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Second Edition



Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible

FEMINISM, GENDER JUSTICE, AND THE
STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Susanne Scholz

B L O O M S B U R Y

INTRODUCING THE WOMEN'S HEBREW BIBLE

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**Feminism, Gender Justice, and the
Study of the Old Testament**

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Bloomsbury T&T Clark

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*In Memory of
Frau Friedel Süß
(1910–1987)*

*And to
Rev. Dr. Peter Sauer*

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North Andover, MA
August 2006

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF THE SECOND EDITION

Ten years have passed since the first edition appeared in 2007. During this time T&T Clark, the original publisher of the volume, was acquired by Bloomsbury Publishing. I am most grateful to the Bloomsbury acquisition editor, Dominic Mattos, for his suggestion to publish a second revised and expanded edition of *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, especially since I have noticed that mergers and acquisitions in the academic book publishing world in religious and theological studies often make some titles hard to find, if they do not disappear altogether.

I also thank the four anonymous reviewers for their careful, nuanced, and valuable suggestions regarding my ideas for revising the first edition. Although I did not include all of their suggestions, the second edition has benefited from many of them. I expanded the history chapter and I added two new chapters: one about queer and masculinity bible hermeneutics, and another about Christian right's interpretations on women in the Bible. When I wrote my manuscript for the first edition, I wondered what the next ten years of feminist Hebrew Bible scholarship would bring. At the time I ended with a chapter on postcolonial feminist Hebrew Bible scholarship because it seemed the most vibrant, innovative, and exciting new development to me. While this is still the case, the second edition no longer ends with postcolonial feminist biblical studies because, in my view, two additional areas of feminist biblical hermeneutics have come to produce great interest in the field. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss these developments, as I have come to think of them during the past ten years. It will be fascinating to find out how the field will have developed by 2027! The way I see it, feminist Hebrew Bible studies ought to develop, shift, move, and expand into all kinds of directions so that the early beginnings—whenever we pinpoint them—will not have been in vain but flourish into an exciting, comprehensive, and advanced field of academic study that also stays connected to the material and intersectional gender conditions of the world.

More gratitude needs to be expressed. I thank my courageous, thoughtful, and honest Christian theology students at Perkins School of Theology who signed up for the two installments of the course entitled "OT8317 Queer Bible Hermeneutics" in Fall 2014 and Spring 2016. Our reading lists were extensive, our conversations profound, and our learning about the theo-political connections and implications of genderqueer exegesis enormous. I also thank the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Perkins School of Theology, Evelyn Parker, for granting me research assistance for the preparation of this manuscript in the summer of 2016. I thank my research assistant, David Schones, doctoral student in the Graduate Program in Religious Studies at SMU, for his tremendous help in getting the bibliography

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Thanks y'all!

Dallas, Texas

July 2016

INTRODUCTION

Personal Beginnings

“Who is Moses?” I asked my mother when I was twelve years old after I came home one afternoon from my confirmation class. Attending secular schools in West Germany and raised by parents who had sworn to themselves not to force religious education onto their children, I had grown up like most of my friends. Nominally, we belonged to the Protestant or Catholic Church because we were baptized, in my case into the Protestant Christian faith, but we did not go to church, rarely prayed at home, and did not have religion courses in school. Like many Germans of my generation, therefore, I had grown up secular without religious talk and language anywhere.

At age twelve, however, I wanted to go to confirmation class because I had heard—I do not remember where—that during this process one goes to church and learns more about one’s faith. I wanted to go badly, to the big surprise of my parents and extended family. Even the Protestant minister, Rev. Büttner, had some initial hesitations, mostly because I was a year younger than everybody else. Yet my mother, wise in these matters, explained to the minister who even made a home visit for the occasion that she approved of my wish to attend confirmation class now rather than later. She anticipated that I might change my mind if delayed. So I went, not knowing anything about the Bible or Jesus, no less about Moses. I started as a *tabula rasa* in terms of my religious knowledge, and my ignorance was perhaps worse than that of other children who had the benefit of religious practice at home. Many years have passed since that time, and by now I believe that it was not an accident that I felt the need to attend confirmation class as soon as I had heard of its existence. What I lacked most shaped my path so far. Strange how these things sometimes work out! I delved into a field that most people do not even know exists as a serious academic subject matter. Since I grew up secular, I understand secular people. Their ignorance about religious matters was once mine, and I feel sympathetic although at the same time I want them to recognize that the loss is theirs. In my view, the Bible and its academic study help to understand oneself and the world. Not faith but a desire to understand is the requirement.

In today’s Germany most people under forty have at best a fragmentary religious education and know little of the extensive theological discussions that have taken place in the scholarly world. Sure, they listen for a moment when archaeologists

claim to have found the coffin of the brother of Jesus. Yet they quickly turn to other things, sometimes even to church concerts that are regularly offered with great success in German cathedrals. Germany of the early twenty-first century is a post-biblical country, as is much of Europe. I know the feel of it but my path has led me into a different direction. During the last three years in *Gymnasium*, I had the opportunity to take religion courses and my teacher, Dr Peter Sauer, left little doubt in my mind that “religion” is a most serious academic subject that includes everything necessary to understand the world: history, political science, literature, art, philosophy, psychology, even science, and once I understood this, I wanted to know more about the field that seemed so all-embracing, so all-illuminating and absolutely mind-opening to me. I decided to study Protestant Theology at the university level. Everybody was stunned: my parents, family, and friends. They could not understand why I would not go into a secular profession as the secular person I was who went dancing, played sports, was dynamic, smart, and definitely not pious enough in the expected ways to become a Christian minister, the standard professional goal for a student of Protestant Theology in Germany at the time.

But determined as I have always been, I knew exactly what I wanted and was not deterred by people's comments. I enrolled at the University in Mainz in the full-fledged Protestant Theology program and was immediately pushed toward the Hebrew Bible. Every student in the Master of Divinity degree (*Kirchliche Examen*) was required to first pass rigorous language exams in biblical Hebrew and classical Greek before we were eligible for many other courses. Luckily, I loved my biblical Hebrew class, taught by Dr Gross who was already retired at the time and hard of hearing. A class of a hundred students, we met during the early morning hours in a tiny lecture classroom while Herr Gross rattled down stem forms and verbal roots. I also registered for a lecture course on Second Isaiah. I was a first-semester student and did not understand why the professor, Horst Seebaß, spent the entire semester on parsing verses, even half- and quarter-verses, from one place to another in the book of Isaiah, as if his life depended on it.

Yet I was committed to the field I knew very little about. I took almost every course offered in “Old Testament”: Kohelet, Jeremiah, Genesis, the obligatory introduction courses on the Old Testament and exegesis, as well as biblical archaeology. I also ventured into a course on Ugaritic in which the professor, Diethelm Michel, learned the language with his students and we translated texts from a time and place I had never known anything about. I wanted to study everything, even participated in an archaeological dig in Israel, and passed a challenging Bible content exam. For the latter I studied day and night because I was deeply worried that I might fail due to my limited Bible knowledge. Who was Moses? After the Bible content exam, this was not my question anymore. Moses, Miriam, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Keturah—I knew about them and all the other biblical narratives, poems, legal texts, songs, and genealogies, both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. My desire to know more was huge, and when I had the opportunity to go abroad, to Israel, to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, I went. I studied Torah, Talmud, and Midrash in modern Hebrew and was part

of a program for students of Theology from German-speaking countries, called “Studium in Israel.” And I loved it.

I was also a feminist and had read books on feminist theology, but biblical feminist courses were not offered anywhere at the time, neither in Germany nor in Israel. I knew that an academic discourse on the link between feminism and religious-theological studies existed, mostly in the United States, and it was in Israel that I decided to go there and learn more about this approach to theological and biblical studies. Why did I not ask about Miriam when I was a child? Androcentric bias was clearly omnipresent in all of my theological training, and it was present in the world at large. One of my New Testament professors in Mainz had been Luise Schottroff, the only woman professor I ever had in Germany, and so, thanks to her courses and publications, I was aware of patriarchal and anti-Jewish biases in much of German Protestant exegesis, history, and doctrine.¹ I will never forget the dubious advice of a male New Testament professor after he had examined me on my topic, “Women in the Early Christian Movement.” He said: “Just make sure you don’t get pushed onto the feminist track—that would be a pity!”

After I graduated with the German equivalent of the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from the University in Heidelberg, I was lucky to be awarded a scholarship of the World Council of Churches for a one-year program at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. My goal was to focus on feminist biblical studies and theologies, and I took courses with pioneers of feminist biblical studies and ethics, especially with Phyllis Trible and Beverly W. Harrison. At Union we read books of major feminist theologians from the U.S.A. and elsewhere. To me, the “feminist track” illuminated one of the most important injustices in the world and in theological studies: gender discrimination, bias, and oppression. Encouraged in my Union courses, I found the inclusion of other forms of social, political, economic, and religious oppression the logical next step. Back in Germany the feminist theological community had already debated the significance of anti-Jewish bias in feminist theological work.² In womanist, *mujerista*, Black, liberation theologies—Jewish and Christian, Latin American, African, and Asian—I found the intellectual and social challenges of a multi-dimensional analysis theologically invigorating and ethically necessary.

In addition, it was always clear to me that biblical and theological studies need to make connections with the contemporary world. The feminist study of the Hebrew Bible was therefore a perfect fit in my mind. For sure, the Bible as the sacred text of Christianity and Judaism provides central clues about the cultural,

1. An influential anthology on the topic is Lenore Siegele-Wenschkewitz (ed.), *Verdrängte Vergangenheit, die uns bedrängt: Feministische Theologie in der Verantwortung für die Geschichte* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1988). It includes an essay by Luise Schottroff.

2. For a brief summary in German with bibliographical resources, see, e.g. Marianne Grohmann, “Feministische Theologie und jüdisch-christlicher Dialog,” available at <http://www.jcrelations.net/Feministische+Theologie+und+christlich-j%FCdischer+Dialog.1273.0.html?&L=3> (accessed December 12, 2016).

political, economic, social, and religious dynamics of past and present gender oppression. My early question, "Who is Moses?," for instance, illuminates the pervasiveness of gender bias. It was not an accident that I learned about Moses and not Miriam in my German Protestant confirmation class, and feminist biblical studies helped me to understand the history and politics of this deep-seated bias.

Why Moses and not Miriam? A post-biblical society such as Germany does not know why the question matters. If one does not know who Moses is, Miriam does not even come up. To make both biblical characters relevant, to introduce the accomplishments of feminist biblical studies to a Bible-illiterate audience is needed now more than ever before. I have always loved learning about religion, theology, and the Bible, perhaps thanks to my parents who felt so burned by their own religious upbringing that their decision protected me from some of the damage that childhood faith can bring. I am most grateful to the feminist professors I was lucky enough to have at Union, but I also appreciate the androcentric ones. Unbeknownst to them, they too added to my firm conviction that feminist biblical studies are making significant contributions to academia and society, and the results have to be made available to the lay public. I was lucky that my personal theological beginning was nurtured by the collective labor of feminist theologians who have surrounded me during much of my theological education and career as a biblical scholar and teacher, especially since I have come to the United States. They have made it possible for their students to join them and to explore the long history and the many traditions of theological and biblical gender bias. This book introduces their accomplishments, as well as their ongoing efforts of dismantling the master's tools and of developing our own paths.³

Forging a Path in Feminist Biblical Studies

During the past four decades a quiet revolution has occurred. Certainly, it is far from completed and sometimes it seems that it has barely begun at all. Yet this revolution has made it possible for women—black, white, and brown, from previously colonizing and colonized countries, rich, wage-earning, and poor, from the North, South, East and West, younger and older—to be heard and, if they wish and can, to join the academic study of the Hebrew Bible.

Unlike ever before in the history of biblical studies women now participate actively and vigorously in research and teaching of the Bible. Although discriminatory theories and practices against women still exist in abundance almost anywhere worldwide, this is a sign of hope. During the past forty years, women have enjoyed relative ease of access as students and professors to academic programs in theology and religious studies. Employed by universities, colleges,

3. See Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007; originally published in 1984), 110–14.

and, seminaries, women have been able to produce important and new knowledge in the field of biblical studies.

By now, the plethora of feminist publications on the Hebrew Bible is staggering. Investigations on almost any topic and text are abundantly available and it is no longer possible to read every published work since there are just too many. Specialization is a must, and years of study are necessary to know one's way around in feminist biblical scholarship. The success of feminist biblical studies is especially impressive considering the fact that many academic institutions are still hesitant to support feminist research. There are also some women scholars who do not want to be connected with feminist work because they fear diminished career opportunities in an androcentric world. Determination, courage, and persistence have therefore been required by those who committed themselves to feminist biblical research. Their examples have inspired others to join the new field, and as a result their research has created a mature area of study.

For beginners and even for seasoned specialists of other fields it can be intimidating to pick up a book on feminist biblical studies. Where shall one begin to enter the conversations which have grown, deepened, and expanded so considerably during the past four decades? This book aims to help in the process of forging a path through the maze of feminist work on the Hebrew Bible.

About the Contents of this Book

This book introduces readers to the diverse field of feminist studies on the Hebrew Bible. Not organized as a traditional introduction to the "Old Testament," the chapters do not follow a biblical book-by-book structure, but instead they provide an introductory survey on the history, participants, methods, and main topics related to the feminist biblical scholarship. Accordingly, feminist scholars and their careers, and biblical texts, characters, and themes stand at the forefront. The discussion is biased toward "Western" feminist research because of the historical developments of feminist scholarship in general and biblical studies in particular. Yet the chapters also include many African, Asian, and Latin American perspectives. In short, then, the book offers an overview on the historical, social, and academic developments of reading the Hebrew Bible as the "Women's Hebrew Bible" during the past forty years.

A first chapter, entitled "From the 'Woman's Bible' to the 'Women's Bible': The History of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible," outlines the Western history of women interpreting the Hebrew Bible. The account begins with examples from Christian medieval women who argued for women's equality on the basis of selected biblical texts. The chapter then focuses on the arguments of nineteenth-century U.S.-American suffrages, especially Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who regarded religion and the Bible as a major detriment for women's rights. A discussion on early and mid-twentieth century women's interpretations of biblical women follows. The chapter culminates in a discussion on feminist biblical scholarship since the 1970s, and it ends with some considerations on feminist hermeneutics.

The last section touches on important questions affiliated with feminist biblical study, such as: Is the Hebrew Bible thoroughly patriarchal and is its androcentrism “redeemable”? And what makes a reading of the Bible “feminist”?

A second chapter, “A Career as a Feminist Biblical Scholar: Four Stories,” describes why and how four feminist scholars of the Hebrew Bible became biblical scholars. The four scholars are Phyllis Trible, Athalya Brenner, Marie-Theres Wacker, and Elsa Tamez. Their stories offer diversity in terms of generation (pioneering and second generation), religion (Protestant, Jewish, Catholic), nationality (American, Israeli-Dutch, German, Mexican) and scholarly approach (historical, literary, cultural). Based on personal conversations with them, the chapter establishes that “real” women stand behind the developments of feminist biblical work. The chapter also makes connections between their lives and career choices, addresses some of the difficulties they encountered as feminist scholars, and describes their major scholarly contributions.

A third chapter, entitled “Gendering the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Considerations,” discusses the main methods with which feminist scholars have interpreted the Hebrew Bible during the past decades. The chapter begins with a brief description of the three major methods, “Historical Criticism,” “Literary Criticism,” and “Cultural Criticism,” and then illustrates each method with feminist biblical research. One section, illustrating historical criticism, discusses how feminist historians describe the patriarchal living conditions of Israelite women and how androcentric structures developed over time in ancient Israelite society. Another section, addressing literary criticism, depicts how feminist literary critics focused on the study of biblical mothers and these characters’ status, role, and function in biblical narratives. Still another section describes feminist interpretations that investigate gender issues in contemporary art such as movies and paintings, and so it demonstrates how feminist biblical scholars use effectively cultural criticism.

A fourth chapter, entitled “Rape, Enslavement, and Marriage: Sexual Violence in the Hebrew Bible,” examines the topic of rape in biblical texts to illustrate some of the hermeneutical problems with which feminist biblical scholars wrestle. Organized into two main sections, “Raped and Enslaved: Sexual Violence in Biblical Narrative” and “The City as a Raped Woman: Sexual Violence in Biblical Poetry,” the chapter refers to selected biblical narratives and poems that contain metaphors on sexual violence. Among the narratives included are the stories of the enslaved women, Bilhah and Zilpah, in Genesis 29:31–30:24 and Genesis 35:22. The poetic literature comes from a variety of prophetic texts that present Israelite and ancient Near Eastern cities as women. They are among the most disturbing poems of the Hebrew Bible because the metaphoric speech includes God as sexual violator and rapist. The chapter takes for granted feminist theories on violence against women, as they inform feminist interpretations of these and other “texts of terror.”⁴

4. For this expression, see Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

A fifth chapter, entitled “Ruth, Jezebel, and Rahab as ‘Other’ Women: Integrating Postcolonial Perspectives,” takes seriously a recent development in feminist biblical studies, the emergence of feminist postcolonial perspectives. Since the late 1990s, feminist biblical scholars, mostly originating from Two-Third World countries, have begun integrating biblical gender analysis with postcolonial theory. The chapter reports on pertinent studies as they relate to feminist and postcolonial theoretical discourse in general. An introductory description of postcolonial theory outside and inside biblical studies begins the discussion, followed by a detailed and illustrative presentation of feminist biblical interpretations. It summarizes important examples from feminist postcolonial studies on the Hebrew Bible that compare biblical women, such as Ruth, Jezebel, and Rahab, with the situations of Two-Third World women, emphasize the significance of ordinary women, and insist on connecting biblical interpretations with colonial histories, cultures, and traditions.

A sixth chapter, entitled “Denaturalizing the Gender Binary: Queer and Masculinity Studies as Integral to Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics,” presents the hermeneutical-exegetical developments that have redefined the Bible as queer literature. It discusses the emergence and significance of queer theories in general and explains why and how queer Bible scholars have contested methodological and hermeneutical heteronormativity of mainstream Bible meanings. Central in the debate is the problem of normativity and neoliberal assimilation in all gender discourse, biblical or not, as it is co-opted into serving the structures of domination and failing in its goal to transform society toward gender justice. Examples from clobber passages, such as Leviticus 18:22, and innovatively interpreted biblical passages, such as Judges 3:12-30 illustrate the hermeneutical claim that the Bible is a queer book. This chapter also elaborates on the hermeneutical development of studying the positionality of males and maleness in the Hebrew Bible. Related to the larger scholarly enterprise of investigating hegemonic masculinity in society, culture, and religion, exegetes in biblical masculinity studies have begun to take another look at many of the male-identified biblical characters such as the men in Genesis, King David, or even God. The chapter indicates how wide-ranging feminist and gender studies in Hebrew Bible scholarship can be, sometimes venturing out into hitherto unknown territories and sometimes continuing the long-standing tendency in biblical studies to adapt biblical interpretations to the ruling hegemonies in the field and in society.

The seventh chapter, entitled “Essentializing ‘Woman’: Three Neoliberal Strategies in the Christian Right’s Interpretations on Women in the Bible” elaborates further on the problem of reinforcing the socio-religious status quo when interpreting the Bible. Although technically Christian Right’s books on women in the Bible cannot be classified as “feminist,” they are often confused as being part of the Second Feminist movement that has led to a focus on women and gender. After all, the abundance of the Christian Right’s publications on women in the Bible also deal with the same topic, or so it seems. This chapter discusses this important development that makes it difficult for many lay and academic Bible readers to differentiate between feminist and Christian Right’s approaches to the

Bible, women, and gender, especially since sometimes feminist Bible scholarship and the Christian Right's interpretations on biblical women rely on similar hermeneutical assumptions. Thus, this chapter organizes the analysis according to three neoliberal strategies that Esther Fuchs identifies in feminist biblical scholarship. The organization helps in making the central point that the Christian Right's assertion of offering "common sense, natural, and straightforward reading of the Bible,"⁵ whether in the case of biblical women or biblical literature in general, is a hermeneutical fallacy. Since this fallacy is also found in academic feminist works, this chapter reminds every feminist interpreter of the serious need to integrate intersectional feminist, gender, and queer theories into biblical exegesis as a way out of the essentializing, naturalizing, and universalizing gender discourse so pervasive in Christian Right and academic works.

The conclusion provides a provocative reflection on the future of feminist biblical research from my German/European diasporic and U.S.-American perspective. The chapter considers questions raised by the weakening of the "Dead White Male" (DWM) Western paradigm in biblical research. Among the questions discussed are: What are the weaknesses and strengths of feminist biblical readings as currently carried out? How does feminist work on the Hebrew Bible relate to feminist research on the New Testament and early Christian literature? How do feminist biblical studies interact with religious studies in general? What are the institutional dangers and possibilities for a gendered approach to the Hebrew Bible in the academic world of today? The conclusion also considers the relationship between feminist biblical studies and movements of socio-political and economic transformation. We have to consider the future of feminist biblical studies from global perspectives and in increasingly interreligious and religiously diverse contexts that sometimes advance stridently secular ideologies, such as human rights and neoliberalism, and often also include numerous proponents of religious fundamentalism and political conservatism. The conclusion thus invites readers to think about feminist biblical research as an ongoing effort to relate the "Women's Hebrew Bible" to the socio-political, academic, and religious developments in the world.

Purpose and Limitations of this Volume

This book introduces some of the main issues, debates, and accomplishments of feminist studies on the Hebrew Bible during the past four decades. Much research had to be omitted, mostly due to space limitations but also due to my assessment of the field and the goals of this introductory volume. Accordingly, this book does not claim comprehensiveness but it presents a general view of the field as I see it after being involved in the feminist study of the Hebrew Bible during the past two

5. Esther Fuchs, "The Neoliberal Turn in Feminist Biblical Studies," in *Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources* (Feminist Studies and Sacred Texts; Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 66.

decades. As a German and U.S.–American Protestant feminist scholar and teacher of the Hebrew Bible who received her theological training at German universities and pursued doctoral work in the United States, where I have lived and worked for the past two decades, I emphasize international contributions to feminist biblical research. Readers will come away from this book with a clear sense of what they need to read and what areas of feminist biblical studies they will want to pursue next.

I decided to begin the survey where Western feminist scholars usually begin the history of women reading the Bible, namely in Europe and then in the United States, starting with the Christian mystical and religious traditions in which women played a crucial role, continuing with Elizabeth Cady Stanton in nineteenth-century America, and then moving into the twentieth century and the Second Feminist Movement. The pre-twentieth-century history was unknown when the pioneering generation of feminist Bible scholars began their work in the 1970s. The tradition of Western women reading the Bible who tried so desperately to eliminate androcentric bias in Western women's lives had been forgotten. When these women and their works were rediscovered, it felt enormously uplifting, energizing, and also infuriating to feminists in the 1970s. The rediscovery was Western-oriented because it dealt with European and U.S.–American, initially mostly white women's history. The geographic limitations of these early voices as well as their socio-theoretical limitations are obvious to today's feminist historians, theorists, and Bible scholars who recognize the value of employing multi-dimensional gender analyses.

Still, I introduce the collective beginnings of women reading Hebrew Scriptures in this line of historical memory because it has played such a central role for feminist biblical studies since the 1970s. To my knowledge, our research has not yet led to compelling alternatives which locate the early history of women reading the Bible elsewhere. This may still happen since Two-Third World feminist scholars have joined the conversation in recent years, and their findings might expand the historical traces of women reading the Bible, and it will be a happy day when it happens. The quiet revolution that began forty years ago is far from over, and this introductory volume serves only as an appetizer inviting readers to join the unfolding conversations in feminist biblical studies.

Nowadays, academic women readers of the Hebrew Bible are a diverse group of people from many countries and continents, although Western nationalities still dominate. They come mostly from Christian traditions, yet some are also Jewish, secular, or a combination of both religious and secular identities. All of them are committed to reading the Hebrew Bible from feminist perspectives and they take seriously the social category of gender in their work. It is an exciting time to learn about feminist biblical studies because the conversations are numerous, and newcomers are invited to join them.

And the Next Generation ...

Forty years is a biblical time period. For instance, the Israelites walked in the desert for that many years. At the end of four decades their leaders were in the process of changing. The pioneering generation had led them as far as they could and it was time for the next generation to take over. In the case of the Israelites, one of the male leaders, Moses, was replaced with another male leader, Joshua, who went on to occupy and settle the new, the so-called Promised Land. The biblical account presents a story of war at this point in Israel's history. According to the book of Joshua, the Israelite invasion of the land brought on the killing of the indigenous Canaanite population. Was it not better for the Israelites to wander in the desert for forty years? Should they have stayed in Egypt and suffered their fate as an enslaved people if their liberation meant the murder of others?

These are serious questions, and many will probably prefer an imperfect liberation from slavery to oppression in silence. The questions also apply to the current state of feminist biblical studies. Athalya Brenner asked poignantly:

Quo vadis, feminist biblical scholarship? ... What is beckoning? Where do you want to go? Is the Master's House still the house you long to possess, only that you would like to become its legitimate(d) masters and mistresses instead of marginal(ized) lodgers? ... Should we not simply demolish the house instead of merely deconstructing it and its inhabitants, in order to build a completely new one instead? And if so, who will get right of occupation in the new house, and on what terms?⁶

After almost forty years of feminist biblical studies it is time to make widely available to new students of the Bible and readers interested in feminist biblical work what has been going on during the past few decades. The pioneering generation is in their seventies and eighties and almost ready to let the next generation take over. We need to catch up everyone and tell them what has been accomplished so far. We also need to talk about what will be next and where we want to go, certainly without murder and violence, and in support of social, political, economic, and religious changes for justice and peace to women and men and people beyond the gender binaries, black and white and brown, straight and gay, from the North and South as well as the East and West of our planet, of modest means and endowed with financial wealth. Much has happened in feminist biblical studies in only four decades and certainly much will emerge in the next few decades.

Yet there are considerable road blocks that the pioneering generation did not need to face. Religious and political conservatism is rampant in the United States

6. Athalya Brenner, "Epilogue: Babies and Bathwater on the Road," in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner (eds), *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 338.

and elsewhere. In fact, religious fundamentalism is growing in many countries.⁷ Gone are the days of the Civil Rights Movement and the economic opportunities in Western societies of the 1960s and 1970s. Nowadays, young people in Western countries have mostly lived through politically and culturally conservative times and they worry about their employment options, but in recent years the Occupy and Black Lives Matter movements have also galvanized politically progressive people into the limelight. The backlash towards feminism has been steady and many young women acquiesce to the heteropatriarchal status quo, assuming everything is fine for them. But these are also signs of feminist hope, as indicated in the Title IX movement that has brought to national attention the continuing pervasiveness of sexual violence and rape. There is also the serious threat that much of the feminist work in biblical studies and in other fields may be forgotten again. The dissemination of the intellectual and political-cultural feminist accomplishments remains an urgent task so that the next generation does not settle for the many compromises that are being made even today.

This book, then, introduces some of the work done during the first forty years of feminist biblical scholarship that can no longer be ignored. The hope is that the next generation will join and make their own contributions, standing in the footsteps of their foremothers and moving forward with hitherto unknown interpretations, hermeneutical discussions, and hybrid connections among biblical texts, histories of interpretation, and our world. Let the explorations in feminist biblical studies continue.

7. See, e.g. the discussions in Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).