, resolving them through diagnosis and presenting alternatives."[771] In this way, Scriptural Reasoning, for example, pursues "strategies for long-term disagreement"[772] in order to address a deficiency in the philosophical approach of religious scholars, with the motivation

[768] Jarvis, Graham, 'Neighbours' in Wingate and Myrelid, *Why Interfaith*, pp. 10-15, p. 10.
[769] Ibid., p. 12.
[770] Ibid., p. 13.
[771] Adams, Nicholas, 'Long-term Disagreement: Philosophical Models in Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism' in Ford and Clemson, *Interreligious Reading After Vatican II,* pp. 154-171, p. 155.
[772] Ibid., pp. 163, 164.

being to ameliorate, in Ochs' words, the "problematic consequences" of such an approach, including "misperception and misrepresentation, failed efforts to repair wounds, and inter-group conflict."[773]

Alongside this "original purpose... to repair what [the founders of Scriptural Reasoning] judged to be inadequate academic methods for teaching scripture and scripturally-based religions,"[774] Ochs notes that a number of other 'purposes' have grown up around 'Formational Scriptural Reasoning',[775] which include providing "a venue for members of different traditions or modes of inquiry to share their affection for scripture,"[776] partly as a result of which, another purpose, "raising unexpected friendships across the borders of religious traditions,"[777] arises. Ultimately, this opens "unexpected levels of textual and hermeneutic discovery, *again for its own sake*."[778] Thus, from quite different motivations, a pattern emerges in which dialogue and engagement with the 'outsider', whether from initially pastoral/practical or philosophical/theological starting points, result in new understandings of scripture as participants find something of the 'Other' in the 'other' whom they encounter.

[773] Ochs, Peter, 'Re-Socializing Scholars of Religious, Theological, and Theo-Philosophical Inquiry', in Ford and Clemson, *Interreligious Reading After Vatican II,* pp. 201-219, p. 209-210.
[774] Ibid., p. 205.
[775] Ochs explains this as "the simplest practice of Scriptural Reasoning: symbolized by study around a small table... This practice is the basis for all training in Scriptural Reasoning and it is also what we might call the 'mode of welcome' that initiates all Scriptural Reasoning-related encounters." (Ochs, 'Re-Socializing Scholars', p. 207).
[776] Ochs, 'Re-Socializing Scholars', p. 207.
[777] Ibid., often through what Ochs calls "hearth to hearth dialogue" as "participants (often unawares)... reveal at least a bit of the warmth and ingeniousness they display in intimate settings of scripture study among coreligionists at home." (p.207).
[778] Ochs, 'Re-Socializing Scholars', p. 207, my emphasis.

This pattern has deep resonances with the findings from my case studies that the 'outsider' brings not a threat to the existence of the community of faith, but the salvation or renewal of that community, in which the 'outsider' acting as divine agent brings disruptive insight and wisdom – even a knowledge of God - from outside the tradition. I believe that such 'outsiders' and their presence in the biblical narrative also present a challenge to the main objections to such dialogue from within faith communities, which arise from attitudes to proselytism or assimilation, and which I shall now address.

A response to the challenge

One of the key objections to dialogue from a Jewish perspective, as I have already discussed, has been the threat posed to the integrity of the community by Christian evangelism and syncretism. Reuven Kimelman notes that in 1964 Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik referred to the proposed document which eventually became *Nostra Aetate* as "'evangelical propaganda' that dealt with Jews only as potential converts. He argued that discussion between Christians and Jews should be limited to non religious subjects and that the council should be asked solely for a condemnation of anti-Semitism, not for assertions of religious brotherhood."[779] Soloveitchik subsequently argued that "Jews should refrain from recommending changes to Christian doctrine, for such recommendations would lead to reciprocal Christian recommendations for changes to Jewish belief. Change must emerge

[779] Kimelman, Reuven, 'Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish Christian Relations' in *Modern Judaism, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Oct. 2004)*, pp. 251-271, p. 255.

autonomously from within, for 'non-interference is a sine qua non for good will and mutual respect.'"[780]

Previously, the efforts of the Council of Christians and Jews faced similar difficulties, as seen in the objections of Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz to the CCJ's educational strategy and his insistence, similar to that of Soloveitchik, that Jews and Christians should not interfere in the religious teaching of the other group.[781] As seen in the response to *Dabru Emet*, such concerns are alive and well for many Jewish groups and individuals today, and are not baseless, given the emphasis still placed by many Christian groups on evangelism as a priority over all other concerns, and the extant threat of anti-Semitism both within the Church and wider society. Concomitantly, Christian individuals, groups and even churches who engage in dialogue can face the challenge of clarifying for themselves and others the purpose of such dialogue, and the tensions which arise in relation to evangelism. The introductory material to *Dialogue and Proclamation,*[782] itself in part a reflection on developments since *Nostra Aetate*, states that "There are those who would seem to think, erroneously, that in the Church's mission today dialogue should simply replace proclamation. At the other extreme, some fail to see the value of interreligious dialogue."[783]

[780] Kimelman, 'Rabbis Soloveitchik and Heschel on Jewish Christian Relations', p. 256.
[781] Braybrooke, *Children of One God*, pp. 15ff.
[782] *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection And Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue And The Proclamation Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ*, Rome: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991.
[783] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §4(c).

Dialogue and Proclamation goes on to reflect the very real tension between the necessity of interreligious dialogue, and of proclamation as an evangelistic obligation, both of which are framed as responses to the work of the Holy Spirit. The document posits that "Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue."[784] While acknowledging a number of potential pitfalls, *Dialogue and Proclamation* also argues that "while keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions. Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified."[785] Despite the stated motivations of those involved directly in the process of dialogue, these background concerns continue to form at least part of the context in which dialogue takes place.

In the light of my conclusions in the previous chapter, there is however, I propose, a scripturally grounded motivation and purpose for interfaith dialogue, which does not require concerns around issues such as proselytism and syncretism to be ignored, but which rather creates a solid foundation on which engage with dialogical partners, and a bulwark against such concerns. As I have argued, there is

[784] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §54.
[785] Ibid., §49.

a pattern of 'outsiders' within the biblical narratives who act as divine agents, whose role as disruptive influences within the community of faith is possible precisely because of their status, and who represent, not a threat, but the means of renewal through which the community can survive, thrive and even come into a deeper relationship with the divine.

The existence and legacy of such 'outsiders', I have argued, suggests that interaction with them is an "essential method by which the divine plan is enacted"[786] and indeed an "an integral feature of the divine economy,"[787] rather than an optional extra for communities of faith. There emerges as a result, a motivation for dialogue which takes seriously the way in which God has communicated with the 'elect' in salvation history, without engaging in any form of syncretism or opening the community itself to assimilation. The fact that God repeatedly *chooses* to use such outside voices runs contrary to Soloveitchik's argument that "change must emerge autonomously from within,"[788] and gives a purpose for dialogue which is an end in itself: to listen to the ways in which divine, disruptive influences are making themselves heard for our communities today.

The fact that, as we have seen, such voices often come from unexpected quarters adds impetus to this motivation, and even goes some way to alleviate the challenge posed by historically unavoidable questions surrounding the integrity of the other as dialogical partner. While it is true that the sorry history of Christian anti-

[786] Q.v., p. 219.
[787] Q.v., p. 222.
[788] Kimelman, 'Rabbis Soloveitchik and Heschel on Jewish Christian Relations', p. 256.

Semitism and the subsequent, even consequent, events of the twentieth Century cast a long shadow over Jewish-Christian relations, it is also true that in Ruth and Rahab, anathematised communities produced figures who themselves became agents of change and inspiration for the 'elect' in a surprising and entirely unpredictable way. Although any persecuted community can be rightly sceptical of the motives of others, and any minority community even more so, a similar impenetrability surrounds the motives of figures such as Jael, and yet it is in engagement with the 'outsider', even the 'anti-elect' that divine wisdom and knowledge can often be discerned.

A caveat, and a proposal for Christians

Although I suggest that the way in which these 'outsiders' act as divine agents may bring new perspective to inter-faith dialogue, it is imperative to recognise an inherent feature in their portrayal within the biblical narrative, which itself compels restraint in offering such a suggestion to another faith tradition. Regardless of the portrayal of these 'outsiders', we cannot ultimately discern from them what this means for the 'non-elect' in terms of the overall relationship between other communities and the divine. In studying the biblical narrative, we are necessarily given a view from the perspective of the 'elect', and the answers which may be discerned as a result relate only to the impact and consequences of their portrayal for the 'insider' community. It is impossible, for example, to draw substantial conclusions regarding the place of other individual Moabites, or of Egypt, or of the Kenites, in the divine economy, much less the nature of the relationship between

God and such communities, from the perspective of the narratives I have examined. It is therefore incumbent upon anyone seeking to learn from such narratives, not to impose their findings upon another community.

Writing consequently from a Christian perspective, I find in the portrayal of our 'outsiders' a similar motivation for dialogue with participants from other communities. If, as we have seen, disruptive 'outside' voices are at least one means by which God chooses to bring wisdom, renewal and even salvation to God's people, this in itself should be an underpinning goal of, and reason for, dialogue and engagement with those seen by Christians as 'other'. This may be couched in terms of responding to the work of the Holy Spirit, and is entirely consistent with the reminder in *Dialogue and Proclamation* that "the Church's commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into a dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression."[789]

Such a motivation should also act to free Christian participants in dialogue from the anxiety surrounding evangelisation and the need to witness to the 'other'. If engagement with the 'outsider' can be seen in terms of actively listening for the voice of God, watching for the actions of God, discerning the wisdom of God, in the words, deeds and insights of our partners in dialogue, then this is itself can become the primary aim and purpose of such work. As I have noted in the previous chapter,

[789] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §53.

such disruptive voices appear to be present even in dialogue with the divine itself in the person of Christ in the New Testament,[790] and it is through active participation in this divinely inspired work of engagement that we might, taking up David Ford's challenge, "see the face of the Jew as the face of the Jew Jesus Christ."[791]

Out of this motivation for engagement may flow many other good consequences and purposes, both intended and unintended, which include healing our own wounds, peace-making between communities, mutual growth in understanding, and even the renewal of our own tradition and our understanding as Christians of what it means to be a people of faith in right relationship with God. Ultimately however, a sufficient end will be to see and hear in the 'other' the disruptive, divine, 'Other' who is the very Source of that faith.

[790] Q.v., p. 223.
[791] Ochs and Ford, 'A Third Epoch', p. 164.

Conclusions

Further applications and research around dialogue and engagement

I have outlined how my findings regarding the role of the 'outsider' may be applicable in the field of interfaith dialogue, by shifting the motivation for, and focus of, engagement between faiths away from questions of doctrinal agreement or evangelism, and starting instead from a position which sees the voice of the 'outsider' as an integral feature of the divine economy. In so doing, such dialogue becomes a means by which communities of faith are able to be open to the disruptive influence of the divine 'Other' in the words, actions and practices of those who lie outwith the community of the 'elect', without compromising the integrity of the community itself, or opening the community up to assimilation or syncretism. Such an approach still necessarily involves discernment, and is resourced by the wider theological frameworks in place within a tradition,[792] but allows those who participate in dialogue to be open to new insights in a way which does not threaten the integrity of either party. As Fitzgerald and Borelli note from a Christian perspective, "provided the Christian realizes that the truth is something by which we are to be grasped rather than for us to grasp, the meeting with others can help towards a deeper understanding of the truth."[793]

[792] Cf. Dault, David, 'Catholic Reasoning and Reading across Traditions' in Ford and Clemson, *Interreligious Reading After Vatican II,* pp. 46-61, especially pp. 53ff on the Catholic Reasoning and 'Catholic Reasoning as Response to the Call of the Holy Spirit' (p. 55).
[793] Fitzgerald and Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue*, p. 34.

This principle might usefully be extended to other areas of practice, not least approaches to ecumenism, underpinning, for example, developments within Receptive Ecumenism, which "advocates a shift *away* from prioritising, in the first instance, the overcoming of abiding differences and *towards* each tradition asking what they might fruitfully have to learn from the other traditions in relation *to* tangible difficulties within their own tradition."[794]

Any approach to encounter with different traditions which takes as its starting point the reality of disruptive intervention from the 'outsider' as a potential means of *strengthening* the community, of gaining new insight into its own relationship with God, has the benefit of providing a sound scriptural and theological basis for engagement, thus avoiding the potential conflict of motive and purpose which arises from divergent views on 'mission'. Additionally, such an approach lends resilience to the community in terms of maintaining its own integrity, rather than having the potential to diminish it; if a – or perhaps even *the* – purpose of engagement is actively to welcome divine insight and wisdom from outside, then discovering the existence of such wisdom is less of a threat than an opportunity for the community as a whole.

The results of such a process need not, of course, be limited to the immediate blessing brought to the community by such engagement, and the impact, as we have seen in the case of our 'outsider' case studies, may be both wide-ranging and long-lasting. The opportunity and space also arise for many other fruits of such

[794] Murray, 'Families of Receptive Theological Learning', p. 78.

unencumbered dialogue: the deepening of friendships, breaking down of barriers, progress towards genuine partnership and even, in the words of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, the "permanent renewal of the Church in greater fidelity to her vocation; such renewal is the driving-force of the movement toward unity."[795] In such an environment, the ultimate goal of achieving visible unity may also become more achievable, if individual churches begin with an open-ended approach to the ways in which God might 'speak into' their community.

On the formulation of doctrine

Given the caveat to which I referred in the previous chapter, that portrayals of 'outsiders' in scripture necessarily only give us the view from the 'elect', the findings of this thesis might most fruitfully be employed in speaking of and into the community of faith to which one belongs. As an example of a possible approach to wider application, I shall therefore outline one area from my own faith tradition in which a new approach to 'outside' voices may be productive: the formulation of doctrine and regulation of practice within the Church of England.

The Church of England is, by comparison with the Roman Catholic Church and many other Christian traditions, somewhat vague as *what constitutes* doctrine, how it is formulated, and how doctrine shapes, guides and restricts the actual practice of the

[795] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §821. this renewal, alongside "dialogue among theologians and meetings among Christians of the different churches and communities" are listed among the "certain things are required in order to respond adequately to this call [of the Holy Spirit]."

church.[796] Instead, the Church is described as "the inheritor of the historic Christian doctrinal tradition encapsulated in its formularies and referred to in the Declaration of Assent."[797] The Declaration of Assent itself describes the Church of England as professing "the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation."[798] In reference to doctrine, the Declaration of Assent proclaims that the Church of England "has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer*[799] and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons."[800]

In a similar statement, Canon A5 of the Church of England states that "The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal."[801] Despite seven references within Canon Law to the acceptability of practice that is "neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of

[796] In contrast to the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church for example, the Church of England has no uniformly accepted set of doctrines.
[797] The Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Ordination Services (Study Edition)*, London: Church House Publishing, 2007, p. 2.
[798] Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 6.
[799] *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be Sung or said in churches: And the Form and Manner of Making, ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons*, London: The Crown, 1662.
[800] Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 6.
[801] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England, Section A', available from https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/canons-church-england/section-a (Accessed: 21st February 2019).

England in any essential matter,"[802] there is little further guidance regarding what might actually constitute 'the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter.' It is axiomatic, given the history of Christian scriptural interpretation, that widespread agreement about "such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures" is unlikely to be easily reached in the absence of any official doctrine. Equally, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion have been open to a variety of interpretations, perhaps most famously in the nineteenth century by Saint John Henry Newman, who argues in his work *On Certain Passages in the XXXIX Articles* that "while our Prayer Book is acknowledged on all hands to be of Catholic origin, our Articles also, the offspring of an uncatholic age, are through GOD'S good providence, to say the least, not uncatholic, and may be subscribed by those who aim at being catholic in heart and doctrine."[803]

Newman's goal was to enable those who thought of themselves as 'catholics' within the Church of England to assent to the Articles of Religion in good conscience, his central thesis being that "the Articles do not oppose Catholic teaching; they but partially oppose Roman dogma; they for the most part oppose the dominant errors of Rome."[804] Though he later recalled that "one special anxiety, very obvious, which was coming on me now, was, that what was 'one man's meat was another man's poison.' I had said even of Tract 90, 'It was

[802] In Canons B2, B4, B5, B38 and C4.
[803] Newman, Rev. J.H., *Tract XC: On Certain Passages in the XXXIX Articles, with A Historical Preface by the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D. and Catholic Subscription to the XXXIX Articles considered in reference to Tract XC by the Rev. John Keble, M.A.,* London: W. Smith, 1841, pp. 4-5.
[804] Ker, Ian (ed.), Newman, John Henry, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, London: Penguin, 1994, p. 119.

addressed to one set of persons, and has been used and commented on by another',"[805] and Newman eventually converted to Roman Catholicism following opposition to his interpretation, his views on the Articles of Religion are still widely accepted by many Anglo-Catholics today. Perhaps most telling in regard to the difficulties associated with discerning Church of England doctrine, is Newman's comment on the prospects of successfully undertaking his endeavour: "there was no doubt at all of the elasticity of the Articles: to take a palmary instance, the seventeenth was assumed by one party to be Lutheran, by another Calvinistic, though the two interpretations were contradictory of each other; why then should not other Articles be drawn up with a vagueness of an equally intense character?"[806]

Given what Newman termed the 'elasticity' of Church of England doctrine, the reality of the church's stance of any given matter of doctrine has often been best discerned in liturgy and precedent, as seen for instance in the reference to the *Book of Common Prayer* in the 'historic formularies' of the church. In the twentieth century, matters of doctrinal importance became the subject of deliberation by a Doctrine Commission, which was periodically convened to report on particular issues, the first such commission reporting after a period of sixteen years of deliberation.[807]

[805] Newman, *Apologia*, p. 181.
[806] Ibid., p. 119.
[807] Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Doctrine in the Church of England: The 1938 Report*, London: SPCK, 1982.

In 2010, the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) of the General Synod of the Church of England replaced the church's Faith and Order Advisory Group and the Doctrine Commission. Since this time, the FAOC, which "has up to sixteen members, who are appointed by the Archbishops"[808] has produced a series of reports and resources relating to individual areas of doctrine, to which I shall return. Additionally, specific working groups have been set up alongside the FAOC to consider contentious issues of doctrine, notably around the subject of human sexuality. These include the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality,[809] and the subsequent groups set up as part of the Living in Love and Faith Project,[810] alongside a Pastoral Advisory Group, established in the wake of the General Synod's decision not to 'take note' of the House of Bishops' report in 2017.[811] Such has been the difficulty of dealing with discussion of the issues involved in doctrine around human sexuality, that the FAOC itself issued a report on 'Communion and Disagreement' specifically to support a 'Shared Conversation' dialogue process on the subject.[812]

This complex matrix of decision making takes place in a context wherein the General Synod itself has power to make *changes* to the received doctrine of the

[808] See The Church of England, 'The Faith and Order Commission', www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/faith-and-order-commission (Accessed: 21st February 2019).
[809] See House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality*, London: Church House Publishing, 2013.
[810] www.churchofengland.org/LLF (Accessed: 21st February 2019).
[811] See General Synod Paper 'GSMisc1158 – General Synod: Next Steps on Human Sexuality' available from www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201158%20next%20steps%20on%20human%20sexuality_0.pdf (Accessed: 21st February 2019) regarding the establishment of these groups.
[812] See General Synod Paper 'GS Misc 1139 – General Synod: Communion and Disagreement, A Report from the Faith and Order Commission' available from https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/communion_and_disagreement_faoc_report_gs_misc_1139.pdf (Accessed: 21st February 2019).

Church of England under Schedule 2 of the Synodical Government Measure 1969, albeit with the proviso that such a change "shall be submitted for such final approval in terms proposed by the House of Bishops and not otherwise."[813] Furthermore, the Worship and Doctrine Measure 1974 declares that "it shall be lawful for the General Synod to make provision by Canon with respect to the obligations of the clergy, deaconesses and lay officers of the Church of England to assent or subscribe to the doctrine of that Church and the forms of that assent or subscription which may include an explanatory preface."[814] General Synod therefore has both the power to change the Church of England's doctrine, and then to require assent to that doctrine from its existing officers.

Seeking wisdom

I do not intend here to present a view regarding the outcome of the ongoing work on doctrine relating to human sexuality (or indeed any other subject). Rather I wish to engage with the process involved, and examine how my case studies and the patterns which emerge in them may contribute to the way in which discussions and formulation of doctrine take place. In the final report of the previous Doctrine Commission, *Being Human*,[815] the Commission argued for Anglicanism as "a wisdom tradition for the twenty-first century."[816] The report states that "Wisdom is not primarily about accepting certain conclusions. It is about the habits of

[813] 'Synodical Government Measure 1969: SCHEDULE 2 – Constitution of the General Synod', § 7(1).
[814] 'Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure 1974', §2(1).
[815] The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Being Human: A Christian Understanding of Personhood Illustrated with Reference to Power, Money, Sex and Time*, London: Church House Publishing, 2003.
[816] Ibid., p. 7.

individuals and communities. These habits of mind, heart, imagination and will can help us, in the ever-changing circumstances of our lives, to find a wisdom that is in line with the purposes of God."[817] The report outlines the various expressions and forms of wisdom it sees as being available to individuals and communities, but argues that, from a Christian perspective, "the 'how' of learning wisdom has to have at its heart the interpretation of Scripture... As a Commission we have increasingly converged on this, and have engaged in biblical interpretation together."[818] I wish to advocate such an approach to the conversations surrounding doctrine themselves, and to the process of formulating doctrine, as well as to individual issues.

One of the emerging themes of our 'outsider' narratives was the concept of the disruptive voice of the 'outsider' acting as divine agent, who acts to save or renew the 'elect' community, often through some insight or knowledge of the divine will which is unavailable to the community itself. We have seen, for example, in the narratives surrounding Zipporah and Jael, how in a situation of existential danger, where the motive and behaviour, not only of the 'outsider', but of God, are difficult to discern and even alarming, instinctive action on the part of the 'outsider' is able to save the elect. In the cases of Rahab, Ruth and Jethro, the 'outsider' is able to bring a fresh knowledge of God's purposes for the community, by addressing deficiencies in their knowledge, their understanding of divine-human interaction, and their practical application of divine revelation as they have received it. Despite

[817] Doctrine Commission, *Being Human*, p. 12.
[818] Ibid.

the uncontested status of the 'elect' in the divine economy in these narratives, the 'insiders' are unable to succeed without such insight from outside voices.

These biblical narratives indicate a pattern wherein the people of God have frequently reached an impasse, unable to continue in their journey (metaphorically or literally!) without the wisdom which is given to them by God through the agency of the 'outsider'. This resonates deeply with the difficulties in which the Church of England has found itself at times of deep doctrinal difference or in coming to terms with changing interpretation of scripture. In the previous chapter, I described some of the difficulties faced by the churches as a whole when confronted with the reality of the Holocaust and the results of 'traditional' Christian doctrine, and proposed a method by which the difficulties inherent in addressing such a situation may be overcome. Here I propose that a similar approach may be taken in wrestling with contentious issues within the church itself.

In the twentieth century, the approach of the Doctrine Commission was generally to have a core of membership, chaired by a serving Bishop, with a small group of consultants and a secretary to the Commission.[819] The membership of the Commission was drawn from both the church hierarchy and the academy, including leading experts in theology and biblical studies, but comprised almost entirely 'insiders', that is to say, members of the Church of England, most of whom (with very distinguished and notable exceptions) were also ordained within the church. A

[819] See e.g. The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Contemporary Doctrine Classics from the Church of England – We Believe in God; We Believe in the Holy Spirit; The Mystery of Salvation: The Combined Reports by the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England*, London: Church House Publishing, 2005, pp. ix-xiii, for the membership of the commissions.

similar approach was initially taken in the twenty-first century towards work on human sexuality; following the publication of 'men and women in marriage'[820] and the Pilling Report,[821] the House of Bishops of the Church of England undertook to produce a report on the way forward in discussions regarding doctrine and practice in this area.

This report,[822] which sought to navigate divergent views within the church, was brought to General Synod in February 2017, but in a 'take note' debate, usually a procedural formality, the motion to take note of the Bishops' Report was defeated in the House of Clergy, leading to the publication of a letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to members of General Synod, in which they declared that "To deal with... disagreement and to find ways forward, we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. This must be founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual."[823] As a result, the Church of England established a 'Pastoral Advisory Group' chaired by the Bishop of Newcastle, and the 'Living in Love and Faith' project, which "involves many people

[820] The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, *men and women in marriage*, London: Church House Publishing, 2013.
[821] The Archbishops' Council, *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on human sexuality*, London: Church House Publishing, 2013.
[822] 'GS 2055 – Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations: A Report from the House of Bishops', available from https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%202055%20Marriage%20and%20Same%20Sex%20Relationships%20after%20the%20Shared%20Conversations%20A%20Report%20from%20the%20House%20of%20Bishops.pdf (Accessed 21st February 2019).
[823] The text of the letter may be found here: https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/letter-archbishops-canterbury-and-york-following-general-synod (Accessed: 21st February 2019).

across the Church and beyond, bringing together a great diversity and depth of expertise, conviction and experience."[824] The project aims to "produce resources that will help bishops to inspire people to think more deeply both about what it means to be human, and to live in love and faith with one another. It will tackle the tough questions and the divisions among Christians about what it means to be holy in a society in which understandings and practices of gender, sexuality and marriage continue to change."[825]

Crucially, the project has moved away from attempting to solve what appears to be an irreconcilable internal debate purely through the wisdom of the 'insider' community, and has established working groups on History, Theology, and Social and Biological Sciences in an attempt to gather evidence which will inform and assist the decision-making process. Whether or not the project is truly successful in producing an outcome upon which the Church of England can base future doctrine remains to be seen, but the introduction of 'outside' voices in two particular forms is notable. The first of these is seen in the Terms of Reference for the project, which specifically encourage the introduction of expertise from outside the church, along with a "consultation with other churches and other faith communities with a view to learning from their perspectives, and informing them of our work."[826] The second is the wide consultation which the project attempts to undertake with

[824] Living in Love and Faith, 'Purpose and Vision' - https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/living-love-and-faith/purpose-and-vision (Accessed: 21st February 2019).
[825] Ibid.
[826] Living in Love and Faith, 'Group membership' - https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/living-love-and-faith/group-membership (Accessed: 21st February 2019).

LGBTI+ people, in an effort to "to make sure that these two projects are earthed in the lived experiences of churches and individuals."[827] There is some debate as to how successfully these aims are being implemented, but the approach itself is a departure from 'business as usual' within the church.

Consultation with other faith communities is surely an example of the approach which I outlined in the previous chapter, seeking the wisdom of other traditions *for its own* sake. Additionally, the idea that the development of doctrine and practice should include the lived experience of those who are affected by the issues involved, but who are seen primarily as 'outsiders', here has a double resonance. Not only can LGBTI+ people bring a disruptive voice to a conversation which has primarily been *about them* rather than *including* them in the past, but there are obvious parallels between those people within the church who have in the past made assumptions about sexuality, morality and ethical behaviour, and the treatment of Ruth as a 'Moabite'. The assumptions that were made by Naomi (and frequently by the reader) about the lack of 'appropriate' morality which would accompany Ruth's identity, and upon which Naomi's plan to send her to the threshing floor appears – at least initially – to depend, seem to be similarly prominent and problematic. The initiative shown by Ruth in this situation to turn expectations on their head and to find a creative solution for all parties involved may here be cause for hope.

[827] Living in Love and Faith, 'Purpose and Vision' (Accessed: 21st February 2019).

"Proclaiming the faith afresh in each generation."

One of the constant tensions in the development of Church of England doctrine has been the balancing of a faith which has been received through the 'historic formularies' of the Church and historical scriptural interpretation, with the imperative, as the Declaration of Assent describes it, to "proclaim afresh in each generation"[828] that same faith which is expressed in such tradition. The continuing task of interpretation is underlined in one of the Doctrine Commission's reports, in which it is argued that "Christian languages and pictures and imaginings of God have emerged as a consequence not only of revelation, but also of the histories of innumerable individuals and social groups, in which those expressions of belief have been tested, shared, corrected, extended and enhanced. They remain, and always will remain, provisional, corrigible, incomplete and approximate."[829] In the approach which is just beginning to be taken to the particularly contentious issue of human sexuality, we see perhaps the first serious attempt to include some of those "innumerable individuals and social groups" in the process of formulating doctrine itself. This may be indicative of the beginnings of an approach wherein the voice of the 'outsider' is welcomed for the disruptive potential which it may have to help discern what God might be saying to the Church, rather than treated as irrelevant or even dangerous to the integrity of the community.

Such an approach is not, I contend, a way in which to subvert or overcome 'difficult' parts of the tradition, nor to eschew 'unpopular realities' of church

[828] Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 6.
[829] The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, 'We Believe in God', Doctrine Commission, *Contemporary Doctrine Classics*, pp. 1-128, p. 25.

doctrine, but rather a method by which scripture may be taken with due seriousness, by giving proper and full consideration to the methods by which God is seen to communicate in the biblical narratives which I have examined. This requires not only the recognition of the various ways in which the 'outsider' can bring wisdom, insight and renewal to the community, but also the ways in which such voices have in the past been 'decontaminated' and their threat to the community's integrity nullified.

Thus, the vilification of Jael in some traditions, despite her exemplary presentation in the biblical text, the assimilation of Ruth as a 'perfect convert' rather than one who subverts and transforms the community, the understanding of divine *ḥesed* and knowledge of the divine plan which are displayed by Rahab despite her 'triple outsider' status and ambiguous profession, must all act as warnings to the Church not to find reasons to exclude or silence 'outside' voices which challenge received wisdom. Rather, the appropriate testing of the contributions of those who have been excluded from the power structures of the Church may lead to a truly scripturally faithful method of examining the Church's doctrine and practice for the future. Equally, the act of virtuous resistance seen in Vashti which provides inspiration thousands of years after her ignominious fall from grace in *Esther*, the practical outworking of Ruth's determination and initiative, and the wisdom of Jethro as a balance to the revelatory knowledge of Moses – what Childs refers to as "the most fruitful theological dimension of [the Exodus 18] text for today"[830] – offer insights into the practical value of outside experience and wisdom, not only as the

[830] Childs, *Exodus*, p. 334.

contribution of 'reason' but as a faithful response to scripture which "flows from God's initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression."[831]

Further areas of research

In the course of this current research I have explored the relationship of the 'outsider' to the community of the elect through a series of case studies, having chosen for those studies a number of key figures who provide a representative 'spread' of those whom Joel Kaminsky refers to as the 'anti-elect' and the 'non-elect.'[832] Of the figures whom I have examined, Jethro may be regarded as the nearest to being an 'insider', as someone who is both male and has 'kinship' ties to the people of Moses through his ancestor Keturah (Gen 25.1-2). By contrast, Rahab represents a 'triple outsider', as a woman, who as a Canaanite is a member of the 'anti-elect', and whose very profession symbolises the reason why Israel must not make any covenant with the people of the land, as those "who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods." (Ex 34.16) In investigating Jethro, Zipporah, Ruth, Jael and Rahab, I have sought to determine the extent to which these figures act as divine agents, and whether any pattern might emerge from their portrayal before and after the revelation to Moses in Exodus 3.

[831] *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §53.
[832] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, p. 109.

I have also examined the reception of these figures, and analogous moves which have been made in interpretative history in the treatment of two further 'outsiders', Vashti and Aseneth. In so doing, I have not sought to undertake a comprehensive survey of 'outsiders' in the Hebrew Bible, but rather to draw out a series of themes which might support an emerging theological proposal relating to the impact and necessity of these figures in the divine economy. One useful area for further research would therefore be to undertake a more substantial survey of those 'outsiders' whose portrayal in the biblical narrative indicates that they play a positive role in the salvation history of Israel. Kaminsky, in discussing the 'non-elect', highlights a number of "foreign figures who are treated with great respect,"[833] some of whom have made fleeting appearances in my discussion of election within this thesis. These include Melchizidek (Gen 14), the pharaoh who exalted Joseph (Gen 41ff), the Egyptian pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2), Hiram (1 Kgs 5), the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10),[834] and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17), along with King Cyrus[835] and indeed Job.[836] Kaminsky notes that "several of these characters are juxtaposed to Israelites who are shown to be sorely lacking,"[837] and draws attention to Naaman (2 Kgs 5) in addition to Jethro and Rahab as figures who "all proclaim the unique power of Israel's God in contexts in which at least certain Israelites doubt God and his saving abilities."[838]

[833] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 124.
[834] The Queen of Sheba also appears elsewhere, such as in the extensive additions to Esther 1 contained in *Targum Sheni*, along with the story of her 'conversion' in Sura 27:20-46 of the Qu'ran.
[835] e.g. Daniel 6, 2 Chronicles 6, Ezra 1, 1 Esdras 2, Isaiah 45 etc.
[836] Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p. 124.
[837] Ibid., p. 125.
[838] Ibid.

Such a survey, especially one which also examined the reception of such figures, as I have endeavoured to do here with our case studies, may help to give a broader picture of the place of various outsiders in the divine economy, regardless of their role as 'divine agents' or of their own motivations, and of the *necessity* of such figures as part of the ongoing revelation of the character and nature, both of God and of the community of the 'elect'. This is a separate question to some of those which have been investigated previously concerning, for example, the status and treatment of the 'outsider' in relation to the elect,[839] or the way in which the actions of the 'outsider' affect such status and illuminate the concept of election itself,[840] and may also produce new insights regarding the themes of visibility and erasure of the 'other' which have been explored, for example, in womanist interpretation.[841]

Ascertaining a clearer picture of the role of 'outsider' figures in terms of their impact on, and necessary part in the story of, the elect, may in addition allow a more comprehensive theological proposal regarding the tensions within our faith traditions between 'mission', 'dialogue' and 'engagement' in a broader sense, by considering further how those outside a community may have a number of roles to play *as 'outsiders'* in the development of one's own tradition. Such work will of course interact with questions of election and how the distinction of 'otherness' is

[839] Cf. e.g. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law.*
[840] E.g. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*. Certainly, however, there is substantial overlap between Spina's work and the wider question of the existence and necessity of the 'outsider' as part of the divine plan, and his own 'case studies' may therefore be seen as a useful 'jumping-off point' for future research.
[841] See e.g. Gafney, 'A Womanist Midrash on Zipporah'.

constructed and understood,[842] both in the biblical text and in subsequent and current tradition, encompassing issues of ethnicity, gender and sexuality amongst other concerns, along with the tensions created by evangelistic imperatives within some traditions.

The New Testament

This thesis has focused on the role of the 'outsider' in the Hebrew Bible, and I have drawn out a number of themes relating to the concept of divine agency and the disruptive influence of such outsiders. As I have indicated in a previous chapter,[843] similarly disruptive figures exist in the New Testament texts, for example in the story of the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman (Mark 7.24-30, Matthew 15.21-28), and the extended conversation in which Jesus engages with the Samaritan Woman in John 4. It would be illuminating to examine these and other figures and their reception in later tradition, alongside such figures in the Hebrew Bible, to draw out both the extent to which similarities may be discerned, and the manner in which their role or significance is affected by their interaction with the person of Jesus.

In particular, it would be useful to explore the identity of the double 'outsiders' of the New Testament in relation to the construction of communal identity in both the

[842] Cf. e.g. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen;* Novak*, The Election of Israel*; Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*; Anderson, Gary A. and Kaminsky, Joel S. (eds.), *The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of Jon D. Levenson*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2013.
[843] Q.v., p. 223.

Hebrew Bible and the New Testament,[844] alongside the portrayal of outsiders in such New Testament texts from the perspective of feminist criticism.[845] Such a reading, in conjunction with that of figures from the Hebrew Bible, some of whom I have already explored, would help to assess the extent to which a coherent pattern maintains across the Christian canon in relation to the role of the 'outsider', and the role of women in particular as 'double outsiders'. An investigation of the reception of such figures would also assess whether similar interpretative moves have been made in order either to assimilate or negate the voices of such 'outsiders', and what might be learned from this in the construction of new theological models of the 'other'.[846]

Finally, such a coherent theology of what it means for the 'outsider' to be both an active agent of transformation and part of God's purposes for the community of faith, will, I hope, inform further work on how ecumenical and interfaith engagement may be underpinned by a proper understanding of divine purpose. This will allow a renewed scriptural basis for future engagement and co-operation

[844] Cf. e.g. Trebilco, Paul R., *Outsider Designations and Boundary Construction in the New Testament: Early Christian Communities and the Formation of Group Identity*, Cambridge: CUP, 2017; Mills, Lawrence M., *Not God's People: Insiders and Outsiders in the Biblical World*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

[845] Cf. e.g. Ringe, Sharon H., 'A Gentile Woman's Story, Revisited: Rereading Mark 7.24-31' in Levine, Amy-Jill (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp. 79-100; Rebera, Ranjini Wickramaratne, 'The Syrophoenician Woman: A South Asian Feminist Perspective' in Levine, *Feminist Companion to Mark*, pp. 101-110; Neyrey, Jerome H., 'What's Wrong with this Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space' in Levine, Amy-Jill, *A Feminist Companion to John, Volume 1*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003, pp. 98-125; Webster, Jane S., 'Transcending Alterity: Strange Woman to Samaritan Woman' in Levine, *Feminist Companion to John Vol. 1*, pp. 126-142.

[846] Cf. also existing surveys of the significance of the 'other' for Christian communities, such as Haught, Nancy, *What the Bible's Outsiders Can Teach Christians,* Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017.

between communities, to which I hope this current thesis will, in a small way, contribute.

Final Conclusions

My original thesis was that, given the existence of 'outsiders' who act as divine agents and have a substantial impact on the future of the elect in the Hebrew Bible, such 'outsiders' are an essential feature of the divine economy. During the course of my investigation, I have outlined the way in which each of Zipporah, Jethro, Aseneth, Rahab, Ruth, Jael and Vashti are, and remain, 'outsiders' in the narratives in which they appear. Though there is evidence of some level of assimilation into the community the case of Zipporah and Jethro, Rahab and Ruth, each of these figures remains, I have argued, an 'outsider' in the biblical text, despite the traditions which have grown up around them.[847] Though Aseneth has been comprehensively 'converted' into an insider by subsequent tradition, and even her original status as an Egyptian has been challenged,[848] she remains in the Genesis text, entirely unproblematically it seems, a foreign figure.

The individuals concerned also represent a variety of relationships with the community of the 'elect', from those with kinship ties through Abraham in the cases of Zipporah, Jethro and Jael,[849] to those who can be deemed the 'anti-elect', whose very presence among the elect is proscribed due to the threat which they

[847] E.g. q.v., 'The problem of Ezra/Nehemiah and Ruth's "conversion"', pp. 102-108.
[848] E.g. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, Vol 1, p. 348.
[849] Though as we have seen, Jael's association to Israel through her husband can be understood in a number of ways, q.v. 'Jael as outsider', pp. 84-91.

are seen to embody to the integrity of the faith community, most prominent among whom are Rahab and Ruth.[850] Equally, such figures appear across narratives which describe periods in which contrasting attitudes to the foreigner obtain. In the patriarchal period, Aseneth's inclusion as a matriarch of Israel, and Jethro and Zipporah's relationship to the divine, may be seen as unusual, yet they are certainly not without precedent.[851] In the context of the conquest narratives, the very existence of Rahab's people is itself the presenting problem for the community, making her contribution to their survival and wisdom extraordinary. In the time of the Judges, the actions of Jael as Israel's lauded hero, and the insertion of the Moabite Ruth into the community of Bethlehem, place 'outsiders' in a place of prominence which could easily have been taken by the elect themselves.

Our 'outsider' figures also appear to bring a means of divine salvation or transformation which is simply *unobtainable* by the community acting on its own initiative. This is expressed both in Jethro's distinctive praise and worship of יהוה, and in his worldly wisdom, which enables Moses to carry the burden of his role. It is seen in the transformational *ḥesed* of Ruth and to some extent Rahab, and in the latter's insight into the nature of the divine promise to Joshua and his people. Most strikingly, it is displayed in the midst of the violent and disturbing scene in Exodus 4.24-26, and in Jael's tent, where the instinct, insight and initiative of two 'double outsiders' combine to save first the chosen prophet, and then the chosen people, in a manner which has deeply troubled interpreters despite the matter-of-factness of

[850] See e.g. Kaminsky, *Yet I loved Jacob*, p.109.
[851] See e.g. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament,* pp. 87-88.

the biblical accounts. In each of these situations, only the 'outsider' appears to know, and act in accordance with, the will and design of God for the elect.

In each case, the repercussions of the knowledge and actions of the outsiders are far-reaching and long-lasting.[852] Despite their relatively infrequent appearances, the consistent presence of such 'outsiders', and the significance of their impact, suggests that this is a means by which God disrupts, transforms, shapes and even saves the community of faith, giving weight to Kaminsky's observation that "Israel needs the theological insight of non-Israelites to help her realize her unique status and fulfil her destiny."[853] It appears indeed that, far from each being an individual curiosity, or an explicable anomaly, or even an example of the perfect convert, our 'outsiders' collectively represent a means by which God repeatedly *chooses* to alter the destiny of the 'elect' and give new direction to the chosen people. The 'outsider' as agent of the divine will is, in short, a *feature* of the divine economy.

It is important to recognise that part of the value of such outsiders lies in their ability to disrupt and challenge the norms of behaviour and thought. The situation of such outsiders in narratives which contain existential threats to the community, and their transgression of boundaries in times of greatest need or challenge, are consistent themes in the presentation of such figures in the biblical texts. The fear and incomprehension of the 'other' which often accompanies their presence and actions, either within the text or within interpretative history, is, I have argued,

[852] E.g. q.v., pp. 219-220.
[853] Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, pp. 125-6.

representative of the fear and incomprehensibility of the divine 'Other',[854] and the strategies for 'decontaminating' their influence can be seen as an attempt to displace or contain uncertainty and unease in the face of the otherness of God.

This conclusion has significant implications for communities of faith today. A community which takes seriously the notion that God will and does speak from the 'outside' in a way which cannot be predicted, prevented or achieved from within the 'chosen' people, will have to develop a new hermeneutic of discernment which allows its own integrity to be maintained, whilst acknowledging the potential challenge to long-accepted and dearly-held beliefs which may accompany such disruption. Such a hermeneutic would have to accept that the 'outsider' herself may stand within and be a fundamental part of the biblical tradition to which the community ostensibly adheres. Rather than a challenge *to* the witness of scripture, the 'outsider' may herself bring a legitimate challenge which is *described within* the witness of scripture.

I have outlined, in the previous chapter and above, some of the possible implications of recognising such a witness in scripture, in relation to the voice of the 'outsider', for the development of practice and doctrine within communities of faith. None of these conclusions suggest that assimilation, integration, or even syncretism, are means by which communities of faith are enriched. 'Reaching a compromise', at least in terms of religious tradition and belief, is not a goal implied by the findings of this study. Nor on the other hand, do my findings allow for the

[854] Q.v. 'Reception and the sanitisation of the other', pp. 220-222.

integrity of a community to be maintained simply by drawing firm doctrinal boundaries and ignoring the voice of those who sit outside the received tradition.

It appears rather to be imperative for 'insiders' to take seriously the value and dignity of outside voices, a vocation which arises not simply from a general obligation to respect the other,[855] often the starting point for addressing difference, but from the recognition that this is the means by which the divine will might be discerned, even – perhaps especially – in situations where it may not easily be comprehended. The simultaneously frightening and yet liberating implications of this, are the possibility that our own understanding of the divine may itself be transformed and renewed by such 'outside' voices, and the recognition that in the process we might find, to our consternation or delight, that 'Ruth's God' may indeed become our God.

[855] E.g. Lev 19.18, "That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation." (Talmud: Shabbat 31a); Tobit 4.15; Sirach 31.15; Matthew 7.12; Luke 6.31; Luke 10.25-28.

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