

SHOULD WOMEN BE ORDAINED AS PASTORS?

Old Testament Considerations

INTRODUCTION

This paper builds upon the hermeneutical principles generally accepted by Seventh-day Adventists, as set forth in the 1986 “Methods of Bible Study” statement voted by the Annual Council, and as synthesized in the chapter “Biblical Interpretation” in the *Handbook of SDA Theology*.¹ Insights for this summary position paper have been gleaned over the last 30 years, from my first assigned paper dealing with the subject, “The Role of Women in the Old Testament” (BRICOM, 1982), through several journal articles on the subject, on 25 years later to the 2007 publication of *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (844 pages),² and to the present in my continued wrestling with how best to account for all the data in the Old Testament (hereafter OT) dealing with the relation between men and women and the place of women in ministry. This paper first looks at the material in Genesis 1–3, and then moves to the OT witness on the role of women outside of Eden, both in the home and in the covenant community. Finally, consideration is given to OT statements pointing forward to the eschatological future with the coming of the Messiah. In harmony with sound hermeneutical principles, while maintain a strong belief in the unity of Testaments, I do not use my pre-conceived understandings of New Testament (hereafter NT) passages which allude to OT passages as a grid into which those OT passages must be forced. Rather, I seek to allow the meaning

of OT passages to emerge from their immediate context, and then compare this meaning with later OT and NT parallel passages. I have found that the interpretations of OT passages in this paper fully harmonize with an informed and careful examination of parallel NT passages (the latter will be set forth in the paper by Teresa Reeve).

I. GENESIS 1–3: THE FOUNDATIONAL DATA REGARDING MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

A consensus within biblical scholarship has emerged in recent decades concerning the foundational nature of Genesis 1–3 in the interpretation of Scripture: “whether one is evangelical or liberal, it is clear that Genesis 1–3 is the interpretive foundation of all Scripture.”³ This is especially true with regard to the understanding of human nature and the relationship between man and woman: “Canonically, the understanding of human nature expressed or implied in the laws, wisdom literature, narratives, prophetic texts, and other genres of the Hebrew Scriptures may be viewed as commentary on the creation texts.... The Bible’s first statement concerning humankind remains the normative statement that governs all others.”⁴ “In the opening chapters of Genesis the triangular relationship of God/man/woman is set in place to explain and inform subsequent narrative and legislation as it unfolds. The reader has the necessary framework to

read the codes and recognise proper and improper behaviour.”⁵

In the modern discussion over whether women should be ordained as pastors, the foundational passage for both those who affirm and those who oppose women’s ordination is Genesis 1–3. Those who affirm women’s ordination (often called “egalitarians”⁶) find in the Genesis creation accounts a statement of full equality without hierarchy of man and woman, set forth as the divinely ordained creation order. They see the rest of Scripture calling us back toward that creation ideal, and allowing for women to fill any position of authority to which God calls and gifts them. Those who oppose the ordination of women (often called “hierarchicalists” or “complementarians”⁷ or “subordinationists”) also go to Genesis 1–2, where they find support for their view that male headship, both in the home and in the church, is a divinely ordained creation ordinance. They see this reaffirmed in Genesis 3 and the rest of Scripture, and thus they assert that women cannot assume the role of authoritative headship in the church. What is often common to *both* groups is a similar view of authority—as top-down (“chain-of-command”) hierarchy. Opponents argue that such hierarchical leadership in the church is a male prerogative; proponents urge that women should have equal rights to those hierarchical leadership offices. What is the truth regarding these matters? Let us go to the opening pages of Scripture to discover what

constitutes God’s creation order for the relationship between men and women.

II. GENESIS 1: GENDER RELATIONSHIPS OF MALE AND FEMALE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

In Genesis 1:26–28 “the high point and goal has been reached toward which all of God’s creativity from v. 1 on was directed.”⁸ Here in lofty grandeur is portrayed the creation of humankind (*ha’adam*):

(26) Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” (27) So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (28) And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

A. The Meaning of the Image of God and Male-Female Relationships

In a separate study, I have examined in detail what it means for humanity to be made in the image of God.⁹ Based upon the clues in the text itself, one

may identify three major ways in which humans constitute the image of God: (1) resemblance (structural constitution); (2) relationship (personal fellowship); and (3) representation (function). All three of these aspects of the *imago Dei* reveal a full equality without hierarchy between man and woman.

First, humans are made in God's "image" in terms of *resemblance* or structural constitution (i.e., in form and character). The Hebrew words *tselem* "image" and *demu* "likeness", although possessing overlapping semantic ranges, in the juxtaposition of v. 26 appear to emphasize the concrete and abstract aspects of the human being, respectively.¹⁰ Ilona Rashkow summarizes the implications of this juxtaposition: "God says that his intention is to make Adam both in 'in our image' (that is, physically similar, whatever that may mean), and in 'in our likeness' (having the same abstract characteristics)."¹¹ Ellen White is thus on the mark when she writes: "Man was to bear God's image both in outward resemblance and in character" (PP 45). Again, she states: "In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature" (GC 644-5).¹² It is important to note that Genesis 1:27 presents the equal pairing of male and female in parallel with "humankind" (*ha'adam*). Both male and female are made in God's image, according to His likeness. While indeed the terms "male" and "female" connote sexual (biological) differences, there is no hint of leadership¹³/submission roles between male and female in this passage. Both are explicitly presented as "equally immediate to the Creator and His act."¹⁴

Second, humans are created in God's image in terms of *relationship*. It is hardly coincidental that

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only once in the creation account of Genesis—only in Genesis 1:26—does God speak of the divinity in the plural: "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." There have been many attempts to account for this use of the plural, but the explanation that appears most consonant with both the immediate context and the

analogy of Scripture identifies this usage as a "plural of fullness,"¹⁵ also termed a "plural of fellowship or community within the Godhead."¹⁶ This plural "supposes that there is within the divine Being the distinction of personalities" and expresses "an intra-divine deliberation among 'persons' within the divine Being."¹⁷ It is crucial to recognize that in describing the divine interrelationships ("let Us") which form an analogy with human relationships ("male and female"), the narrator gives no indication of a hierarchy in the Godhead, no reference to the asymmetrical submission of one Person (the Son) to the Other (the Father). In describing the interrelationship among the members of the Godhead, the emphasis in this text is upon the deliberation and fellowship of Equals. If there is any submission implied, it is a *mutual submission* of Equals as the members of the Godhead discuss and deliberate together concerning the creation of humankind. The divine "Let Us" implies that One is not commanding, and Another obeying; all are equaling engaged in the deliberation. Such equality without any top-down hierarchy, by analogy, is thus emphasized with regard to the *mutual* submission in human (male-female, husband and wife) relationships, who are made relationally in the image of God.

Third, humans are made in God's image in terms of *representation* or function. "Just as powerful

earthly kings, to indicate their claim to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God's image as God's sovereign emblem. He is really only God's representative, summoned to maintain and enforce God's claim to dominion over the earth."¹⁸ Whereas human rulers were not able to be in every place at one time, and thus felt the need to erect an image representing themselves, the Godhead is omnipresent (Psalm 139, etc.), needing no representative to take their place when they were not present. Yet, in an act of self-denying submission, the Godhead entrusts the responsibility of dominion over the earth to humankind. Thus there is submission in the Godhead, but it is submission of the full Godhead (the "Us") who together entrusted Their prerogative of dominion to humans They had made (Genesis 1:26, 28)—humans whom the Godhead, in Their infinite foreknowledge, knew would rise up in rebellion against Them and eventually cost the death of the Son of God, God being ripped from God at Calvary. The submission of the Godhead is also displayed in Their giving freedom of choice to human beings, thus limiting Their own sovereignty. This is implied in the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1:26–28, and also further indicated in the presence of the tree of life and tree of knowledge and good and evil in the Garden (Genesis 2:9).

According to the biblical text (Genesis 1:28), humans are to be the creative shapers of the new creation, to "fill the earth and *subdue* [*kabash*] it"—not by exploitation, but by "shaping the creation into a higher order of beauty and usefulness."¹⁹ They are also to be "co-managers" of God's creation (Genesis 1:28): they are to "rule" (*radah*) over the animal kingdom, again not by exploitation, but by judiciously representing God's sovereignty in the earth.²⁰ They are not slaves to do the menial

work of the gods, as in the ancient Near Eastern stories,²¹ but co-regents, the king and queen of their earthly dominion! Neither is the designation "image of God" reserved for the ruling monarch, as in Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources; all humans are in God's image, His representatives on the earth.²²

It is again crucial to note that according to Genesis 1:27–28, both the man and woman are equally blessed. Both are to share alike in the responsibility of procreation, to "fill the earth." Both are to subdue the earth. Both are given the same co-managerial dominion over God's non-human creation. As Rebecca Groothuis states it, "both have been commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other, but both together over the rest of God's creation for the glory of the Creator."²³ There is no mention in this passage of any differentiation in the male and female's authority to rule.

B. Male Leadership Role in the Beginning?

Proponents of male leadership as a creation ordinance generally concede what they term an "ontological"²⁴ equality (i.e., in personal and spiritual value before God) between the genders in Genesis 1, but a functional leadership role for the male is often seen as implied in Genesis 1:26, where God identifies male and female as '*adam*' "man." So Raymond Ortlund writes: "God cuts right across the grain of our peculiar sensitivities when He names the human race, both man and woman, 'man'... God's naming of the race 'man' whispers male headship...."²⁵ What Ortlund and others who employ this argument fail to recognize is that the word '*adam* never means "man" (in the sense or implication of male gender) in Scripture! The problem is a modern language translation issue, not an aspect of the Hebrew text. The word '*adam* is a generic term

meaning “human person” or “humanity.”²⁶ Aside from Genesis 1–3, where it refers to the first human person, this term is *never* in the whole Hebrew Bible used to designate a “man” in the sense of male (as opposed to female). The use of *’adam* does not whisper male headship as a creation ordinance.

According to Genesis 1, male and female are regarded wholistically, as equal without hierarchy. The full equality of man and woman—in resemblance/constitution, in relationship, and in representation/function—is unhesitatingly proclaimed in the first chapter of the Bible, and is evaluated by God Himself as “very good” (Genesis 1:31)! In short, both man and woman participate equally, and without hierarchy, in the image of God, just as the Godhead in Genesis 1 is functioning in a relationship of equality without hierarchy among the Persons comprising that Godhead.

III. GENESIS 2: GENDER RELATIONSHIPS ACCORDING TO THE DIVINE CREATION ORDER

The one major question which has dominated the scholarly discussion of man-woman relations in Gen 2 concerns the status of the sexes relative to each other that is set forth as a divine creation ordinance. The “traditional” view—held by the vast majority of Christian commentators and theologians before the twentieth century—has held that according to Gen 2 woman was created by nature inferior to man, and thus women as a class or even race are not competent and must be excluded from leadership or from exercising authority in the home, church, or society.²⁷

Many recent proponents of male leadership as a creation ordinance now acknowledge that Genesis 1 emphasizes equality on the personal and spiritual level, but at the same time maintain that Genesis 2 emphasizes a male leadership and female

submission role on the functional or societal level.²⁸

Does Genesis 2 affirm a fully egalitarian view of the relationship between the sexes, or does it support a hierarchical ranking in which man is in some way in leadership over the woman at creation?

A. Gender Hierarchy (Male “Headship”) as a Creation Ordinance? Evaluation of Arguments

The main arguments from the narrative in Genesis 2 used by Adventist (and other conservative) hierarchicalists to prove a “creation order” of hierarchical gender ranking may be summarized as follows: (1) man is created first and woman last (vv. 7, 22) and the first is head/leader and the last is subordinate; (2) man, not woman, is spoken to by God and does the speaking (vv. 16–17, 23); (3) woman is formed for the sake of man—to be his “helpmate” or assistant to cure man’s loneliness (vv. 18–20); (4) woman comes out of man (vv. 21–22) which implies a derivative and subordinate position or role; (5) woman is created from man’s rib (vv. 21–22) which indicates her dependence upon him for life; and (6) the man names the woman (v. 23) which indicates his authority or leadership over her. Do these points really substantiate a hierarchical relationship between the sexes? Let us look at each point in turn.

The order of creation. First, because man is created first and then woman, it has been asserted that “by this the priority and superiority of the man, and the dependence of the woman upon the man, are established as an ordinance of divine creation.”²⁹

Adventist (and other conservative) hierarchicalists today generally avoid the word “superiority” for man but argue instead for male leadership from this order of creation. But a careful examination of the literary structure of Genesis 2 reveals that such a conclusion of hierarchy does not follow from the fact of man’s prior creation. Hebrew literature often makes use of an *inclusio* device (also called

an “envelope structure” or “ring construction”) in which the points of central concern to a unit are placed at the beginning and end of the unit.³⁰ This is the case in Genesis 2. The entire account is cast in the form of an *inclusio* in which the creation of man at the beginning of the narrative and the creation of woman at the end of the narrative correspond to each other in importance.³¹ The narrator underscores their equality of importance by employing precisely the same number of words (in Hebrew) for the description of the creation of the man as for the creation of woman! As Trevor Dennis puts it, “the writer has counted his words and been careful to match the lengths of his descriptions exactly.”³²

As with the first creation account in Genesis 1, the movement in sequence in Genesis 2 is from incompleteness to completeness. In Genesis 2 woman is created as the climax, the culmination of the story, and as Adam’s full equal.³³ Mary Corona summarizes the narrative progression:

*The movement of the story beautifully progresses from the utter loneliness of Adam, through the presence of useful living creatures that only accentuate the loneliness by their incapacity to be his companions, to the ecstasy of delight in discovering the companionship of an equal [Genesis 2:23 cited].*³⁴

I have found no evidence in Genesis 1–2 that the law of the primogeniture (“firstborn”) is operative at creation. The paper by Carl Cosaert on 1 Timothy 2 also demonstrates that Paul is not referring to the priority of creation (Adam as “firstborn”) to substantiate male headship as part of the creation order.³⁵

Mention of “firstborn” and “birthright” and related terms in Scripture are only employed to describe conditions after the Fall (e.g., Genesis 4:4; 10:15; 25:31–36). Even after the Fall, the law of the

firstborn was not a hard-and-fast rule. In fact, in the case of the patriarchal covenant line in Genesis, it is regularly the second-born (or sometimes an even later-born), not the first-born, who inherits the birthright: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Ephraim. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself is not the firstborn in His human family (He had older half-brothers through the line of Joseph), and when the term “firstborn” is employed of Jesus, it does not refer to His chronological order of “birth”, but to His “pre-eminence” (that is the meaning of the Greek *prōtotokos* in Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Revelation 1:5).

This does not deny that (at least) Adam was the one-time “head of the human family” (Ellen White, 6T 236), “the father and representative of the whole human family” (Ellen White, PP 48). Adam’s representative headship of the entire human race is based upon the biblical principle of corporate solidarity, the individual(s) representing the many.³⁶ Adam bears the Hebrew name *’adam*, which is also the name meaning “Humankind” (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2). Only Adam in OT salvation history is given this personal name. The fluid use of the term (*ha*) *’adam* in Genesis 1–5 to refer both to an individual “human” and to “humanity” indicates that Adam the individual is to be viewed in corporate solidarity with the *’adam* which is humanity as a whole. (This is the theological truth recognized by Paul in Romans 5:12–21.)

With reference to Adam as the “head of the entire human race,” at first glance it may seem apparent that he exercised this representative role alone. However, the biblical text also makes clear that God named both the first man and the first woman “Adam” (*’adam*, Genesis 5:2). Eve also was given a representative role in solidarity with the entire human race, as “Mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). The spiritual followers of God are traced through

her “seed” and *not*, as might be expected, through Adam’s (Genesis 3:15, contrary to usual reference to a man’s “seed” elsewhere in Scripture). So it is very possible that God intended from the start that both Adam and Eve serve as representative heads, mother and father, of the entire human race. Thus both would have joined the “sons of God” in the heavenly council instead of Satan, representing this earth (Job 1–2). As a parallel to this usage, Ellen White states that “Adam was crowned king in Eden, and to him was given dominion over every living thing that God had created” (1SDABC 1082), although it is evident from the biblical text that Eve equally exercised this dominion (Genesis 1:26, 28; cf. PP 50). Likewise, although Ellen White mentions Adam as “head of the human family,” she does not thereby necessarily exclude Eve, his “equal partner” and “second self” in that representative role.

Regardless of whether Adam served in this headship alone or along with Eve, what is important to our issue in this paper is that this was a *one-time, representative (non-hierarchical, or better, inverse-hierarchical servant) headship*, and involved headship of the entire human race, including both men and women. Non-hierarchical (or inverse-hierarchical) representative headship may be illustrated in United States politics, where congressmen in the House of Representatives serve to *represent* their constituency, but by no means are in hierarchical authority over them. This *one-time representative (not hierarchical) headship* of the “first Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:54) was not passed on from generation to generation. Intended to be a one-time representative headship, it was usurped by Satan (who became the “prince of this world,” John 12:31) and was restored by the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Hence there is no indication here of female subordination to male headship; rather, what was intended was the entire human race (“humanity,”

male and female) being represented by the Father (and Mother) of the human race.

Man’s priority of speech. A second argument concerns the man’s priority in speaking and being spoken to in the narrative. It has been claimed that the man’s leadership over his wife before the Fall is revealed in that God addresses the man, and not the woman, and also in that the man does the speaking in the narrative of Genesis 2, not the woman. However, such a claim fails to take into account the movement of the narrative from incompleteness to completeness and climax as has been pointed out above. As part of the process of bringing the man to realize his “hunger for wholeness,”³⁷ that he is alone and like the other creatures needs a partner, God indeed speaks to him, warning him not to eat of the forbidden tree. As soon as God created a human being such information was crucial for that being to avoid transgression, and in order to be a free moral agent with the power of choice. But the divine impartation of such knowledge to the man before the woman was created does not thereby reveal the leadership of the man over his partner.³⁸ Likewise, only the man speaking (not the woman) in Gen 2 does not reveal his pre-Fall leadership over the woman any more than only Eve speaking (and not Adam) outside the Garden (Genesis 4) reveals Eve’s leadership over Adam after the Fall.

If there had been an intention to emphasize *male* headship in Genesis 2, the narrator would have regularly employed the term *’ish* “man,” which indicates the male gender, and not *ha’adam* “the human,” a term which never in the Hebrew Bible implies a male (as opposed to female). Throughout this narrative (except for the two verses 23–24 which use the gender-explicit terms *’ish* “man” and *’ishah* “woman” when specifically describing marriage) the term *ha’adam* “the human” (or *’adam* with the preposition *le* in v. 19b) is consistently used, emphasizing the

human's relationship with God and solidarity with all humanity, and not a male headship over the woman.

The purpose of woman's creation. If a hierarchy of the sexes is not implied in the *order* of their creation or *priority* of speech, is such indicated by the *purpose* of woman's creation, as is suggested in a third major argument for the hierarchical interpretation? Genesis 2:18 records the Lord's deliberation: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him 'ezer kenegdo" (KJV—"a help meet for him"; RSV—"a helper fit for him"; NASB—"a helper suitable to him"). The Hebrew words 'ezer kenegdo have often been taken to imply the inferiority or subordinate status of woman. For example, John Calvin understood from this phrase that woman was a "kind of appendage" and a "lesser helpmeet" for man.³⁹ More recently, Clines argues that the Hebrew word 'ezer refers to someone in a subordinate position.⁴⁰ But this is not the meaning conveyed by the Hebrew!

The masculine noun 'ezer is usually translated as "help" or "helper" in English. However, this is a misleading translation because the English word "helper" tends to suggest one who is an assistant, a subordinate, an inferior, whereas the Hebrew 'ezer carries no such connotation. In fact, of the nineteen occurrences of 'ezer in the Hebrew Bible outside of Genesis 2, sixteen employ 'ezer to describe a *superordinate*—God himself as the "Helper" of Israel.⁴¹ The other three occurrences outside Gen 2 denote military allies.⁴² Never does the word refer to a subordinate helper. As elsewhere in the OT, in Genesis 2 the word 'ezer is a relational term, describing a beneficial relationship, but in itself does not specify position or rank.⁴³ The specific position intended must be gleaned from the immediate context. In the context of Genesis 2, with God bringing the parade of animals (all apparently with mates) but Adam finding no fitting companion, the "help" intended is

clearly "real companionship that can be given only by an equal."⁴⁴ This "help" or benefaction is indeed "for the man" (v. 18) in the sense that she "would bring benefit to Adam,"⁴⁵ but this does not imply a hierarchy of roles. The benefit brought to the man is that at last he has an egalitarian partner.

Genesis 2:18 and 20, confirm this equality of ranking with the expression which adjoins 'ezer, namely *kenegdo*. The word *neged* conveys the idea of "in front of," "opposite," or "counterpart," and a literal translation of *kenegdo* is thus "like his counterpart." Used with 'ezer this prepositional phrase indicates no less than equality without hierarchy: Eve is Adam's "benefactor/helper," one who in position and status is, as recognized by the standard Hebrew lexicon, "*corresponding to him*, i.e., equal and adequate to himself."⁴⁶ Eve is "a power equal to man;"⁴⁷ she is Adam's "soul-mate,"⁴⁸ his equal partner, in nature, relationship, and function. The phrase 'ezer *kenegdo* in no way implies a male leadership or female submission as part of the creation order, but instead affirms the full equality of man and woman.

Woman's existence derived from man. As a fourth alleged indication in Genesis 2 of male leadership and female submission, it has been argued that since woman came out of man, since she was formed from man, therefore she has a derivative existence, a dependent and subordinate status. That her existence was in some way "derived" from Adam cannot be denied. But derivation does not imply subordination! The text indicates this in several ways. Note, for example, that Adam also was "derived"—from the ground (v. 7) but certainly one is not to conclude that the ground was his head or leader!⁴⁹ Furthermore, as the first woman was derived from man, every subsequent man comes from woman, so there is an expression of integration, not subordination, indicated here (see Genesis 3:20).

With regard to the naming the animals, the man is not exercising his authority over them, but classifying them.

Again, woman is *not* Adam's rib. It was the raw material, not woman herself, that was taken out of man, just as the raw material of man was "taken" (Genesis 3:19, 23) out of the ground.⁵⁰ Samuel Terrien rightly points out that woman "is not simply molded of clay, as man was, but she is architecturally 'built' (2:33)." The verb *banah* "to build," used in the creation account only with regard to the formation of Eve, "suggests an aesthetic intent and connotes also the idea of reliability and permanence."⁵¹ To clinch the point, the text explicitly indicates that the man was asleep while God created woman. Man had no active part in the creation of woman that might allow him to claim to be her head.⁵²

Woman created from man's rib. A fifth argument used to support the hierarchical view of the sexes concerns the woman's creation from Adam's rib. But the very symbolism of the rib points to equality and not hierarchy. The word *tsela'* can mean either "side" or "rib." Since *tsela'* occurs in the plural in v. 21 and God is said to take "one of" them, the reference in this verse is probably to a rib from Adam's side. By "building" Eve from one of Adam's ribs from his side, God appears to be indicating the "mutual relationship,"⁵³ the "singleness of life"⁵⁴ in which man and woman are joined. The rib "means solidarity and equality."⁵⁵ Created from Adam's "side [rib]," Eve was formed to stand by his side as an equal. Peter Lombard was not off the mark when he said: "Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his ruler, but from his side to be his beloved partner."⁵⁶ This interpretation

appears to be further confirmed by the man's poetic exclamation when he sees the woman for the first time (v. 23): "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" The phrase "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" indicates that the person described is as close as one's own body. It denotes physical oneness and "a commonality of concern, loyalty and responsibility."⁵⁷ The expression certainly does not lead to the notion of woman's subordination or submission to man, but rather implies full equality without hierarchy, in constitution, relationship, and function. Ellen White well captures the meaning when she writes:

Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it." Ephesians 5:29. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one." (PP 46.)

Some have taken Ellen White's statement that the Eve was "to be loved and protected by him [Adam]" as indicating male hierarchical headship, but protection here implies greater physical strength, not hierarchy! A government leader's body guards are protectors, but that does not make the leader subordinate to them. The context of Genesis 2 is not one of hierarchy but of symmetrical equality.

Woman named by man. The last major argument used to support a hierarchical view of the sexes in Genesis 2 is that in man's naming of woman

(v. 23) is implied man's authority over her, as his naming the animals implied his authority over the animals.⁵⁸ This conclusion is predicated upon the commonly-repeated thesis that assigning names in Scripture signifies authority over the one named, but this widely-held scholarly assumption has been recently effectively challenged, with examples from numerous Scriptural passages.⁵⁹ George Ramsey shows from the OT data of naming that "if the act of naming signifies anything about the name-giver, it is the quality of *discernment*" and not the exercise of authority or control. Even if the man did name the woman in Genesis 2:23 (which I argue below is unlikely), "the exclamation in Genesis 2:23 is a cry of discovery, of recognition [cf. Jacob's cry in Genesis 28:16–17, prior to bestowing the name Bethel], rather than a prescription of what this creature built from his rib shall be. An essence which God had already fashioned is recognized by the man and celebrated in the naming."⁶⁰ The preceding poetic lines of Adam's speech confirm that exercise of leadership authority is not intended here: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." This clause, as already noted, clearly connotes mutuality and equality, not subordination.⁶¹ The second part of Genesis 2:23 also confirms this interpretation: the arrangement in Hebrew is chiasmic (symmetrical parallelism), with the words for "woman" and "man" placed in parallel in the center,⁶² "suggesting a corresponding and equal relationship to one another."⁶³

With regard to the naming the animals, the man is not exercising his authority over them, but classifying them.⁶⁴ This can be seen in the immediate context of man's being "alone" and this being "not good" (v. 18), evidencing that God's bringing of the animals to the man for him to name further implies that the man is entering into a delightful companionship with the animals, only to ultimately discover that such companionship is inadequate

to satisfy his quest for complete reciprocity and mutuality.⁶⁵

Furthermore, it appears most probable that Adam does *not* name the woman before the Fall at all. The designation *'ishah* occurs in the narrative *before* Adam ever meets her (Genesis 2:22). She is already called "woman" by the narrator even before the man sees her. Jacques Doukhan has shown that Genesis 2:23 contains a pairing of "divine passives," indicating that the designation of "woman" comes *from God*, not man. Just as in the past, woman "was taken out of man" *by God*, an action with which the man had nothing to do (he had been put into a "deep sleep"), so in the future she "shall be called woman," a designation originating in God and not man. Doukhan also indicates how the literary structure of the Genesis creation story confirms this interpretation.⁶⁶

There is no indication in the text that the word-play in v. 23 between *'ish* (man) and *'ishah* (wo-man), and the explanation of the woman being taken out of man, are given to buttress a hierarchical ranking of the sexes; rather, in context, they are best understood to underscore man's joyous recognition of his second self.⁶⁷ In fact, the word *'ish* (man) first appears in this verse; the man becomes aware of his own identity as he discerns the identity of *'ishah* (wo-man). In his ecstatic poetic utterance the man is not determining who the woman is—any more than he is determining who he himself is—but rather delighting in his recognition of what God has done. He is saying yes to God in recognizing his own sexual nature and welcoming woman as the equal counterpart to his sexuality.⁶⁸ After the Fall Adam *did* give his wife a name (Eve), but even then it is more probable that he is discerning what she already was by the promise of God, "mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20), and not exercising authority over her.⁶⁹

In short, none of the arguments advanced from Gen 2 to support a hierarchical relationship between the sexes can stand the test of close scrutiny. In light of the foregoing discussion, I concur with a host of other commentators and scholarly studies in their conclusion that Genesis 2, like Genesis 1, contains no statement of dominance, subordination, or leadership/submission in the relationship of the sexes.⁷⁰ Rather, these very arguments affirm the opposite of what is claimed by those who oppose ordination of women. The man and woman before the Fall are presented as fully equal in rank, with no hint of a hierarchy of nature or relationship or function, no leadership/submission ranking between husband and wife. Gilbert Bilezikian has summarized well:

*Conspicuously absent in Genesis 1–2 is any reference to divine prescriptions for man to exercise authority over woman. Due to the importance of its implications, had such an authority structure been part of the creation design, it would have received clear definition along with the two other authority mandates [God’s sovereignty over humans, and human’s dominion over all the earth]. The total absence of such a commission indicates that it was not a part of God’s intent. Only God was in authority over Adam and Eve. Neither of them had the right to usurp divine prerogatives by assuming authority over each other. Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God’s creation design is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text.*⁷¹

This affirmation of the full equality and mutuality of man and woman in the Gen 2 account of creation is all the more striking when seen in contrast with the other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts which contain no separate narration of the creation

of woman. The Genesis creation narratives not only give a detailed account of origins, but at the same time appear to serve as a direct polemic against the mythological creation stories of the ancient Near East.⁷² By its special, lengthy, separate account of the creation of woman in Genesis 2, the Bible is unique in ancient Near Eastern literature with its high valuation of woman on an equal par with man.

B. Different Roles for Man and Woman in Creation?

Those who oppose women’s ordination insist that Genesis 2 (like Genesis 1) depicts different roles for men and women. It is true that the terms “male” and “female” imply biological differences, and an affirmation of the egalitarian relationship of Adam and Eve does not deny their complementarity.⁷³ They were to have no interests independent of each other, and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. They were bone of each other’s bone, flesh of each other’s flesh, equal in being and rank, and at the same time they were individuals with differences. As Tribble points out, “oneness does not level life to sameness; it allows for distinctions without opposition or hierarchy.”⁷⁴

Some have called attention to the different modes of creation between the man and women—the man’s creation out of the ground, and the woman’s creation out of man—and suggest this may be intimately related to unique differences between the sexes. It is proposed that a man tends to have “an immediate relationship to the world of things” while “the woman is primarily directed to the world of persons.”⁷⁵ However, the divine mandate in Genesis 1–2 for both male and female to join in the work of procreation, subduing, having dominion, and tending the garden (Genesis 1:28; 2:15), reveals that the sexes are not one-dimensional; both genders are directed to the world of things and the world of relationships.

While biological gender differences are acknowledged in Genesis 1–2, other differences between the genders are not described. The emphasis of the stories is on a shared equality of nature and status and responsibility. Since the biblical text in Genesis 1–2 differentiates between the sexes (male and female) but does not specify certain behaviors that belong exclusively to the male, and others that are exclusively the domain of the female, it seems inappropriate to go beyond the biblical evidence to insist that certain gender-specific “roles” such as “male headship” and “female submission” are part of the creation order.

While the text of Genesis 1–2 implies complementarity between the sexes, it presents no stereotypical roles that constitute the “essence” of manhood and womanhood respectively. Both genders without differentiation are made in the image of God; both are given the command to be fruitful and multiply; both are commanded to fill the earth and subdue it; both are commanded to have dominion over all the other creatures (Genesis 1:27–28). They are equal partners corresponding to each other, with full reciprocity and mutuality, and without hierarchy (Genesis 2:18). Any attempt to distill the essence of the “roles” of man and woman respectively from the opening chapters of Genesis is going beyond the revelation of the text.⁷⁶ Complementary wholeness without hierarchy is the portrait of man-woman relationships in Genesis 1–2.

In fact, the very use of the term “role” by gender hierarchicalists/subordinationists to describe a permanent subordination of women to men is highly problematic. The French word *role* had its origins in regard to the part that an actor played on the theater stage. In the 1930s the word “role” became a key term in the secular humanistic discipline of functional sociology (“role theory”). It was only in the mid-1970s that the term “role” was combined with a

new understanding of creation orders, and introduced into the ordination debate by George Knight III, in his book *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Women and Men*.⁷⁷ Knight, and the many who have since followed his lead, attempt to distinguish between gender equality in person and role differentiation in function. Whereas earlier opponents of women’s ordination simply assumed that women are inferior to men and thus are subordinate to male headship, the new argumentation since the Knight’s book redefines women’s subordinate status based upon role differentiation.

Kevin Giles provides an incisive critique of this new kind of argumentation. He points out “Nowhere does the Bible suggest that women and men are simply *acting out* their maleness or femaleness or that apart from procreation there are some tasks given only to men and others only to women.... In our very being we *are* differentiated; we are not merely functionally differentiated.”⁷⁸ Giles affirms that “The recently popularized usage of terminology and ideas drawn from the theater and humanistic sociology actually contradicts divine revelation.... When conservative evangelicals interpret biblical teaching on women and men in terms of role differentiation, we have to recognize that they are reading into the text something that is not there and that is never mentioned prior to the 1960s. To use their own terminology, they are not being ‘biblical.’”⁷⁹

Giles also shows how the use of the term “role” by recent opponents of women’s ordination is not only unbiblical, but also logically flawed. The term “role” by its very definition refers to something transient and secondary, not something part of a person’s essential nature or being. In the theater the actor plays a “role” but is not essentially and permanently the character whose role he takes in the performance. Again, an officer and a private in the

army have different roles, based upon training and competence to lead. It is possible for the private to become an officer and for the officer to be demoted. The officer's leadership role is "not intrinsically connected with who he is. His role is not an essential feature of his personhood."⁸⁰ By contrast, in the modern debate over women's ordination, Giles points out that according to subordinationists, "because a woman is a woman, and for no other reason, she is locked into a *permanent* subordinate role, no matter what her abilities or training might be. Who she is determines what she can do; her sexual identity determines her role. The private can assume higher responsibilities, but a woman can never become a leader in the church and can never assume equal responsibility with her husband in the home, simply because she is a woman."⁸¹

Perhaps without realizing it, those who use this argument based upon "role differentiation" have actually recast the term "role" in essential terms; roles are not just functions, but are part of the very essence of the person. "Introducing the sociological term *role* in this argument for the *permanent functional* subordination of women does not negate the fact that women because they are women, and for no other reason, are subordinated.... Cleverly worded phraseology cannot avoid this fact. If a woman's role is not essential to her nature or being, then it can change. If it cannot change because it is basic to her nature or being as a woman, then it is not just a role she performs."⁸² Paul Petersen states the matter concisely: "from the point of semantics, when anyone speaks about an eternal role, it is no longer a role, but describes the very essence and being.... Per definition a role cannot be permanent or eternal."⁸³

If "role" is no longer a temporary, secondary feature of being a woman or man, but involves a permanent subordination of women to men

because of their very personhood, then "role" is not the appropriate word to describe this situation. It may be a nice-sounding term, but it is misleading, since, as Giles points out, for gender subordinationists "The issue is not *gender roles* but essential *gender relations*. God has set men over women because they are women. The word *role* only has the effect of obfuscating this fact."⁸⁴

What those who oppose women's ordination call "role differentiation" is actually a permanent, hereditary social division based solely upon gender. The dictionary term which best fits this description is "caste." On the basis of subordinationists' interpretation of Genesis 1-2, viewed through the lens of their assumed understanding of 1 Timothy 2, "half the human race is subordinated to the other half." According to this interpretation, "in creation God instituted an *unchanging social order* that gives men the leading role in the home and excludes women from leading . . . in church."⁸⁵ This is nothing less than a caste system in which there is permanent subordination of the female gender to the male gender. Against this and all other caste systems Ellen White's words apply: "No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption" (COL 386). "Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character" (CC 291).

Evangelical subordinationists often support the permanent subordination of women to men by analogy to the Trinity, in which they argue there is found the subordination of the Son to the Father. Many Adventists have taken over this evangelical analogy between man-woman relationships and the Trinity in their opposition to women's ordination. But what they apparently have failed to recognize is that the analogy only works if one takes the common evangelical position on the Trinity, i.e., that it

What those who oppose women's ordination call "role differentiation" is actually a permanent, hereditary social division based solely upon gender.

involves the *eternal subordination* of the Son. The analogy is then straightforward: just as the Son was *eternally* subordinated to the Father, so women are *permanently* (from creation) subordinated to men in the home and in the church. Ironically, Adventists who use this argument of analogy to the Trinity do not normally accept that the Son was *eternally* subordinate to the Father, but see Him as only *economically* subordinate in the context of solving the sin problem (in the Incarnation),⁸⁶ since they realize that the idea of eternal subordination is not biblical and ultimately undermines the doctrine of the Trinity. Nonetheless they seek to retain the analogy, when in actuality the analogy without the *eternal* subordination of the Son undercuts the very argument they are trying to make. Logically, if Christ's subordination to the Father is only temporary (in the context of the sin problem) and is changeable, then by analogy the subordination of women to men is only temporary (in the context of the Fall), and is changeable.

Those who oppose women's ordination often support the hierarchical interpretation of gender relations in Genesis 1–2 by referring to the "order" in heaven in which there is hierarchy even before sin entered the universe: there were the "commanding angels" (Ellen White, GC 646) and others who followed the commands (PP 37). According to this argument, if such hierarchy is appropriate in heaven before sin, why should it not be appropriate in Eden between Adam and Eve before the Fall? In response to this argument, I affirm that Scripture does indeed recognize hierarchy on earth before the Fall: Adam and Eve, as co-equal vicegerents of God, were made "a little lower than God [LXX, angels]" (Psalm 8:5);

and they both had dominion over the rest of the animal kingdom, who were "lower orders of being" (PP 45). (However, as I will argue later/below, this was actually an "inverse hierarchy," one of servanthood.) But this hierarchy from angels to humans to the lower orders of animals, did not involve a hierarchy among human beings themselves.

This is not to deny that if humans had not sinned, and the human family had expanded into a developed society, there would no doubt have been representatives chosen for various positions of responsibility, in parallel to the ordered society of the angels. But such "ordering" of society would not have been based upon a "caste" system, in which persons, simply by virtue of their gender, without regard for their aptitude and training, were stratified into different levels of society in which women were subordinated to men.

We do not have much information in inspired sources regarding the "order" among the angels in heaven before the Fall, but the evidence available leads to the conclusion that such heavenly order is based, not upon a permanent and hereditary "caste" system, but rather, angels were chosen for their various duties because of their particular aptitude and skill for the tasks assigned, and those positions of responsibility could change over time. See, for example, the description of the qualities such as wisdom and musical talent that fitted Lucifer for his post of covering cherub and choir leader (Ezekiel 28:12–14; 1SP 28). Moreover, Lucifer was specifically installed in this position and was removed from it when he sinned (Ezekiel 28:14, 16), and his position was replaced by Gabriel who then became "next in rank to the Son of God" (DA 232).

While order among humans, involving certain persons in representative positions of responsibility, would probably have developed eventually had the first pair not experienced the Fall, order did not necessarily involve hierarchy (or inverted hierarchy) in the beginning. Egalitarian marriages today testify to the possibility of an ordered marriage relationship without hierarchical structures (I am experiencing such a relationship!) And such egalitarian gender relationship is that which is described in Genesis 1–2 as part of the creation order. Some argue that “every ship must have a captain” and in parallel therefore the couple in Eden had to have one “in charge.” But the first family was not a ship! Even today, many business firms pride themselves in being established and run by senior partners who are fully equal, with no hierarchy between them. (My uncle ran such a successful CPA business in full partnership with another accountant.) According to Genesis 1–2, such was the full partnership of equals without hierarchy in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

C. Mutual Submission of Husband and Wife from the Beginning

With regard to marriage, the complementarity established by God involves a *mutual* submission involving both husband and wife as the divine ideal both before and after the Fall. This is apparent from Genesis 2:24: “therefore [*al-ken*], a man leaves [*azab*] his father and his mother and cleaves [*dabaq*] to his wife, and they become one flesh [*basar ekhad*].”⁸⁷ The introductory “therefore” (*al-ken*) indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the pattern for all future human sexual relationships, and not just an etiological insertion to explain the common legal custom at the time of Moses. Robert Lawton insightfully points out, as I will expand further below, that it was *not* the normal custom in OT patriarchy for the man to leave

his father and mother, but rather for the woman to leave. Therefore, the Hebrew imperfect verb in this context is best taken not as a frequentative imperfect “he [typically] leaves” but as a potential imperfect “he *should* leave.” The verse thus expresses “a description of divine intention rather than of habitually observed fact.”⁸⁸ What is particularly striking in v. 24 is that it is the *man* who is to “leave” (*azab*). It was a matter of course in the patriarchal society at the time Genesis 2 was penned that the wife left her mother and father. But for the husband to “leave” was revolutionary!⁸⁹ In effect, the force of this statement is that both are to leave—to cut loose from those ties that would encroach upon the independence and freedom of the relationship.

Likewise, it is the *man* who is called upon to “cleave, cling” (*dabaq*) to his wife. This Hebrew term implies a strong voluntary attachment involving affectionate loyalty, and is often used in the OT to describe Israel’s “cleaving/clinging” to the Lord.⁹⁰ It was expected in a patriarchal society that the woman would have such attachment to her husband, and hence the force of this statement is that *both* man and woman are to “cleave” or “cling” to each other. Reciprocal “clinging” implies a mutual submission without hierarchy—a self-sacrificing love where the husband identifies himself with his wife so as to provide for her needs, and vice versa (as Paul recognizes in his citation and elaboration of the verse in Ephesians 5:21–31). Finally, in the context of the marriage covenant, the husband and wife are become “one flesh” (*basar ekhad*). This expression, like the “leaving” and “cleaving” in Genesis 2:24, implies a mutual submission. It indicates a oneness and intimacy in the total relationship of the whole person of the husband to the whole person of the wife, a harmony and union with each other in all things.

This mutual submission of husband and wife parallels what we have seen above regarding the

Godhead—a mutual submission of Equals as They deliberated together regarding creation of human-kind (Genesis 1:28), and in submission together as They entrusted Their dominion over this earth into the hands of humanity. Mutual submission in the symmetrical (non-hierarchical) relationship of Adam and Eve before the Fall leaves no room for an asymmetrical (hierarchical) “servant leadership” on the part of the man over the woman as a creation ordinance.⁹¹

D. Man and Woman as Priests in the pre-Fall Eden Sanctuary

Genesis 2 not only portrays Adam and Eve as equal partners in mutual submission in their marriage relationship; the narrative also indicates that both of them served as priests officiating in the pre-Fall sanctuary worship services in the presence of Yahweh. According to Genesis 2:15, the first couple were to “tend” (*abad*) and “keep” (*shamar*) the garden. These terms literally mean to “serve” and “guard” respectively, and imply more than that Adam and Eve were entrusted with a responsible stewardship of serving and protecting their environment. There is abundant textual evidence that links Genesis 1–2 with the biblical sanctuaries mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, indicating that the pre-Fall garden of Eden is to be regarded as the original sanctuary on earth, a copy of the original heavenly sanctuary, and in parallel with the later Mosaic sanctuary and Israelite temples. The evidence for this conclusion has been documented by scores of biblical scholars.⁹² See Table 1 for a few examples of the more than thirty textual parallels that have been recognized.

The suffusion of sanctuary language in Genesis 1–2 leads inescapably to the conclusion that the Garden of Eden is to be regarded as the original sanctuary on this earth. In light of this sanctuary

context, the paired use of the two terms *abad* and *shamar* to describe the work of Adam and Eve in the Eden garden is extremely significant. These two words, when used together elsewhere in the OT in the setting of the sanctuary, function as a technical expression for the service of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary (see Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:3–7). (A modern parallel to understand how OT “intertextuality” works would be the typing into “Google Search” the three key words “serve” and “guard” and “sanctuary,” and being led directly to the work of priests and Levites as the only place where these term intersect.) Thus, the use of this paired terminology in the setting of the Eden Garden sanctuary clearly implies a sacerdotal function for the first couple in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are portrayed as creative co-participants, spiritual intimates, yes, priests, in the sacred worship service of the Eden sanctuary! This is in harmony with the original (pre-sin) worship function of the heavenly sanctuary (“Eden, the Garden of God,” Ezekiel 28:13), where Lucifer, adorned with the same stones as the High Priest in the later earthly sanctuary, apparently served a similar priestly function as worship leader (Ezekiel 28:13–14). And it is also in harmony with the heavenly sanctuary’s return to its primary worship function after the windup of the Great Controversy, with the redeemed serving as priests in that Temple (Revelation 5:10; 7:15; 20:6; 21:3).⁹³

Note also that the work of the priest in the OT earthly sanctuary after sin involved the functions of leader in the worship service (Numbers 18:7; cf. Numbers 6:23–27), teacher (Deuteronomy 33:10), and judge or decision-maker (Deuteronomy 19:16), fully appropriate to a pre-Fall context. The OT priest was also an offerer of sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7). Before sin, there were of course no bloody sacrifices or intercession because of sin, but offering “sacrifices of praise” (Hebrews 13:15), along

TABLE 1: INTERTEXTUAL PARALLELS BETWEEN EARTHLY EDEN AND OTHER BIBLICAL SANCTUARIES

Intertextual Parallels	The Earthly Garden of Eden Sanctuary	Other Biblical Sanctuaries
“Eden.”	“Garden of Eden” (Gen 2:8, 10, 15),	“Eden, the Garden of God,” identified with the heavenly sanctuary (Ezek. 28:13)
Orientation	Eastward (Gen 2:8)	Eastward (Exod 27:13–16; 36:20-30; 38:13–18; 1 Kgs 7:21; Ezek 47:1).
Divine “planting.”	“Planting” (<i>nata</i>) of the garden (Gen 2:8)	“Planting” (<i>nata</i>) at the place of His sanctuary (Exod 15:17; cf. 1 Chr 17:9)
“In the midst.”	Tree of life “in the midst” (<i>betok</i>) of the garden (Gen 2:9)	The living presence of God “in the midst” (<i>betok</i>) of His people in the sanctuary (Exod 25:8)
God “walking around.” (only two times in Scripture)	God “walking around” (<i>Hithpael of halak</i>) in the garden (Gen 3:8)	God “walking around” (<i>Hithpael of halak</i>) in the midst of the camp of Israel (Deut 23:14 [Heb. 15]).
Flowing river.	River flowing from the central location in the Garden (Gen 2:10)	River flowing from the sanctuary shown to Ezekiel (Ezek 47:1-12) and from the throne of God as shown to John (Rev 22:1).
Precious metals	Bdellium, and onyx, and gold (Gen 2:12)	Bdellium (Num 11:7), onyx (Exod 25:7, 28:9, 20; 35:9, 27; 39:6, 13); and gold throughout (Exod 25:9, etc.).
Three spheres of ascending holiness.	The earth, the garden, and the midst of the garden.	The court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place
Series of verbal parallels.	“Saw [<i>ra’ah</i>] . . . made [<i>’asah</i>] . . . finished [<i>kalah</i>] . . . blessed [<i>qadash</i>]” (Gen 1:31; 2:1; 2:2; 2:3)	“Saw [<i>ra’ah</i>] . . . made [<i>’asah</i>] . . . finished [<i>kalah</i>] . . . blessed [<i>qadash</i>]” (Exod 39:43; 39:32; 40:33; 39:43)
Six + Sabbath.	Creation in six days (each introduced by the clause “And God said”), followed by the seventh day Sabbath (Gen 1:3–2:3)	Instructions for construction of the tabernacle (Exod 25-31) in divided into six sections (introduced by the phrase “The Lord said to Moses”), followed by the seventh section dealing with the Sabbath.
Portrayals of the natural world.	Plants and animals of creation week.	Lilies and other flowers, palm trees, oxen, lions of the Solomonic temple (1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35; 7:26, 29, 36), artistic portrayals representative of the return to the lost Garden, the earth’s original sanctuary.
“Light” of the menorah.	The term for “light” (<i>Heb ma’or</i> , “lamp”) used to describe the sun and moon in Gen 1:14-16; they are “lamps” of the Eden sanctuary.	This term is found elsewhere in the Pentateuch only for the light of the menorah in the Holy Place of the sanctuary (Exod 25:6; 35:14; 39:27, etc.).

with other functions of a priest, was certainly appropriate. Furthermore, even the role of priest as mediator was appropriate in a context before sin. A mediator’s function is not just in connection with solving the sin problem. A mediator is a “go-between.” According to John 1:1–3, “in the beginning” at creation Christ was the “Word.” A word is that which “goes-between” someone’s mouth and another person’s ear so that there can be communication between the two parties. In a separate study of Proverbs 8:22–31 and other OT passages, I have shown that from the beginning of creation Christ served as the “Angel [Messenger] of the Lord,” the “Go-between” or Mediator between an infinite God

and finite creatures.⁹⁴ Ellen White may be referring to this larger role of Christ’s mediation when she writes: “Christ is mediating in behalf of man, and the order of unseen worlds is also preserved by His mediatorial work.” (MYP 254). Adam and Eve likewise were mediators, “go-betweens,” representing God to the creatures over which they had dominion. Ellen White writes: “He [Adam] was placed, as God’s representative, over the lower orders of being. They cannot understand or acknowledge the sovereignty of God, yet they were made capable of loving and serving man.” (PP 45.)

From the very beginning, before the Fall, woman, as well as man, is welcomed into the priestly

function in the Eden sanctuary, to be a leader in worship and to serve in other priestly functions alongside her male counterpart.

E. The Nature of Human Dominion/Authority: Inverted Hierarchy

It is not enough to recognize that Adam and Eve functioned as priests in the Eden Sanctuary before the Fall. We must also inquire as to the nature and status of their priestly work. Did this pre-Fall priesthood give them authoritative leadership status? In order to answer this question, we must revisit the dominion of humans over the earth assigned to them in Genesis 1:26. Reading this passage from the standpoint of our modern concepts of authority in the context of fallen humanity, we might be tempted to see this “dominion” or rulership as one of hierarchical power/authority on the part of humans to subject the rest of creation according to their will and wishes. However, the dominion given in Genesis 1:26 is further defined in Genesis 2:15, where God challenges our post-Fall concepts of rulership hierarchy. God puts the human in the Garden to *abad* and to *shamar* the Garden. These words literally mean “to serve” and “to guard.” Although the term *abad* in other creation passages (Genesis 2:5 and 3:23) has the primary meaning of “to till/work [the soil]” (with the addition of the word “ground”), in 2:15 (without the use of “ground”) it is probable that the connotation of “serving” is especially present. As Victor Hamilton writes: “The word we have translated as *dress* is *abad*, the normal Hebrew verb meaning ‘to serve.’ So again the note is sounded that man is placed in the garden as servant. He is there not to be served but to serve.”⁹⁵ To state it differently, “Man is to function as the servant leader in the inverse hierarchy.”⁹⁶

The inverted hierarchy of humans in their servant leadership over the earth also applies—with

even greater force—to the kind of spiritual leadership envisaged for Adam and Eve in their role as priests in the Eden sanctuary. The Eden priesthood is a role of *abad*—servanthood! Adam and Eve were not to exercise the hierarchical authority of “chain of command,” but to display an inverted hierarchy of servanthood. Such a model of servant leadership—involving both man and woman—is the model set forth from the beginning as God’s ideal in the setting of public worship. As we have pointed out above, this servant pattern of submission is already modeled by the Godhead in the creation.

IV. GENESIS 3: MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE FALL

When God comes to the Garden after Adam and Eve sinned, he initiates an encounter that constitutes nothing less than a “legal process,” an investigative trial judgment conducted by God.⁹⁷ God begins the legal proceedings with an interrogation of the “defendants,” and the defensive and accusatory responses by Adam and Eve (vv. 9–14) indicate the rupture in inter-human (husband-wife) and divine-human relationships that has occurred as a result of sin. Following the legal interrogation and establishment of guilt, God pronounces the sentence in the form of curses (over the serpent and the ground, vv. 14, 17) and judgments (for the man and the woman, vv. 16–19).

The judgment pronounced upon the woman is of particular concern in this paper (v. 16):

- (a) I will greatly multiply your pain [*itsabon*, hard labor] in childbearing;
- (b) in pain [*itsabon*, hard labor] you shall bring forth your children;
- (c) yet your desire [*teshuqah*] shall be for your husband,
- (d) and he shall rule [*mashal*] over you.

The meaning of the last two enigmatic lines (v. 16c and *d*) of the divine sentence is crucial for a proper understanding of the nature of God's provision for man-woman relationships after the Fall.

A. Genesis 3:16: Divine Judgment and the Relationship between Adam and Eve: Major Views

Six major views have been advanced for the interpretation of this passage. The first, and perhaps the most common, position maintains that the submission⁹⁸ of woman to man is a creation ordinance, God's ideal from the beginning (Genesis 1–2). This position holds that part of the Fall consisted in the violation of this ordinance, with Eve seeking to get out from under Adam's leadership and Adam failing to restrain her (Genesis 3). As a result of sin, Genesis 3:16 is a predictive *description* of the continued distortion of God's original design with the man's exploitive subjugation of woman and/or woman's desire to control the man (or her "diseased" desire to submit to his exploitations).⁹⁹

The second major interpretation also understands the hierarchical gender relationship (submission of woman to the leadership of man) as a creation ordinance (Genesis 1–2), and agrees that at the Fall this creation ordinance was violated (Genesis 3). But according to this second view, Genesis 3:16 is as a divine *prescription* that the man must "rule"—i.e., exercise his "godly headship"—to restrain the woman's desire, i.e., her urge get out from under his leadership and control/manipulate him.¹⁰⁰

The third major interpretation also views the hierarchical relationship between the sexes as a creation ordinance, and agrees that at the Fall this ordinance was somehow violated. But this third view sees in Genesis 3:16 not a distortion but a *divine reaffirmation* of the submission of woman to the leadership of man, provided as a blessing and comfort to the woman in her difficulties as a mother.¹⁰¹

The fourth major view contends that the subordination or subjection of woman to man did not exist before the Fall; the mention of such a subordination/subjection in Genesis 3:16 is only a *description of the evil consequences of sin*—the usurpation of authority by the man and/or the woman's desire to rule or be ruled. These evil consequences are not a prescription of God's will for man-woman relationships after sin, and are to be removed by the Gospel.¹⁰²

The fifth major position concurs with the fourth view that God's original design was for an egalitarian relationship between the sexes (Genesis 1–2), and the Fall brought a rupture in their relationships. But in the fifth view, Genesis 3:16 is to be understood as *prescriptive* and not just descriptive: this verse presents the husband's leadership and the wife's (voluntary) submission as God's normative pattern for the marriage relationship after the Fall.¹⁰³

The final (sixth) view agrees with views four and five that God's original plan was an egalitarian gender relationship. It also agrees with the view three that Genesis 3:16c–d is a blessing and not a curse, but differs in denying that subordination/subjection of woman to man is a creation ordinance. This position argues, by various means of translation and interpretation, that even in Genesis 3 no gender hierarchy (leadership/submission) is either prescribed or described.¹⁰⁴

The various major interpretations of Genesis 3:16 in its larger context are summarized in Table 2.

B. The Meaning of Gen 3:16: Evaluation of Views and Evidence in the Text

In assessing the true intent of Gen 3:16, I must immediately call into question the first three interpretations which proceed from the assumption that a gender hierarchy existed before the Fall (views one, two and three). My analysis of Genesis 1–2

TABLE 2: MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BEGINNING (GENESIS 1–3)—MAJOR VIEWS

Creation (Genesis 1–2)	Fall (Genesis 3)	Divine Pronouncement Concerning Eve (Genesis 3:16)
1. Hierarchical (Submission of woman to male leadership)	Violation of male-female hierarchy and/or ruptured relationships	Description of the perversion of hierarchical relationships (woman seeks to control man and/or man exploitively subjugates woman)
2. Hierarchical (Submission of woman to male leadership)	Violation of male-female hierarchy and/or ruptured relationships	Prediction that woman would desire to get out from under man’s authority, and prescription that man must exercise his “godly headship” to restrain her urge to control him.
3. Hierarchical (Submission of woman to male leadership)	Violation of male-female hierarchy and/or ruptured relationships	Reaffirmation of original hierarchical roles as a continued divine blessing, or a statement of continued subjugation of woman by man
4. Egalitarian (Full equality with no submission of woman to male leadership)	Ruptured relationship between the sexes	Predictive description of the consequences of sin—man usurps authority over the woman—which “curse” is to be removed by the Gospel with return to egalitarianism
5. Egalitarian (Full equality with no submission of woman to male leadership)	Ruptured relationship between the sexes	Permanent prescription of divine will in order to preserve harmony in the home after sin: wife’s submission to her husband’s leadership
6. Egalitarian (Full equality with no submission of woman to male leadership)	Egalitarian relationship continues	Blessing of equality (no hierarchy of leadership/submission) in the midst of a sinful world and its challenges

has led to the conclusion that no such submission of woman to man’s leadership was present in the beginning.

Nor is there any indication of male leadership over the woman, and female submission to the man in the account of the Temptation and Fall (Genesis 3:1–7). The temptation of the woman by the serpent is presented in vv. 1–6. In this passage the woman’s response to the serpent reveals her to be intelligent, perceptive, informed, and articulate, contrary to frequent assertions in the past that she was feeble-minded, weak, and naive.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the temptation to which both Adam and Eve yielded was the temptation to become like God—to exercise moral autonomy in acting against the express command of God. God specifically states what the sin of both of them was— not the violation of a man/woman leadership/submission principle, but eating from the tree from which he commanded them not to eat (3:11). As Hess aptly puts it, “The challenge of the snake is not directed against the man’s authority. It is against God’s authority.”¹⁰⁶ While the passage may

well allow for the interpretation that Eve wandered from Adam’s immediate presence, lingered at the forbidden tree, and later offered the fruit to her husband,¹⁰⁷ there is no warrant in this text for maintaining that their sin consisted of the woman getting out from under the authoritative leadership of her husband, or of her husband failing to exercise his “godly headship” to restrain her. Marris rightly concludes: “the woman’s sin in 3:1–7 has nothing to do with usurping the man’s authority; rather, it involves exalting herself above the Creator to determine for herself right and wrong.”

Marris also correctly points out that God’s statement to the man in 3:17 (“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife”) does not imply that the man had failed to control his wife or had abdicated his leadership role. Rather, it is simply “an acknowledgment of the man’s decision to follow his wife’s direction rather than God’s command.”¹⁰⁸ The sin of Adam was not in “listening to” or “obeying” his wife *per se*, but in “obeying” his wife *rather than* or *in opposition to* God’s explicit command not to eat of

the fruit. Of course, this is not to deny that there is “strength in numbers” in withstanding temptation, and Eve made herself more vulnerable to the serpent’s attack by separating from her husband. But such fortification against temptation by partners standing together is just as applicable in a totally egalitarian relationship (which I see here before the Fall) as in a hierarchical one (which I do not find in the narrative before Genesis 3:16).

Many Adventist opponents of women’s ordination have used the following quotation from Ellen White to attempt to prove that Eve’s sin consisted in seeking to get out from under the authority of her husband. In the context of interpreting Genesis 3, Ellen White writes:

Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but, like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them. (PP 59).

A careful examination of the immediate context of this passage makes clear that the “higher sphere” which Eve hoped to enter was to be *like God*, not to get out from under her husband’s headship. The sphere which God had assigned her was to be an equal partner “by her husband’s side,” not to be in submission to her husband’s male headship: this is

made clear in the previous paragraph (PP 58): “In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other.” The asymmetrical submission of one to the other came only after the Fall! Likewise, Ellen White’s reference to “restless modern Eves” is not describing their attempts to usurp male headship in the home or church, but rather describes any attempt on their part to “reach positions for which He has not fitted them.” This principle applies equally to men as to women, as one aspires to a position that he/she does not have the necessary preparation for filling, or abandons other work God has given him/her to do in attempts to advance in career or status.

Neither does the argument have persuasive power that after the Fall God approached and addressed the man first because the man was in a position of leadership over his wife.¹⁰⁹ God questions the man first for a number of reasons that are apparent in the text: (1) A primary reason no doubt is that the man was created first and the first one to have received the command not to eat from the fruit of the forbidden tree (2:17), and since he had been the one directly and personally warned, it was natural for him to be the one God would approach first. But such choice in no way implies pre-Fall male leadership over his wife. This is clear because, (2) the man clearly is not approached by God on behalf of his wife, but solely on his own behalf, since the personal pronoun of God’s question in v. 9 is singular, not plural: “Where are you [singular]?” (3) In the dialogue between God and the man, the man does not function as the woman’s overseer; in answer to God’s questioning he explains only his

own behavior, not that of the woman, and instead of being her spokesperson, he is her accuser. (4) The woman is summoned to give her own testimony concerning her behavior, and answers directly on behalf of herself. (5) The interrogation of vv. 9–13 proceeds in chiasmic (reverse) order from that in which the characters in the narrative are introduced in vv. 1–8, with God in the center of the structure (this is in harmony with an overarching chiasmic structure of the entire chapter,¹¹⁰ and with another reversal of order in vv. 14–19). (6) In this legal trial investigation, God must examine the witnesses one by one to demonstrate their individual guilt; the man blames the woman, who then naturally in turn is put on the witness stand for divine interrogation. (7) The answers of both man and woman, with their blame of others (the woman and the snake respectively), reveals that “sin’s breakdown of the creation order was not an abdication of divinely instituted hierarchy but the loss of loving harmony between the man and the woman.”¹¹¹ Paul Borgman states it well, “That no sort of one-way submission could be part of the Ideal Marriage is underscored by what is lost.”¹¹² I conclude that those espousing views 1–3 who argue for implications of hierarchy from Genesis 3:1–13 are reading into the text what does not exist in the chapter, just as they have done for Genesis 1–2.

I also find that view four (that Genesis 3:16 is only descriptive, and not in any way intended by God) is unsatisfactory, despite its popularity, because it fails to take seriously the judgment/punishment context of the passage, and the nature of this judgment/punishment as indicated by the text. As I have already noted, Genesis 3:16 comes in a legal trial setting, a “legal process,” a “trial punishment by God,”¹¹³ and v. 16 is thus not just a predictive description but a divine sentence involving a new element introduced by God.

Thus the basic thrust of view five seems correct, even though for reasons described below, I avoid using the term “prescriptive.” The divine origin of the judgment upon Eve is underscored by the Hebrew grammar of God’s first words in the legal sentencing (Genesis 3:16): “I will greatly multiply [*harbâ ’arbeh*, literally, ‘multiplying I will multiply;] ...” The use of the first person singular “I” refers to the Lord Himself who is pronouncing the judgment, while the Hebrew infinitive absolute followed by the finite verb implies “the absolute certainty of the action.”¹¹⁴ God is not merely *informing* the woman of her fate; he is actually pronouncing the juridical sentence introducing the state of affairs announced in Genesis 3:16. In the context of the other judgments/punishments of Genesis 3, and the use of the generic name for “man” and “woman,” it is clear that the biblical writer intended to indicate that this judgment was not just applicable to the first man and woman, but was to extend beyond to the human race outside the Garden.¹¹⁵

It also seems clear that according to Genesis 3:16c–d a *change* is instituted in the gender relationships after the Fall. God is not simply re-iterating or reaffirming a relationship that had already existed in the beginning. The intent of v. 16a is unmistakable: “I will greatly multiply your *’itsabon* [pain, anguish, (hard) labor].” There was no pain/anguish/hard labor prior to sin. This is announcing a change in conditions, and sets the tone for the parallel changes prescribed in the remainder of the verse.¹¹⁶ This conclusion is confirmed by the judgments/curses upon the serpent and the man—both announcing radical changes from the previous Edenic conditions.

Some suggest that the changes inherent in the judgments after the Fall are only quantitative, and not qualitative, and actually parallel pre-existing conditions before the Fall. According to this

argument, (1) woman already had the capacity to give birth before the Fall; this is only now rendered painful; (2) the man already labored in agriculture; it now becomes hard labor; and (3) in the same way, male headship was already in place before the Fall, but now only is especially emphasized. But such argument fails to take into account the actual parallels/contrasts, and totally overlooks the fourth ultimate judgment—of death as a result of sin. The true contrasts move from complete absence of conditions before the Fall to their presence after the Fall: (1 and 2) from no pain or hard labor (of both man and woman) to pain and hard labor; (3) from no hierarchy (no male headship) to hierarchy in man-woman relationships; and (4) from no death to the inevitability of death.

The changes in Genesis 3:16c–d definitely involve the subjection/submission of the wife to the husband. The force of the last line (v. 16d) is unavoidable: “he [your husband]¹¹⁷ shall rule over you.” The verb *mashal* in this form in v. 16d definitely means “to rule” (and not “to be like” or “to be irresistible” as some have suggested) and definitely implies submission/subjection.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the verb *mashal* “rule” employed in Genesis 3:16 is not the same verb used to describe humankind’s rulership over the animals in Genesis 1:26, 28. In the latter passages, the verb is *radah* “to tread down, have dominion over,” not *mashal*. In the Genesis accounts a careful distinction is maintained between humankind’s dominion over the animals and the husband’s “rule” over his wife. Furthermore, although the verb *mashal* does consistently indicate submission, subjection, or dominion in Scripture, “the idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the verb.”¹¹⁹ In fact, there is a number of passages where *mashal* is used with the connotation of servant-leadership, to “comfort, protect, care for, love.”¹²⁰ In later usages of *mashal* in Scriptural narratives (e.g.,

the time of Gideon), the people of Israel are eager to have someone to “rule” (*mashal*) over them (Judges 8:22), and the term *mashal* describes the rulership of Yahweh and the future Messiah.¹²¹ Thus *mashal* is predominantly a concept of blessing, not curse.

The semantic range of the verb *mashal* thus makes it possible to understand the divine sentence in v. 16 as involving not only punishment but promised blessing, just as the sentence pronounced upon the serpent and man included an implied blessing in the curse/judgment.¹²² As Cassuto puts it, “The decrees pronounced by the Lord God mentioned here are not exclusively *punishments*; they are also, and chiefly, *measures taken for the good of the human species* in its new situation.”¹²³ This also fits the pattern of Genesis 1–11 as a whole where each sequence involving divine judgment was also mitigated by grace.¹²⁴

That the element of grace/blessing is especially emphasized in this verse appears to be confirmed by recognizing the same synonymous parallelism between v. 16c and v. 16d as occurs between v. 16a and v. 16b.¹²⁵ The divine sentence upon Eve concerning her husband’s servant-leadership is shown to be a blessing by its placement in synonymous parallelism with Eve’s “desire” for her husband. The meaning of the Hebrew word *teshuqah* is “strong desire, yearning,”¹²⁶ and not, has been suggested, “attractive, desirable”¹²⁷ nor “turning [away].”¹²⁸ This term appears only three times in Scripture, and its precise connotation in Genesis 3:16 is illuminated by its only other occurrence in a context of man-woman relationship, i.e., Song of Solomon 7:11 (English v. 10). In this verse, the Shulamite bride joyfully exclaims, “I am my beloved’s, and his *desire* [*teshuqah*] is for me.” As will be argued below, this passage is in all probability written as an intertextual commentary on Genesis 3:16. Along the lines of this usage of *teshuqah* in the Song of Songs to

The husband's servant-leadership in the home, even though it grows out of the results of sin, may be regarded as a divine blessing in preserving the harmony and union of the relationship.

indicate a wholesome sexual desire, a desire for intimacy, the term appears to be employed in Genesis 3:16c to indicate a blessing accompanying the divine judgment.¹²⁹ A divinely-ordained, intimate (sexual) yearning of wife for husband will serve as a blessing to sustain the union that has been threatened in the ruptured relations resulting from sin.¹³⁰ As Belleville puts it, “The wife’s desire is as God intended—a desire to become ‘one flesh’ with her husband (Genesis 2:24).”

Thus, an essential feature of the sixth view of Genesis 3:16 (the aspect of divine blessing) also seem to be valid. If Genesis 3:16d is seen to be in synonymous parallelism with v. 16c (as v. 16a is with v. 16b), then the emphasis upon promised blessing as well as judgment should also apply to man’s relationship with his wife. The husband’s servant-leadership in the home, even though it grows out of the results of sin, may be regarded as a divine blessing in preserving the harmony and union of the relationship. As is implied in the semantic range of *mashal*, this is to be a servant-leadership of protection, care, and love. In the modern idiom, the husband is to lovingly “take care of” his wife.

Genesis 3:16c and d together also seem to be a combined blessing that relates to the first part of the verse (v. 16a and b). The conjunction *waw* linking the first two lines of this verse with the last two lines should probably be translated as “yet,” as in some of the modern versions.¹³¹ God pronounces that even though the woman would have difficult “labor” in childbearing—an ordeal that would seem naturally to discourage her from continuing to have relations with her husband—“yet,” God assures her,

“your desire shall be for your husband,” and his loving servant-leadership will take care of you even through the roughest times. He will be your “strong umbrella” of protection and care.¹³² The ruptured relationship between husband and wife, indicated in the spirit of blaming by both man and woman immediately after the Fall (Genesis 3:12, 13), is to be replaced by reconciliation and mutual love, with the wife resting in her husband’s protective care.

At the same time, the synonymous parallelism between v. 16ab and v. 16cd, as well as the parallelism with vv. 17–19, also reveal that it is not inappropriate for humankind to seek to roll back the curses/judgments and get back as much as possible to God’s original plan. Few would question the appropriateness of taking advantage of advances in obstetrics to relieve unnecessary pain and hard labor during delivery, or of accepting agricultural and technological advances to relieve unnecessary hard labor in farming, or by scientific and medical advances to delay the process of death. In the same way, it is not inappropriate to return as much as is possible to God’s original plan for total egalitarianism (“one flesh,” Genesis 2:24) in marriage, while at the same time retaining the validity of the husband servant-leadership principle as it is necessary in a sinful world to preserve harmony in the home. Thus it is appropriate, indeed important, to speak of a divine remedial¹³³ or redemptive¹³⁴ provision, rather than “prescription” (which may to some imply a permanent divine ideal) in these verses. As husbands and wives learn more and more to live in harmony through the infusion of divine grace, there is less and less need to resort to the voluntary submission

of the wife to the husband in order to maintain harmony and unity in the home, and a gradual return to egalitarian relationship as before the Fall. As will become apparent later in this study, such movement back toward the egalitarian marriage of pre-Fall Eden is the canonical thrust of the Old Testament.

Thus I suggest a seventh interpretation of Genesis 3:16, that combines elements of views five and six above. Like view five, there is a *qualified divine sentence announcing the voluntary submission of the wife to her husband's servant-leadership*¹³⁵ as a result of sin. This involves, however, not so much a judgment as a *promised blessing* (as suggested in view six) of *divine grace designed to have a remedial/redemptive function leading back as much as possible to the original plan of harmony and union between equal partners without hierarchy.*

Three final points may be underscored with regard to the practical application of this passage today. First, as already alluded to above, although in Gen 3 the husband is assigned the role of “first among equals”¹³⁶ to preserve harmony and union in the marriage partnership, yet this does not contradict the original divine ideal of Genesis 1:26–28, that both man and woman are equally called to accountable dominion, sociability and fruitfulness. Nor does it nullify the summary statement of Genesis 2:24 regarding the nature of the relationship between husband and wife. Genesis 2:24 is clearly written in such a way as to indicate its basis in the pre-Fall ideal (“For this reason,” i.e., what has been described before) and its applicability to the post-Fall conditions. God’s ideal for the nature of sexual relationship after the Fall is still the same as it was for Adam and his equal partner [*ezer kenegdo*] in the beginning—to “become one flesh” in non-hierarchical (symmetrical) mutual submission. The divine judgment/blessing in Genesis 3:16 is to facilitate the achievement of the original divine design within the

context of a sinful world.¹³⁷ The context of Genesis 3:16 reveals that it is entirely appropriate for marriage partners to seek to return as much as possible to non-hierarchical egalitarianism in the marriage relationship.

Second, the functional behaviors attached to Adam and Eve in the divine judgments of Genesis 3 correspond to what will be their respective primary concerns in a sinful environment, but do not lock husband and wife into pre-determined, or mutually-exclusive, roles. Even as the divine judgments in Gen 3 were given separately to Adam and Eve, and dealt with the aspect of life with which they would have primary concerns, at the same time the judgments of both overlapped with and included each other. Their concerns were not to be mutually exclusive. The divine judgments state what will be true with regard to Eve’s primary concern (childbearing), and what will be true with regard to Adam’s primary concern (food production), but the judgment nowhere limits or pre-determines that these concerns must remain exclusively (or even primarily) the woman’s and the man’s respectively. The context of Genesis 3:16 reveals the appropriateness of husbands and wives seeking to return as much as possible to pre-Fall egalitarianism, including equally-shared functions of dominion (work) and fruitfulness (procreation) as described in Genesis 1:26–28.¹³⁸

Third, the relationship of subjection/submission between Adam and Eve prescribed in v. 16 is not presented as applicable to man-woman role relationships in general. The context of Genesis 3:16 is specifically that of marriage: a *wife’s* desire (*teshuqah*) for her own husband and the *husband’s* “rule” (*mashal*) over his own wife. This text describes a *marriage* setting, not a general family or societal or worship setting, and thus the submission of wife to husband prescribed here cannot be broadened into a general mandate subordinating women to

men (whether in society or in the church). The *mashal-teshuqah* remedial provisions of Genesis 3:16 are specifically linked to the woman's relationship to her own husband, and to the husband's relationship to his own wife. Because of the poetic parallelism in Genesis 3:16 between the husband's "rule" and the wife's "desire," if one attempts to broaden the husband's *mashal* role prescribed in this passage (v. 16d) so as to refer to men's "rule" of women in general (both home and the wider society), then to be faithful to the poetic parallelism it would be necessary to broaden the *teshuqah* of the wife (v. 16c) for her husband to include the (sexual) desire of women for men in general, not just their own husband! The latter broadening is obviously not the intent of the passage, and therefore the former cannot be either. Thus, any suggestion of extending the specific marriage-specific provision of Genesis 3:16 beyond the husband-wife relationship to become a divinely-prescribed mandate for the leadership of men over women in general is not warranted by the text. As will be shown in the remainder of this paper, the rest of the Old Testament is consistent with this position, upholding the remedial/redemptive *mashal-teshuqah* divine provision for husband and wife as beneficial to preserve the marriage relationship (and ultimately return it to the egalitarian ideal), but not extending *mashal-teshuqah* relationship beyond the marital relationship, and not barring women from roles of servant leadership within the covenant community at large.

I find it encouraging to note that Ellen White adopts the basic interpretation I have summarized above:

And the Lord said, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony

with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. Had the principles joined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden. (PP 58–69.)

When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power. Infinite wisdom devised the plan of redemption, which places the race on a second probation by giving them another trial. (3T 484.)

Ellen White emphasizes the same points as emerge from the biblical text: (1) Before the Fall Adam and Eve were equal "in all things," without hierarchical role distinctions. (2) The hierarchical

Ellen White says nothing about “male headship” before the Fall; in fact she denies this by pointing to Eve as “in all things” the equal of Adam.

relationship with asymmetrical “submission on the part of one” came only *after the Fall*. (Note that this is in direct contradiction to the traditional interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, which sees Genesis 3:16 as merely reaffirming the hierarchical headship of Genesis 1–2.) (3) The hierarchical relationship was a remedial provision, given by God to Adam and Eve so that “their union could be maintained and their harmony preserved.” (4) This remedial arrangement was limited to the marriage relation: Eve “was placed in subjection to *her husband*.” Ellen White never broadens this to men-women relations in general in the church. (5) The subjection of the wife to her husband “was part of the curse;” and the “plan of redemption” gave the race an opportunity to reverse the curse and return to the original plan for marriage whenever possible.

Ellen White also gives us clear indication as to the reasons why it was Eve who was placed in subjection to her husband, and not the other way around. She says nothing about “male headship” before the Fall; in fact she denies this by pointing to Eve as “in all things” the equal of Adam. Rather, she gives three reasons for Eve’s submission to Adam and not vice versa: (1) “Eve had been the first in transgression;” (2) “she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction;” and (3) “it was by her solicitation that Adam sinned.” Based upon these three criteria, it would seem reasonable to assume that if *Adam* had been first in transgression, if *he* had fallen into temptation by separating from his companion, and if it was by *his* solicitation that Eve sinned, then, Adam would have been placed in subjection to his wife,

and not the other way around.

These conclusions regarding gender relations in Genesis 1–3 have significant implications for the current Adventist and wider Christian debate over the role of women in the home and in the church. Major concerns of both “egalitarians” and “hierarchicalists” in the modern debate are upheld, and at the same time both groups are challenged to take another look at the biblical evidence. With the “egalitarians” (and against “hierarchicalists”) it can be affirmed that Genesis 1–2 presents God’s divine ideal for men and women at creation to be one of equality both in nature and function, with no leadership of the male and no submission of the female to that male leadership. With “hierarchicalists” (and against “egalitarians”) it can be affirmed that God’s provision for harmony and unity *after the Fall* does include the wife’s submission to the servant-leadership of her husband. Against the “hierarchical” position, however, the evidence in Genesis 3:16 already points to the implication that the male servant-leadership principle is limited to the relationship between husband and wife. Also against the “hierarchical” position, the evidence of this text points toward a provision which is *qualified by grace*, a temporary, remedial/redemptive provision representing God’s less-than-the-original-ideal for husbands and wives. This implicitly involves a divine redemptive call and enabling power to return as much as possible to the pre-Fall egalitarianism in the marriage relationship, without denying the validity of the servant-leadership principle as it may be needed in a sinful world to preserve unity and harmony in the home. Also against the “hierarchical” position, Genesis 1–3 should not be seen as barring women from accepting whatever roles of servant leadership in the believing community (church) or society at large to which they may be called and gifted by the Spirit.

Finally, as pointed out above, often common to

both egalitarians and hierarchicalists is a similar view of authoritative leadership in the church—as a “chain-of-command” top-down hierarchy. Opponents of women’s ordination argue that such authoritative leadership in the church is a male prerogative; proponents urge that women should also have the right to such authoritative leadership offices. Against both hierarchicalism and egalitarianism, I find that the biblical data in Genesis 1–3 presents a surprising third alternative, of inverted hierarchy, in which servanthood and submission on the part of leaders—following the servanthood/submission example of the Godhead Themselves—takes the place of top-down “chain-of-command” leadership. Seventh-day Adventists, with their unique understanding of the issues in the Great Controversy, in which Satan has accused God of not being willing to exercise humility and self-denial,¹³⁹ have a unique opportunity to lift up the divine model of self-denying servanthood before the world. It is hoped that these conclusions, by moving beyond both hierarchicalism and egalitarianism to a biblical “third alternative,” may assist in breaking the impasse in the current discussion within Adventism as well as the wider evangelical world.

C. Adam and Eve as Priests of the Eden Sanctuary after the Fall

Already in Genesis 3, strong evidence is given that the temporary, remedial/redemptive provision for husband-leadership in the home did not bar Old Testament women from leadership positions, even priestly office, in the setting of public worship.

Adam’s nakedness described in Genesis 3:10 obviously refers to more than physical nudity, for Adam depicts himself as still naked even though already covered with fig leaves. The nakedness of Genesis 3 seems to include a sense of “being unmasked,”¹⁴⁰ a consciousness of guilt, a nakedness of soul.

Likewise, God’s clothing of Adam and Eve with skins appears to represent more than a concern for physical covering, more than a demonstration of the “modesty appropriate in a sinful world,”¹⁴¹ though these are no doubt included. The skins from slain animals may be seen to intimate the beginning of the sacrificial system and the awareness of a substitutionary atonement, because of which humans need no longer feel unmasked or ashamed.¹⁴²

Moreover, there is strong inter-textual evidence that the clothing of Adam and Eve by God has another significance beyond the aspects suggested above. In connection with our discussion of Genesis 2 above, we referred to the abundant inter-textual parallels between Genesis 1–2 and other biblical sanctuaries showing that the Garden of Eden is to be considered the original sanctuary on earth already before the Fall. The parallels are even more direct and striking for after the Fall, indicating that Gateway to the Garden of Eden is a sanctuary, the precursor to the later biblical sanctuaries. After Adam and Eve are expelled, in their sinful state they are no longer able to meet with God face to face in the Garden’s Holy of Holies. But at the *eastern* entrance to the Garden (Genesis 3:24; cf. the *eastern* entrance to the later sanctuaries), now appear cherubim—the beings associated with the ark in the Most Holy Place of the Mosaic sanctuary (Exodus 25:18–22). These cherubim, with a flaming sword, are “placed” (Hebrew *shakan*), the same specific Hebrew verb for God’s “dwelling” (*shakan*) among his people (Exodus 25:8), and also the same root as for the “sanctuary” (*mishkan*) and the *Shekinah* glory, the visible presence of God in the sanctuary.¹⁴³

In light of this sanctuary language of Genesis 3, it is significant to note one more linkage between Eden and the Mosaic sanctuary rituals. Before Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden, God “clothed” (*labash, hip’il*) them with “tunics/coats” (*kotnot, pl.*

of *ketonet*), Genesis 3:21. As one today enters several key words into an internet search engine to find the point of intersection of these terms, the connection between “sanctuary” and “clothed” and “tunics” leads to one, and only one, convergence of ideas. In a sanctuary setting, the terms *labash* (“clothe”) and *kotnot* (“tunic/coat”) are only found together in describing the clothing (*labash, hip’il*) of the priests—Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8:7, 13; Numbers 20:28; cf. Exodus 28:4; 29:5; 40:14). Robert Oden has demonstrated that this phraseology in Genesis 3:21—the combination of “clothing” (*labash, hip’il* [causative]) with “tunics/coats” (*kotnot*, pl. of *ketonet*)¹⁴⁴ describes a divine conferral of status upon Adam and Eve.¹⁴⁵ Jacques Doukhan draws out the implication of the divine ceremony in light of its canonical intertextual parallels: “The rare occasions where God clothes humans in the OT always concerned the dressing of priests.... Adam and Eve were, indeed, dressed as priests.”¹⁴⁶ The unmistakable and consistent linkage within the Hebrew Bible of this pair of terms—“to clothe” (*labash, hip’il*) and “tunics/coats” (*kotnot*)—with the clothing of Israel’s priests, viewed in the larger setting of the Garden of Eden as a sanctuary, clearly points to Adam and Eve’s inauguration as priests in the post-Fall world. By highlighting God’s clothing of Adam and Eve with the skins of sacrificial animals (instead of the fine linen of the later priests), the final canonical form of the text further emphasizes the divine confirmation that Adam and Eve are to be identified as priests, for the skin of the sacrificial animals belonged exclusively to the priests in the Mosaic cultus (Leviticus 7:8). As Doukhan summarizes, “By bestowing on Adam and Eve the skin of the sin offering, a gift strictly reserved to priests, the Genesis story implicitly recognizes Eve as priest alongside Adam.”¹⁴⁷ At the very beginning of the portrayal of man-woman relations after the Fall, the narrative indicates that

women are not barred from serving in a priestly capacity alongside their male counterparts. The far-reaching implications of this conclusion regarding the divinely-ordained priestly status of woman as well as man after the Fall will become more evident as we look at the proceed through the Old Testament and beyond.

V. THE PATTERN FOR HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONS OUTSIDE OF EDEN

A. Servant Leadership of the Husband/Father in OT Families

Patriarchy. There is little question that in ancient Israel (and throughout the ancient Near East) a patriarchal structuring of society was the accepted norm, and the father was the “titular head of the ancient Israelite family.”¹⁴⁸ The family, not the individual, was the basic unit of society in ancient Israel. In familial/marital situations the father assumed legal responsibility for the household. His formal leadership and legal authority are evidenced in such concerns as family inheritance and ownership of property, contracting marriages for the children, and over-all responsibility in speaking for his family.¹⁴⁹ (Compare our modern use of the term “head of household,” which has some of the same legal implications as in biblical times.)

The institution of patriarchy (“rule by the father”) was wisely arranged by God in his condescension to the human fallen condition, as a temporary remedial and redemptive measure to bring about unity and harmony and integrity in the home in the midst of a sinful world. Patriarchy, as intended by God, was not evil in itself, but rather one of those God-ordained remedial provisions instituted after the Fall, but not the ultimate divine ideal.¹⁵⁰ The very term “patriarchy” (“rule of the father”), or the OT phrase “father’s house” (*bet ’ab*), emphasizes the role of the *father* to his children, not the *husband*

to his wife. As we will observe below in concrete examples throughout OT history, the “patriarchy” of OT times consisted in the *father’s* authority over his children, not his authority over his wife. Furthermore, this was *not* male authority over women, but the authority of one patriarchal figure over all of his descendants, male and female. As will also become apparent below, it is fully compatible with this patriarchal model of leadership to have a *matriarch* functioning in an egalitarian relationship with her husband, the patriarch, and the married children of the patriarch and their spouses likewise functioning in an egalitarian marriage.

Examples of the husband’s servant leadership. What we have just said about patriarchy does not deny the remedial measure of the husband’s servant leadership in the home and the wife’s respect for her husband, as provided in Genesis 3:16. In the narrative of the life of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:12), Sarah refers to her husband as “my lord” (*adoni*), and elsewhere in Scripture the word *ba’al* (“lord”—both as a verb and a noun) is used to identify the husband.¹⁵¹ However, the meaning of these terms must not be pressed too far, for they often may simply denote polite respect. As I concluded with regard to a husband’s “rule” over his wife in Genesis 3:16, the description of husband as “lord” seems to emphasize his position as the “titular head” of the family and not his domination or hierarchical authority over the wife in marriage.¹⁵² The husband has authority to accomplish his task of representing the family, not authority over his wife. This becomes evident in the next section of this paper as Sarah and Abraham and other couples in the OT demonstrate a very egalitarian marriage.

The attendant servant leadership and/or legal responsibility and protection given by God as a remedial provision to the husband in Genesis 3:16 seems implied in the Mosaic legislation concerning

wives who were “under their husbands” in Numbers 5:19–20: “if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while *under your husband* [*takat ’išēk*].... But if you [the wife] have gone astray, though you are *under your husband* [*takat ’ishek*]...” Verse 29 summarizes, “This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, *under her husband* [*takhat ’ishah*], goes astray and defiles herself.” These verses do not spell out exactly how the wife is “under” her husband, but in context it seems best to supply the expression “under [the legal protection of]” or “under [the legal responsibility of].” In light of the OT evidence that follows in the next section of this paper, which reveals many examples of essentially egalitarian husband-wife relations, to supply the unqualified term “authority”—“under [the authority of]”—as in many English versions, is too strong.

B. Return to the Edenic Ideal of Egalitarian Marriages

Although Genesis 3:16 provided a remedial measure of husband (servant) leadership to preserve harmony and unity in the home, the ideal of egalitarian marriages set forth in Genesis 2:24 was still the ultimate divine plan for marriage. The OT provides many examples of marriages in which the husband and wife have moved (or are moving) back toward that egalitarian ideal.

Egalitarian marriages of OT husbands and wives.

It came as a surprise to me in my research—actually, building upon the research of my wife!—to discover that the Hebrew patriarchs mentioned in Scripture from the OT “patriarchal” period were regularly portrayed as married to a powerful *matriarch* and their marital relationships were described as functionally non-hierarchical and egalitarian.¹⁵³ From among the twenty-nine named women mentioned in Genesis, let us look more closely here at a couple of examples. First, details of Sarah’s life in the

Genesis narratives reveal the high valuation of this matriarch, as she and her husband are portrayed as equal partners.¹⁵⁴ Consider the following:

1. When Sarah and Abraham approach Egypt during a famine, Abraham does not command her to agree to his planned deception, but begs her, with an almost apologetic plea, to say she is his sister (Genesis 12:13).
2. God protects Sarah from harm at Pharaoh's court and again in the household of Abimelech, and returns her to her husband (Genesis 12:10–20; 20:1–8).
3. Abraham cohabits with Hagar because Sarah wants him to, and expels Hagar again at Sarah's insistence (Genesis 16:1–4; 21:8–21).
4. God defends Sarah in her demand that Hagar be sent away, telling Abraham "Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice!" (Genesis 21:12)
5. Sarah is regarded as just as critical to the divine covenant as Abraham himself, with God's continued insistence (at least after the birth of Ishmael) that it is Sarah's seed that will fulfill the covenant promise (Genesis 17:18–19; 21:12).
6. Sarah's name is changed (from Sarai) just as Abraham (from Abram), with the accompanying promise that "she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her" (Genesis 17:16).
7. The literary structure of Genesis 17 emphasizes the significance of Sarah by placing her in the middle of the passage concerning circumcision, thus showing that the covenant blessings and promises apply to her—and to women—just as surely as to Abraham and his male descendants.¹⁵⁵
8. Abraham and Sarah share in the meal preparations when offering hospitality to the three

strangers (Genesis 18:6–8), showing that there is no distinct division of labor by gender.

9. Sarah is the only matriarch with her age indicated when she dies, as is always seen with the patriarchs (Genesis 23:1).
10. Her death and burial at Mamre receives extended attention textually: in the sparse historical style characteristic of the Genesis narrator, it is surely remarkable that an entire chapter is devoted to this event (Genesis 23), with no more details given of the last forty-eight years of Abraham's life after Sarah's death.

Sarah the matriarch is no wallflower! Janice Nunnally-Cox summarizes how Sarah and Abraham are presented as equal partners:

*She appears to say what she wants, when she wants, and Abraham at times responds in almost meek obedience. He does not command her; she commands him, yet there seems to be an affectionate bond between them. Abraham does not abandon Sarah during her barrenness, nor does he gain other wives while she lives, as far as we know. The two have grown up together and grown old together, and when Sarah dies, Abraham can do nothing but weep. Sarah is a matriarch of the first order: respected by rulers and husband alike, a spirited woman and bold companion.*¹⁵⁶

To cite a second example, that of Rebekah, note the following:¹⁵⁷

1. Although she is described as physically beautiful (Genesis 24:16) Rebekah is not appreciated solely for her outward appearance.
2. Her independence and trust and hospitality parallels that of Abraham: like him she was willing to take the risk of leaving her

family and travel to a strange land; like him she showed eagerness to perform her hospitable acts.¹⁵⁸ Most impressive in the Rebekah narratives is the noticeable correspondence of key terms with the Abraham narratives. “It is she [Rebecca], not Isaac, who follows in Abraham’s footsteps, leaving the familiar for the unknown. It is she, not Isaac, who receives the blessing given to Abraham (22:17). ‘May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies!’ (24:60).”¹⁵⁹

3. The Genesis genealogical record highlights the prominence of Rebekah by listing only her as the one begotten by Bethuel (Genesis 22:23), although later the narrative includes her brother Laban (Genesis 24:29). The unusual placement of this genealogy immediately after the account of the testing of Abraham with his son Isaac (22:1–19) emphasizes the importance of Rebekah.
4. In Genesis 24, when Abraham directs Eleazar to find a wife for Isaac, he declares that “if the woman is not willing to come with you, then you will be free from this oath of mine” (24:8). Contrary to those who claim that the woman under the patriarchal system had no voice in who she would marry, here “Abraham assumes the woman will have the final say in the matter.”¹⁶⁰ Ultimately it is Rebekah herself that chooses to go with Eleazar. In fact, in the lengthy narrative of Genesis 24, her determination to travel with Eleazar is spoken directly by her in the dialogue and not just reported by the narrator (24:58), and Rebekah’s answer is saved by the narrator for the very climax of the narrative.
5. Upon Eleazar’s arrival, Rebekah arranges for his hospitality herself. Eleazar asks for a place in her “father’s house,” but Rebekah arranges

with her “mother’s house” (v. 28). Her father says hardly a word throughout this entire narrative. Rebekah’s father determines nothing, as might be “expected” in an oppressive patriarchy.

6. After Rebekah marries Isaac and becomes pregnant, in apparent agony she is anxious enough “to inquire of the LORD” (paralleling the great prophets of the OT); and she does this herself (Genesis 25:22), receiving a direct oracle from the Lord. Highly significant also is the formula used to announce Rebekah’s delivery: “And her days were fulfilled that she should give birth” (Genesis 25:24). This formula is used of only three biblical women: Elizabeth and Mary in the NT and Rebekah of the OT.
7. Later, when Esau marries two Hittite women, the text informs us that this was a “grief of mind to Isaac *and Rebekah*.” (26:35, emphasis added). This inclusion of Rebekah’s distress regarding Esau’s marriage to pagan women reveals that Rebekah was just as concerned about the covenant line as was Isaac.
8. Finally, the biblical narrator in many ways accents the role of Rebekah the matriarch far beyond that of her husband Isaac, the patriarch. Teubal summarizes:

If the narration of events following the death and burial of Sarah was truly patriarchal, it would deal with the life and exploits of the male heir, Isaac. Instead, once again the accent is on the role of a woman. Rebekah. About Isaac, her husband, we are told little relating to the establishment of the religious faith. He is a placid, sedentary man whose life is colored and influenced by the presence of his outstanding wife. Apart from the incident of the Akadah (The

*Binding of Isaac in which Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son), we know nothing of the boyhood or youth of the supposed hero. 'His' story begins with a detailed account of Rebekah's betrothal.... Rebekah is vividly depicted in Genesis.... Rebekah's strength, beauty, and suffering have not been dimmed.*¹⁶¹

Examples could be multiplied in the marriage relationship of other Genesis matriarchs and patriarchs, and in Israelite homes depicted throughout the history of the nation.¹⁶² The embodiment of (or move toward) the pre-Fall ideal of an egalitarian marriage is revealed in the descriptions of the day-to-day relationships between husbands and wives throughout the OT, in which the “ancient Israelite wife was loved and listened to by her husband, and treated by him as an equal...”¹⁶³ “The ancient Israelite woman wielded power in the home at least equal to that exercised by the husband...; she participated freely and as an equal in decisions involving the life of her husband or her family.”¹⁶⁴

Egalitarian respect for men/husbands and women/wives in Pentateuchal laws. The various laws dealing with major cultic, ethical, and moral prohibitions and infractions are fully egalitarian. The Decalogue is clearly intended to apply to both men and women, using the gender-inclusive second masculine singular “you” to apply to both men and women. (If the masculine “you” were not gender-inclusive, then such commands as “You shall not steal” would only prohibit men and not women from stealing.) The judgments of the chapters following the Decalogue (the so-called Covenant Code) which apply the “Ten Words” to specific cases make explicit that both male and female are included (Exodus 21: 15, 17, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32), and this appears to set the standard for later legal material where gender inclusiveness is to be implied

although masculine terminology is used.¹⁶⁵ With reference to ritual impurity legislation, the Hebrew Bible presents “a system that is rather even-handed in its treatment of gender.”¹⁶⁶ Aside from the menstrual uncleanness that applies only to women, the other major sources of ritual impurity are clearly gender-blind.¹⁶⁷

Pentateuchal legislation that seems to give women/wives a subordinate status or place their sexuality under the “possession” of the male leader of the household should actually be viewed as setting forth the obligation of the husband/father to protect his wife/daughter’s sexuality and personhood and thereby the integrity of the family structure. These are laws that are designed to protect women, not oppress them. I have set forth the evidence for this conclusion with regard to each of these laws elsewhere.¹⁶⁸

As an example, the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21) is often cited to demonstrate how a wife was considered as man’s “chattel,” but in actuality, the wife is not here listed as property but as the first-named member of the household.¹⁶⁹ That the wife was not considered as “chattel” or on the level of a slave is confirmed by the fact that an Israelite could sell slaves (Exodus 21:2–11; Deuteronomy 15:12–18) but never his wife, even if she was acquired as a captive in war (Deuteronomy 21:14).

As another example, some have argued that the woman was the “property” of the husband because at the time of the marriage, the bridegroom gave the father of the bride the “brideprice” or “dowry”—thus implying that the husband “bought” his wife much as he bought other property. However, the term *mohar* (used only three times in the OT, Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:17; and 1 Samuel 18:25), often translated “brideprice,” is more accurately translated as “marriage present,”¹⁷⁰ probably represents the

compensation to the father for the work the daughter would otherwise have contributed to her family,¹⁷¹ and probably ultimately belonged to the wife and not the father.¹⁷²

In contrast to elsewhere in the ancient Near East, where vicarious punishment was carried out (i.e., a man was punished for a crime by having to give up his wife or daughter, or ox or slave) indicating that indeed wives and daughters

were viewed as property of men, in biblical law no such vicarious punishment is prescribed.¹⁷³ Likewise, in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern laws, where a husband is permitted to “whip his wife, pluck out her hair, mutilate her ears, or strike her, with impunity,”¹⁷⁴ no such permission is given to the husband in biblical law to punish his wife in any way.

Far from being regarded as “chattel,” according to the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and repeated commands throughout the Pentateuchal codes, the wife/mother was to be given equal honor as the father within the family circle (Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18–21; 27:16).¹⁷⁵ There is “no discrimination in favor of father and against mother. The mother’s authority over the son is as great in the law codes as is that of the father.”¹⁷⁶ The same penalty is imposed upon the son for striking or cursing his father or his mother (Exodus 21:15, 17). In fact, amid a Near Eastern milieu in which the mother was often controlled by the son, Leviticus 19:3 surprisingly places the mother *first* instead of the father in the command: “Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.” This reversal from normal order clearly emphasizes the woman’s right to equal filial

In the book of Proverbs, the position of woman is regarded as one of importance and respect. The wife is placed upon an equal footing with the husband in numerous passages.

respect along with her husband. Likewise, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue implicitly places the husband and wife on a par with each other: in Exodus 20:10 the masculine “you shall not” clearly includes the wife, since she is not mentioned in the list of the household dependants that follows.¹⁷⁷

When one looks at the empirical evidence of family life as it emerges from the OT narratives and laws, it is difficult

to escape the conclusion that the wife was treated by her husband in an egalitarian manner, that she exercised an equal power in the home, and participated equally in the family decisions. The “functional non-hierarchy” in ancient Israel makes any question of exact legal or jural equality a moot point.¹⁷⁸

Husband and Wife in Proverbs. In the book of Proverbs, the position of woman is regarded as one of importance and respect. The wife is placed upon an equal footing with the husband in numerous passages: both have equal authority in the training of children (1:8, 9; 6:20; 23:25); the mother is entitled to the same honor as the father (19:21; 20:20; 23:22; 30:17). A lofty view of the true dignity and value of woman in her own right seems implied in the personification/hypostasization of wisdom as a great lady in Prov 1–9.¹⁷⁹ The wife is particularly singled out for praise and honor in Proverbs 12:4: “An excellent wife [*’eshet kayil*, lit. ‘woman of power/strength/might’] is the crown of her husband.” This high valuation becomes concretized in the paean of praise to the *’eshet kayil* in Proverbs 31.¹⁸⁰ Here in an intricately and elegantly crafted acrostic and chiasmatic¹⁸¹ form a portrait is provided of the *’eshet kayil*—the “mighty woman of valor”—¹⁸² who is “far

more precious than jewels” (v. 10), a woman of individuality and independence, valued for her own sake and not just as the property of her husband. She is, to be sure, a loyal and devoted wife: her husband has implicit trust in her and she meets his needs (vv. 11–12). She is a model homemaker: a thrifty shopper (vv. 3–14), superior seamstress (vv. 12, 13, 21–22, 24), gourmet cook (v. 15), able administrator of domestic affairs (v. 15*b*), and successful in parenting (v. 28). Furthermore, she is a capable business woman: knowledgeable in real estate and agriculture (v. 16); an enterprising and farsighted entrepreneur (vv. 18, 24, 25). She takes good care of herself: she is a paragon of physical fitness (v. 17). She dresses becomingly with attention to beauty, quality and economy (vv. 13, 21–22). She has a high reputation in the community for her liberal philanthropy (v. 20), her noble dignity (v. 25), her wisdom, tact, and kindness (v. 26). It is no surprise that (vv. 28–29)

*Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”*

A wife of valor possesses more than physical charm and beauty: she is to be praised ultimately because she is “a woman who fears the Lord” (v. 30).¹⁸³ Therefore, concludes the book (v. 31), “give her the work of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

Many have recognized that this *summa summarum* of a wife’s virtues encompasses all the positive characterization of woman in the book of Proverbs, and at the same time this valiant woman serves as an embodiment of all the wisdom values of the book, “the epitome of all the Lady Wisdom teaches.... Throughout the Book of Proverbs women are neither ignored nor treated as inferior to men;

in fact the climactic conclusion found in 31:10–31 elevates womanhood to a position of supreme honor.”¹⁸⁴ That this woman is elevated to such honor is further indicated by the literary genre of the poem, which, as Wolters incisively analyzes, is reminiscent of Israel’s hymnic form (utilizing, e.g., overall hymnic structure, the grammatically unique “hymnic participle,” and the theme of incomparability), and forms a part of Hebrew “heroic literature” (utilizing various military terms and themes from the tradition of Hebrew heroic poetry; cf. Judges 5 and 2 Sam 1).¹⁸⁵ Thus, here is a “heroic hymn” in praise of a valiant woman!¹⁸⁶

Claudia Camp also states correctly that this depiction at the end of Proverbs provides a literary model for women “as creative, authoritative individuals, very much in league with men for the well-being of the world in which they lived (though not, primarily, for its perpetuation through reproduction), but not defined by or dependent on them.”¹⁸⁷ The woman of Proverbs 31 stands as “a role model for all Israel for all time.”¹⁸⁸

Husband and Wife as Egalitarian Partners in the Song of Songs. This section of the paper may seem inordinately long in proportion to the rest of paper. But I am convinced that the evidence from the Song of Songs is even more crucial than that found in NT passages such as 1 Timothy 2, and hence must be included here in detail. In the Song of Solomon we have the OT inspired commentary on Genesis 1–3, providing insight as to the nature of the relationship which God envisaged between a husband and wife. This book, written by Solomon in the early years of his reign during the some twenty years of his monogamous marriage to “the Shulamit,”¹⁸⁹ shows that even after the Fall it is possible to return to the fully egalitarian (non-hierarchical) marriage relationship as before the Fall.

In the Song of Songs we come full circle in the

OT back to the Garden of Eden. Several recent studies have penetratingly analyzed and conclusively demonstrated the intimate relationship between the early chapters of Genesis and the Song of Songs.¹⁹⁰ In the “symphony of love,” begun in Eden but gone awry after the Fall, the Song constitutes “love’s lyrics redeemed.”¹⁹¹ Phyllis Tribble summarizes how the Song of Songs “by variations and reversals creatively actualizes major motifs and themes” of the Eden narrative:

*Female and male are born to mutuality and love. They are naked without shame; they are equal without duplication. They live in gardens where nature joins in celebrating their oneness. Animals remind these couples of their shared superiority in creation as well as their affinity and responsibility for lesser creatures. Fruits pleasing to the eye and tongue are theirs to enjoy. Living waters replenish their gardens. Both couples are involved in naming; both couples work...whatever else it may be, Canticles is a commentary on Genesis 2–3. Paradise Lost is Paradise Regained.*¹⁹²

The Song of Songs is a return to Eden, but the lovers in the Song are not to be equated in every way with the pre-Fall couple in the Garden. The poetry of this book reveals the existence of a world of sin and its baleful results: there are the angry brothers (1:6); the wet winter (2:11); the “little foxes that spoil the vineyards” (2:15); the anxiety of absence from one’s beloved (3:1–4; 5:6–8; 6:1); the cruelty and brutality of the watchman (5:7); and the powerful presence of death (8:6). Yet the lovers in the Song are able to triumph over the threats to their love. In parallel with Genesis 2:24, the Song depicts the ideal of “woman and man in mutual harmony after the fall.”¹⁹³ As becomes apparent from the evidence that follows, “What is extraordinary in the Song

is precisely the absence of structural and systemic hierarchy, sovereignty, authority, control, superiority, submission, in the relation of the lovers.”¹⁹⁴

The Song of Songs highlights egalitarianism, mutuality, and reciprocity between the lovers. The Song “reflects an image of woman and female–male relations that is extremely positive and egalitarian.”¹⁹⁵ “Nowhere in the OT is the equality of the sexes...as real as in the Song.”¹⁹⁶ “Nowhere in ancient literature can such rapturous mutuality be paralleled.”¹⁹⁷ The keynote of egalitarianism is struck in Song 2:16: “My beloved is mine and I am his.” The same refrain recurs in 6:3: “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” And a third time in 7:11 [ET 10]: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” Scholars have not failed to point out the implication of this thrice-repeated refrain: “love-eros is mutual; it puts the two partners on a perfectly equal footing ...”¹⁹⁸ “The present verse [7:11] speaks of a relationship of mutuality, expressed in a formula of reciprocal love like that in 2:16, 6:3. In the Song, sex is free of notions of control, dominion, hierarchy.”¹⁹⁹

This egalitarianism/mutuality/reciprocity is revealed throughout the Song in a number of ways. Several recent studies have pointed to various literary techniques in the Song that highlight the gender mutuality between the lovers.²⁰⁰ Perhaps most obvious is the frequent use of echoing, in which the words or actions of the one lover are repeated or patterned on the other’s.²⁰¹ Especially significant are the mutuality of actions and statements in reversal of stereotypical gender conceptions which usually place the woman in a passive-receptive and dependent role and the man taking the independent initiative. So, for example, the woman, like the man, is portrayed as a person of capability, independence, and self-reliance. She, like the man, is gainfully employed—(1:6, 7; cf. 6:11). Even after the marriage—at the conclusion of the Song—she

The woman in the Song possesses not only awesome power, but power over the man. She ravishes him with one look of her eyes.

continues to display her business acumen and retain her self-reliance: like Solomon, she owns a vineyard, and is not totally dependent upon her husband for sustenance (8:11–12). Both the lovers see each other as having eyes like doves (4:1; 5:12); both are proud and tall like trees (5:15; 7:8); both describe parts of the other’s body as rounded and crafted like art works (5:14, 15a; 7:2b, 3a [English vv. 1b, 2a]).

Again, the woman is as active in the love-making as the man. She brings him to the love-chamber (3:4) as he brings her (1:4; 2:4). She sexually arouses him (8:5) as he has aroused her (2:3,4; 5:2–5). She uses reciprocal expressions of endearment and praise for him as he does for her (e.g., “my companion” (5:2, 16, etc.), “behold, you are beautiful” (1:15, 16). Both use similar language to praise the beauty of the other (e.g., eyes like doves [1:15; 4:1; 5:12], “beautiful and comely” [1:16; 7:17], lips dripping honey/myrrh [4:11; 5:13], and the whole matching sections with extended praise of one another’s beauty [4:1–16; 6:4–10; 7:1–9]). She invites him to come with her into the fields (7:12–14 [English vv. 11–13]) as he invites her (2:10–14). In the Song, “where the lovers take turns inviting each other, desire is entirely reciprocal. Both are described in images that suggest tenderness (lilies/lotus flowers, doves, gazelles) as well as strength and stateliness (pillars, towers). In this book of the Bible, the woman is certainly the equal of the man.”²⁰²

Daniel Grossberg’s assessment of the reciprocity and mutuality of roles between man and woman is not an overstatement:

*In all of Canticles there is hardly a thought, idea or deed that is not attributed to both the male and the female. Almost all expressions (spoken both inwardly, outwardly, and acted) are shared by the two lovers in the Song of Songs.... Sexism and gender stereotyping, so prevalent in ancient (and modern) literature is totally lacking in Canticles. Instead, undifferentiated, shared roles and positions are the rule. Harmony, not domination, is the hallmark of the Song of Songs.... In Canticles, neither one of the couples is subordinate; neither is minor. The Song revolves around them both equally. They are costars sharing the spotlight.*²⁰³

David Dorsey’s literary structural analysis of the Song demonstrates how each of its seven sections reinforces and enhances the theme of reciprocity/mutuality, by means of various structuring devices, including alternation of speeches, initiations, and invitations, and the numerous matchings of reciprocal expressions of love. He concludes:

*These structuring techniques underscore the point that the two lovers are equally in love, equally adore one another, and are equally ready to initiate, to suggest, to invite. The ideal conveyed by the author’s structure (as well as by the contents of the speeches) is an egalitarianism and mutuality in romantic love that is virtually unparalleled in ancient Near Eastern literature. In a world that was strongly patriarchal, where love lyrics often portrayed the man as a “bull” and the woman as something less than his equal, the Song of Songs represents a surprisingly high view of woman and a remarkable vision of the ideal of equality and delightful reciprocity in the marriage relationship.*²⁰⁴

Indeed, apparently to accentuate this mutuality

and equality in dramatic reversal of gender stereotypes prevailing at that time, the woman is actually given the predominant role in the Song.²⁰⁵ Landy aptly calls “the dominance and initiative of the Beloved [the woman] the most astonishing characteristic of the Song.”²⁰⁶ The Song of Songs begins and closes with the woman speaking (1:2–4a; 8:14). The image of the garden, representing the woman, falls at the midpoint of the Song, emphasizing her predominance.²⁰⁷ Woman carries almost twice the amount of dialogue as the man.²⁰⁸ A number of the man’s lines are actually quotations of him made by the woman (2:10–14; 5:2), while the man never quotes the woman’s words. It is the woman who interrelates with the other major and minor protagonists in the Song. The woman initiates most of the meetings with her lover. In these rendezvous, she repeatedly takes the initiative.²⁰⁹ The woman’s invitations to love are more forceful and outspoken than the man’s (4:16; 7:13 [English v. 12]; 8:2). Most of the first person verbs have reference to the woman; she is the only one who uses the emphatic “I” (*’ani*) (twelve times); and the significant introspective term “soul, self” (*nepesh*) is applied only to her (seven times).²¹⁰ Only she makes dramatic, self-assured statements about her beauty and character: “I am dark and²¹¹ I am beautiful!” (1:5); “I am the [glorious, beautiful²¹²] rose of Sharon, the [singular, special²¹³] lily of the valleys” (2:1); “I am a wall, and my breasts are towers” (8:10). Only she commands the elements: “Awake, north wind! And come, O south! Blow upon my garden” (4:16). The Shulamite is the one who pronounces the great wisdom sayings about love (8:6–7; cf. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). “She is assertive, taking the initiative in this relationship. She is undaunted, risking misunderstanding and censure as she pursues her love. She is responsible, being accountable for her actions. She is protective, shielding her lover and the love they share from the prying eyes of others.”²¹⁴

The woman is also described with imagery that is normally connected with the male. Carol Meyers has shown how “the Song as a whole presents a significant corpus of images and terms derived from the military—and hence the male—world” and how “without exception these terms are applied to the female.” She concludes from this: “Since military language is derived from an aspect of ancient life almost exclusively associated with men, its use in the Song in reference to the woman constitutes and unexpected reversal of conventional imagery or of stereotypical gender association.”²¹⁵ Again, Meyers examines the use of animal imagery in the Song, and notes that while some animals (like the dove and the gazelle) depict the character of both the male and the female, the wild beasts—lion and leopard—with their wild habitations is associated exclusively with the female (4:8). She notes: “Nothing would be further from a domestic association for a female. Nor does the wildness, danger, might, strength, aggressiveness, and other dramatic features of these predators fit any stereotypical female qualities.”²¹⁶ Combining both military and faunal imagery, the woman is also compared to a “filly among Pharaoh’s chariots” (1:9). This connotes a powerful military ploy: “The female horse set loose among the stallions of the chariotry does violence to the military effectiveness of the charioteers. The female has a power of her own that can offset the mighty forces of a trained army.”²¹⁷ Again, the military “terror of awesomeness” is twice linked with the woman in the Song: she is “awesome as [an army] with banners” (6:4, 10).

What is more, the woman in the Song possesses not only awesome power, but *power over the man*. She ravishes (Heb. *labab* in the *pi’el*) his heart with one look of her eyes (4:9). Her eyes *overcome* or *overwhelm* him—elicit his fear (Heb. *rahav* in the *hip’il*) (6:5). Amazingly, the king—one of the most

powerful humans on earth—is *held captive/bound/imprisoned* (Heb. *'asur*) by the tresses of her hair (7:6 [English v. 5]). Clearly “the reversal of conventional gender typing is again evident.”²¹⁸

Moving beyond the predominance of the female lover herself, one can recognize throughout the Song that a “gynocentric mode”²¹⁹ prevails. The third set of voices is the “daughters of Jerusalem,” which play no small role in the movement of the Song.²²⁰ The mother of the woman or man is mentioned seven times in the Song,²²¹ but never the father. The king is crowned by his mother for his wedding (3:11).²²² Furthermore, the Song twice mentions the “mother’s house” (3:4; 8:2), never the masculine equivalent. This is very significant, even startling, in view of the importance of the term “father’s house” elsewhere in Scripture.

The emphasis upon the woman—and women—in the Song does not imply the superiority or dominance of woman over man. Rather, in light of prevailing stereotypical biases that placed women in a subservient or subordinate role, the Song sets right the stereotypical gender imbalance by highlighting the woman’s powers. At the same time the Song pictures the woman desiring the man to draw her away after him (1:4). She is pictured leaning upon, and resting under the protecting shadow of, her lover. So Song 2:3: “Like an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” Francis Landry has not failed to catch the intent of the imagery: “The apple-tree symbolizes the lover, the male sexual function in the poem; erect and delectable, it is a powerful erotic metaphor. It provides the nourishment and shelter, traditional male roles—the protective lover, man the provider.”²²³ Song of Songs 8:5a seems to continue the male-protector motif: “Who is that coming up from the wilderness leaning

upon her beloved?” But notice that the rest of this verse re-introduces the “apple tree” metaphor, and this time it is the *woman* who awakens the man under the apple tree. Thus juxtaposed in two lines are the images of female initiative/independence and male protection. Certainly the author wished this balanced perspective to be held together.²²⁴ This description of the man as protector is an echo of the egalitarianism in Eden before the Fall, where Eve was to stand by Adam’s side “as an equal, to be loved and protected by him” (PP 46).

By highlighting both the woman’s initiative/power and the protecting, providing role of the man, the Song paints a balanced portrait of full mutuality and egalitarianism, captured by the refrain already quoted from the woman: “My beloved is mine and I am his” (2:16; cf. 6:3; 7:11 [English v. 10]). Meyers summarizes this balance: “The Song has a preponderance of females, but that situation does not obtain at the cost of a sustained sense of gender mutuality. Neither male nor female is set in an advantageous position with respect to the other.... In the erotic world of human emotion, there is no subordination of female to the male.”²²⁵ S. S. Ndoga and H. Viviers concur: “although feminist scholars insist that the female ‘voice’ is very conspicuous in the Song, the male voice is also constantly ‘there’ and equally strong. Thus, the Song does not celebrate the supremacy of either gender, but praises mutuality and equality.”²²⁶

A number of modern studies have pointed out that the Song of Songs constitutes a reversal of the divine judgment set forth in Genesis 3:16, and a return to Eden before the Fall (Genesis 1–2) with regard to the love relationship between husband and wife.²²⁷ Such a reversal seems implicit in the Song’s echo of Eden’s “desire” (*teshuqah*)—a term found only in Genesis 3:16 and Song 7:11 (English v. 10) with reference to sexual desire between

man and woman. In Song 7:11 (English v. 10), the third of the woman's three explicit affirmations of mutuality with her lover (along with 2:16 and 6:3 already cited above), the Shulamite says: "I am my beloved's, and his desire (*teshuqah*) is for me." Whereas the judgment of God in Gen 3:16 stated that the woman's desire (*teshuqah*) would be for her husband, and he would "rule" (*mashal*) over her (in the sense of servant leadership), now the Song describes a reversal—the man's desire (*teshuqah*) is for his lover. However, contrary to the feminist readings that see here a movement away from a distorted use of male power (which is their [misguided] interpretation of Genesis 3:16), I find a re-affirmation of the divine ideal of full equality ("one-fleshness") between husband and wife set forth in Genesis 2:24 without necessarily denying the validity of Genesis 3:16. Song of Songs does not nullify the provision of Genesis 3:16 whereby the servant leadership of the husband may be necessary to preserve the harmony in the home. But the Song reveals that after the Fall it is still possible for man and woman to experience that mutual, reciprocal love wherein headship/submission is transcended and the egalitarian ideal of Genesis 2:24 is completely realized.²²⁸

We have indeed returned to Eden. This return to full reciprocity is encapsulated in the names of the lovers. Just as in pre-Fall Eden the husband and wife were called *'ish* and *'ishah* (Genesis 2:23)—names linked together by sound and (folk) etymology, so in the return to Eden the names of the lovers once again intertwine—*sholomoh* (Solomon) and *shulammit* (Shulamite/Shulamit = Solomoness).²²⁹ The reciprocation between Solomon and the Solomoness displays the equivalent of the *'ezer kenegdo* "counterpart, complement" of Genesis 2:18. The lovers in the Song return to Eden as egalitarian, mutual, reciprocal partners.

VI. THE PATTERN FOR MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

Despite the prevailing patriarchal society of OT times, in the OT we find numerous women in public ministry, including leadership roles in the covenant community, in harmony with the pattern set in Genesis 1–3. I cite some of these examples in the sections that follow.

A. Women and the Priesthood: God's Original Plan and Subsequent Condescension

Perhaps the most-often-cited OT evidence for "male headship" in the OT covenant community is the fact that the Israelite priesthood was confined only to men. For many Adventist (and other Christian) gender hierarchicalists/subordinationists this is a crucial indication that women were (and still should be) barred from having a leadership role over men in the covenant community (the church).

But the Bible gives a different picture of the divine will regarding the priesthood. God's original purpose for the priesthood on earth included both male and female! As I have already argued above, Gen 1-3 gives the surprising picture that both Adam and Eve had the same role as the Levites and priests of the Mosaic tabernacle in the original Eden sanctuary (Genesis 2:15; cf. Numbers 3:7, 8, 38; 18:2–7), and that God himself clothed both Adam and Eve as priests (Genesis 3:21) after the Fall.

It may come as a further surprise for many to learn that this arrangement for both male and female priests continued to be God's ideal at the time of the Exodus when the Mosaic tabernacle was to be erected.

God's original plan for Israel was that all Israel be a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). This does not simply refer to a corporate function of the nation of Israel offering salvation to the surrounding

nations, as frequently claimed. In a penetrating study of Exodus 19, John Sailhamer has shown that it was God's original purpose for all Israel to be individual priests, and this was indicated in God's call for all the people, men and women, to come up on the mountain as priests to meet God on Sinai.²³⁰ Although many modern translations translate Exodus 19:13b as a call on the third day for Israel to come only "to the mountain" (NIV) or to "the foot of the mountain" (NLT) or "near the mountain" (NKJV), the Hebrew is precise: after three days of sanctification (Exodus 19:11-13a) God is calling all Israel to "go up [Heb. 'alah] on the mountain" (so the NRSV and NJPS). Angel Rodriguez has shown that there were three spheres of holiness in connection with Mt. Sinai, corresponding to the three spheres of holiness in the sanctuary that was later constructed: (1) the plain in front of the mountain where the people camped (Exodus 19:2), equivalent to the courtyard; (2) the level place part way up the mountain where the priests and the 70 elders later met with God (Exodus 24:10), equivalent to the Holy Place; and (3) the top of the mountain where Moses alone went (Exodus 24:15-18), equivalent to the Most Holy Place.²³¹ According to God's original plan, all the people of Israel—including men and women—were to come up on Mt. Sinai, to the place on the mountain equivalent to the Holy Place in the later sanctuary, where only the priests could enter.²³²

It was only after the people refused to come up on the mountain because of their fearfulness and lack of faith (Exodus 19:16; Deuteronomy 5:5), and after their subsequent sin in the worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32), that God introduced the specialized priesthood into the sanctuary equation. In this alternate plan for the priesthood, most men were also excluded—all non-Israelites and within Israel all except for one family in one tribe in Israel.

In God's alternate plan condescending to human

failure, why did he choose men and not women? Some have suggested that a woman was restricted from the priesthood in Israel because of her regular (monthly) ritual uncleanness that would have prevented her from serving in the sanctuary for up to one fourth of her adult life. Others suggest that the amount of upper body strength required to lift the sacrificed carcasses, or serve as military "guards" of the sanctuary,²³³ would have made it very difficult for women to serve in the professional capacity as priests.²³⁴ Still another suggestion is that "Since women's place in society is determined by their place within the family, women are not normally free to operate for extended periods outside the home."²³⁵ Still others consider the typological connection, with God appointing a male priesthood to point to the coming of Jesus, who in His humanity was male. While these and other rationale may have contributed to the exclusion of women from the specialized priesthood in Israel, they do not seem to constitute the main reason.

The male-only priesthood in Israel was in stark contrast to the other ancient Near Eastern cultures where the cultic personnel included priestesses. Surely Otwell is correct when he observes: "Since other peoples in the ancient Near East worshiped in cults which used priestesses, their absence in the Yahwism of ancient Israel must have been deliberate."²³⁶ Yahweh's institution of a male priesthood in Israel was made in the immediate aftermath of the worship of the golden calf linked to the Egyptian/Canaanite fertility cults. In this context, the choice of men only seems to have constituted a strong polemic against the religions of surrounding nations to which Israel succumbed at the foot of Sinai, religions which involved goddess worship and fertility-cult rituals. A primary function of the priestesses in the ancient Near East during the last half of the second millennium and the first millennium, was to

serve as a “wife of the god,” and such a function for a woman in the religion of Yahweh was out of the question.²³⁷ The exclusion of women in the specialized Israelite priesthood helped to prevent syncretistic contamination of Israel’s sanctuary services with the introduction of the divinization of sex and sexual immorality that was so deeply imbedded in Canaanite Baal/Asherah worship.

Thus, the restriction of the priesthood to males from the house of Aaron in no way reveals a denigration of women’s status, and likewise in no way implies that women are barred from leadership (teaching/administrative) roles in the covenant community. In fact, on the basis of Deuteronomy 33:8–10, Jacques Doukhan points to three essential duties of the Levitical priesthood: (1) didactic and administrative leadership functions (judging, teaching); (2) prophetic functions (oracular techniques especially with the Urim and Thummim to determine the future or will of the Lord); and (3) cultic functions. He then goes on to show that two of the three functions of the priest, the prophetic and the (teaching/administrative) leadership, were allowed of women (witness the OT women who functioned as prophet, teacher, and judge).²³⁸ As I pointed out, it was only the cultic function that was barred to women, probably because of the polemical concerns directed against the ancient Near Eastern priestesses’ involvement in the divinization of sex.²³⁹

Yet in the New Testament the Gospel restores God’s original plan. Not a few male priests, but once more the “priesthood of *all* believers” (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), as it was in the beginning.

B. The Old Testament Concept of Leadership/ Authority

In a separate (forthcoming) study I have surveyed the OT concept of leadership/authority.²⁴⁰ Here I summarize some of my findings.

The OT refers to numerous different positions of leadership/authority, utilizing some thirty different Hebrew nouns,²⁴¹ and five major verbs.²⁴² These terms are primarily used to *identify* various kinds of leadership, or to indicate the general *function* of such leadership. But one additional concept (involving a number of specific Hebrew or Aramaic terms) specifically goes beyond mere identification and function, and serves to *characterize* the nature of godly leadership articulated in the Old Testament. This concept is servanthood. No other Hebrew concept covers the whole range of Old Testament leaders, whether civil (such as the judge or king), cultic (such as the priest), military (such as the commander), or religious (such as the prophet). Whatever their specific task of leadership, before anything else they were to consider themselves as servants.

The language of servanthood is pervasive throughout the Hebrew Bible. There are some sixteen different Hebrew/Aramaic terms for “servanthood” in the Hebrew Bible, involving an astonishing 1500 different occurrences.²⁴³ While it is true that the language of “servanthood” does not automatically translate over into servant leadership (sometimes servant language actually becomes used by individuals as a term of power), we find that in the OT this servant language is used in particular to characterize the faithful leaders of God’s people.

Two OT individuals were most frequently called God’s servant: Moses and David. Moses is called “My servant” (e.g., Numbers 12:7–8), “the servant of the Lord” (e.g. Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1); language of servanthood is employed of him over thirty times in the OT. David is referred to repeatedly by God as “My servant” (e.g., 2 Samuel 3:18; 1 Kings 11:13), and by the inspired biblical writer as “servant of the Lord” (Psalm 18:1); language of servanthood is used for David nearly sixty times in the OT.

It is instructive to note that when Joshua is first introduced in the narrative of the Pentateuch, he functions as Moses' "minister" (*mesharet*), a term that denotes the elevated status of those who are disciples of elect men of God.²⁴⁴ In Joshua 1:1, after Moses' death, Moses is referred to as "[menial] servant [*'ebed*] of the Lord," while Joshua is still referred to as Moses' "[prime] minister" (*mesharet*). However, by the time of Joshua's death, Joshua is also called the Lord's "[menial] servant" (*'ebed*). Joshua came to embody the principles of servant leadership embodied by Moses.

Other OT figures were also called God's servant ("My [God's] Servant" or "His/Your [God's] Servant").²⁴⁵ Still other OT individuals (figuratively) described themselves as "servant," or as ones who "served."²⁴⁶ Individuals and groups "served" or "ministered" at the sanctuary/temple, beginning with Adam and Eve at the Eden sanctuary.²⁴⁷ Other groups are metaphorically called "servants" or in situations portrayed as "serving."²⁴⁸

Finally, a number of biblical verses speak of the coming Messiah as God's Servant: the Messianic Servant as Branch (Zechariah 3:8) and as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 42:1, 19; 49:5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).

The language of "servant[hood]" is used to describe some thirty-five named individual leaders and a total of over sixty different individuals or groups of people in the OT, spanning the entire scope of biblical history and including the full range of leaders in OT times: patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, Job), prophets (Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, Ahijah, Jonah, Daniel), priests (Adam and Eve, plus all the Aaronic priests and Levites who were to "serve"), judges (Samuel), kings (David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Nebuchadnezzar), various civil leaders (Ziba, Eliakim, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah), military figures

(Caleb and Joshua, Uriah the Hittite), and many unnamed individuals who filled various offices and occupations and situations of service.

It is noteworthy how many women are noted as providing leadership, using explicit language of servanthood. They include such figures as Eve, Ruth, Hannah, Abigail, Bathsheba, the wise woman of Tekoa, and the wise woman of the city of Abel, in addition to those numerous unnamed women who served at the sanctuary or in other capacities. When females such as the wise woman of Tekoa and of the city of Abel spoke, they spoke with a voice of authority, and men listened. These OT women who are referred to by "servant" terminology, were recognized for their influential and far-reaching leadership in ancient Israel.²⁴⁹

Based on the usage and context of servant terminology in the OT, fundamental insights regarding servant leadership have emerged from my study, which may be summarized in the following points.

1. Old Testament Scripture contrasts two different forms of leadership: power (authoritarian, top-down, hierarchical) leadership and servant (bottom-up, inverse-hierarchical) leadership. The contrast between power leadership and servant leadership is dramatically illustrated in the counsel of elder and younger statesmen to young King Rehoboam as he takes office. The elder statesmen counsel the king to adopt a leadership style characterized by the attitude of service (1 Kings 12:7): "If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." But the theory of the younger counselors "is that servant leadership will not work."²⁵⁰ They counsel the king to exercise power leadership (1 Kings 12:10-11): "Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make *it* lighter for us'—But you

shall speak to them: ‘My little *finger* is thicker than my father’s loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!’” Unfortunately, King Rehoboam chose power leadership over servant leadership, as is evidenced by his response to the people, following the advice of the young men (1 Kings 12:13–14): “The king answered the people harshly... saying, ‘My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’” The results of this choice of power leadership are all too evident in the consequent breakup of the United Monarchy (1 Kings against God, see 1 Kings 12:21–33).

The contrast between two forms of leadership finds its ultimate basis in two contrasting root attitudes, as set forth in the book of Proverbs. Underlying servant leadership is the root attitude of a “servant’s heart,” whereas power leadership imbibes the root attitude of pride and a haughty spirit (Proverbs 11:2; 16:18; 29:23). It should be noted that those called of God, who were supposed to be functioning as servants of the Lord, who provided leadership in the OT community, did not always or necessarily evidence true servant leadership.

2. Servant leaders are those characterized by service to God and to others, possessing a servant’s heart, and they need not be in a position or office of responsibility to exercise their leadership.

Perhaps the most remarkable and greatest concentration of servant language in a single passage is used of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. In this narrative we find a beautiful example of servant leadership as Abigail, wife of Nabal, speaks words of tact and wisdom to David:

She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the blame; And please let your

maidservant [’amah] speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant [’amah].... Now let this gift which your maidservant [shipchah] has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant [’amah]; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD; and evil will not be found in you all your days.... When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant [’amah].... ” Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me” ... Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, “David has sent us to you to take you as his wife.” She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your maidservant [’amah] is a maid [shipchah] to wash the feet of my lord’s servants [’ebed]” (1 Samuel 25:24, 27–28, 31–32, 39–41).²⁵¹

Abigail influenced David through her spirit of servanthood. She did not merely direct or order. Instead she exercised persuasion, exerting influence in a spirit of humility, and thus was providing leadership characterized as servant leadership.

3. There is a stark contrast between the [forced] service of the world and the [voluntary] service of God. In the context of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, the same Hebrew root *’bd* is used for Israelites serving (*’abad*) as slaves (*’ebed*) to Pharaoh in Egypt, and their serving (*’abad*) as servants (*’ebed*) of God after being delivered from Egyptian bondage. In the first case it was servitude (slavery) and in the second instance it was voluntary service. Later in Israel’s history, God teaches this same lesson to His people, by allowing them to be attacked and subjugated

The ministry of servant leadership is a precious gift from God Himself.

by Egypt under Pharaoh Shishak and his army. God explicitly spells out the point He wants Israel to learn: “But they [the Israelites] will become his [Pharaoh Shishak’s] slaves, so that they may learn the difference between My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries” (2 Chronicles 12:8). The way of service to God is one of liberty, the way of service to the kingdoms of foreign nations is bondage.

4. Service is ultimately done to the Lord, but necessarily also involves serving the covenant community. On one hand we find clear indication in Scripture that the full-time workers for God were ultimately serving Him. Regarding the Levites, Moses writes: “At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord, to serve [*sharat*] Him, and to bless in His name until this day” (Deuteronomy 10:8; cf. Deuteronomy 17:2; 18:5, 7; 1 Chronicles 15:2; 23:13; 2 Chronicles 13:10; 29:11). On the other hand, Moses makes very clear to the Levites that they are serving the congregation: “the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service [*abodah*] of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to [*sharat*, ‘serve’ NKJV, NRSV, NJPS] them” (Numbers 16:9).

In later Israelite history, King Josiah summarizes this two-directional focus of service, as he addresses the Levites: “Now serve [*abad*] the LORD your God and his people Israel” (2 Chronicles 35:3). Ezekiel juxtaposes this same duo-directional service: “Yet they [the Levites] shall be ministers [*sharat*,

‘serve’ NIV, ‘servants’ NJB] in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering [*sharat*, ‘serving’ NIV] in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to [*sharat*, ‘serve’ NIV, NRSV, NJPS] them” (Ezekiel 44:11).

5. Service is a gift from God. God instructs Aaron the high priest and the other priests: “But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil; and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service [*avodat matanah*, lit. ‘service of gift’]” (Numbers 18:7). Several modern versions emphasize this point by translating this latter clause: “I give your priesthood as a gift” (ESV, NIV, NRSV, etc.). The ministry of servant leadership is a precious gift from God Himself.

6. Servant leadership calls for a whole-hearted, willing-spirited, personal relationship with God. God evaluates the service of His servant Caleb: “But my servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it” (Numbers 14:24). David was called “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14) because of his whole-hearted commitment to divine service, despite his times of failure to live up to the divine ideal. David gave wise advice to his son Solomon about the kind of servanthood God desires: “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9).

7. The call and career of the servant leader is marked by humility and total dependence upon God, not self. Hear the self-appraisal of Moses, the

servant of God: “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). God’s own evaluation of Moses coincides with His servant’s self-testimony: “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Solomon displayed this quality of humility as he took up the task of leadership over the people of Israel, as evidenced in his prayer: “Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:7–9).

Nowhere in scripture is the terminology of “servant” (*‘ebed*) so concentrated in a large section of scripture as in the repeated references to “servant” in Isaiah 41–66 (a total of 31 occurrences). The individual Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42–53 is the Representative Israelite, the promised Messiah. The context and content of the four individual Servant Songs (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12) clearly show the Servant to be the coming Messiah.²⁵² The NT witnesses regard these individual Songs as fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 8:17; 12:18–21; Mark 10:45; Luke 2:32; 4:16–30; 22:37). The Messiah is the Servant Leader *par excellence*. Strikingly, the NT also recognizes that the life of the Messianic Servant provides a model of servant leadership for Christian leaders (see citations in Acts 13:47; 26:18; Romans 15:21; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16).²⁵³ Profound principles for today’s leaders emerge from Scripture’s unparalleled concentration of servant language in

the Isaianic Servant Songs.²⁵⁴ It was amazing for me to find how the attitudes, attributes, and actions of the Messianic Servant consistently exemplify the bottom-up, inverted hierarchy established in Eden, and run counter to the top-down, “chain-of-command” hierarchy so often today equated with biblical authority.

C. Examples of OT Women in Public Ministry

Miriam. The daughter of Jochebed exhibits intelligence, diplomacy, and courage to speak to the Egyptian princess, cleverly suggesting a “nurse” for the baby in the basket (Exodus 2:1–10). Miriam may not have ever married; the OT includes no record of a husband or names of any children for her as it does for Moses and Aaron. Once the exodus from Egypt commences the focus of attention among most commentators centers on the lives of her two brothers, Moses and Aaron. Any regard ever granted Miriam concentrates on her errors. Thus this amazing woman’s position during the exodus has been underestimated.

However, recent studies have begun to recognize the high profile and valuation of Miriam in Scripture.²⁵⁵ In the book of Exodus the figure of Miriam is utilized by the narrator to bracket the exodus event: she appears at the bank of the Nile as the exodus account begins, and at the end of the story, on the bank of the Red Sea, she reappears (Exodus 2:1–10; 15:20–21)! Thus “the story of salvation of Israel delivered from Egyptian bondage begins and ends with Miriam.... Miriam’s story brackets the salvation of the Lord! Israel’s salvation from Egypt begins when Miriam saves Moses and it ends when Miriam sings her song.”²⁵⁶

Miriam is presented as a prophet (Exodus 15:20), only the second person in the Pentateuch so designated thus far in its canonical form. At the crossing of the Red Sea one finds her in a dual

role as prophetess and musician at the side of her two brothers. The “Song of Moses” and the “Song of Miriam,” are juxtaposed in Exodus 15— Moses’ song starting with a first person jussive “I will sing to Yahweh” (v. 1), and Miriam’s song commencing with a second person plural imperative “Sing to Yahweh” (v. 21). This juxtapositioning and specific use of verbal forms implies that “the song of Moses was meant to be a response to the invocation by the Song of Miriam.”²⁵⁷ Furthermore, such juxtaposition of songs indicates that “the prophet Miriam is included along with her fellow musicians, implying the concept of togetherness in the setting of the chorus of both genders and all statuses.”²⁵⁸ What is more, the antiphonal rendition of “The Song of Miriam” (Exodus 15:20–21) led by this inspired musician is reserved by the narrator to constitute the grand climax of the whole exodus story (Exodus 1–14).²⁵⁹ Or stated differently, “the subtle emphasis on the importance of the roles of women in the fate of Moses...., and thereby the whole people of Israel, culminates in the duet of Moses and Miriam, where the reader is invited to remember and acknowledge the audacious roles of women, particularly Miriam.”²⁶⁰ Miriam’s aesthetic performance as singer-dancer-percussionist has significant implications for her prominence, prestige, and power in Israel.²⁶¹

Most of the passages in the Pentateuch which mention Miriam by name represent her as a leader.²⁶² Moreover, God himself insists through Micah (6:4) that she, along with her brothers, was divinely commissioned as a leader of Israel: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”

Furthermore, the biblical record of Miriam’s death (Numbers 20:1) highlights her prominence in the estimation of the narrator: most other named

figures in the wilderness community disappear without mention. It is certainly not accidental that her death and the death of her two brothers coincide with the last three stops in the wilderness wandering.

Scripture also includes an indicative genealogical mention of her. First Chronicles 5:29 (ET 6:3) lists Miriam as a child (ben, lit. “son”) of Amram. The fact that Miriam is mentioned among Amram’s children (lit. “sons”) in an entire chapter of fathers and male offspring surely confirms her prominence, implicitly underscoring her parallel status in religious leadership along with her two brothers.

Deborah. Deborah is set on center stage to reveal the high valuation of women by the narrator (and divine Author) in the book of Judges.²⁶³ It cannot be overemphasized that the only judge described in any detail without mentioning serious character flaws (or pointing up how their life “went sour”) was a woman!²⁶⁴ And “the only judge who combines all forms of leadership possible—religious, military, juridical, and poetical—is a woman!”²⁶⁵ That woman, Deborah, is introduced as “the woman/wife of Lapidoth” (Heb. *’eshet lappidot*), which, instead of referring to her husband’s name, perhaps should be translated “woman of torches/lightning” or “spirited woman.”²⁶⁶ Male commentators of the past have often had a hard time with Deborah! Some have refused to recognize her as a true judge, suggesting Barak was the real judge; others focus on the battle as the real subject of the narrative and ignore Deborah’s leadership as a woman; still others argue that she is only an exception, chosen by God as judge because he could not find a fit man available!²⁶⁷ Feminist interpreters of the Deborah narrative have also largely missed the mark, often seeing this as a text of empowerment for women and subversion of patriarchal oppression.²⁶⁸ Most critical scholars see the narrative of Judges 4 in

contradiction with the ancient poem of Judges 5, and posit different redactional sources separated by a long interval of time.²⁶⁹ Some conservative (including Adventist) writers who think the Bible forbids women from occupying leadership positions involving men make an effort to show that Deborah deferred to men: she was “not an abrasive or pushy woman” but rather “gave the man [Barak] the opportunity to take the honor of leading the nation to victory all for himself, but was not afraid or hesitant to help him in the leadership role when asked to do so...”²⁷⁰

In contrast to all these misreadings, I find the text straightforward, with the poetry highlighting and amplifying the narrative. In both narrative and poetry, Deborah is unequivocally presented as one of the most powerful woman leaders in the Bible. She is the recognized political leader of the nation, “one of Israel’s chief executive officers.”²⁷¹ She is the military leader on an equal footing with the male general Barak.²⁷² In fact, “the plot of Judges 4 signals the conceptuality of Deborah’s predominant status and superior role in comparison with Barak. ...Deborah is the initiator and Barak the reluctant follower. Deborah is the strategist and Barak the executor. Against this background the story develops with the subtle implication that the real heroic honor goes to the women, Deborah and Jael, as opposed to the men, Barak and Sisera.”²⁷³

In the narrative of Judges 4 and the song that follows in Judges 5, “the reader finds an unusual and unexpected concept of the status of women, one that ironically surpasses that of men.”²⁷⁴ At the same time, there is compositional evidence in the narrative and accompanying poem of “teamwork and mutuality” between Deborah and Barak: “both leaders reveal their willingness to be open to and cooperate with each other. Together they build a team with mutual respect, communication, and

correction. The only peculiarity is that in spite of the reciprocal relationship, Barak remains a follower.”²⁷⁵ Thus the texts ultimately imply “the concept of balance toward equality by means of the radical paradigm shift and role reversal between Deborah and Barak on the one hand, and through compositional effort to mention the two names together on the other.”²⁷⁶

Deborah is a judge of the same stature as all the other judges in the book of Judges, one to whom men as well as women turned for legal counsel and divine instruction.²⁷⁷ She is a prophetess, providing spiritual leadership in Israel. Contrary to a common modern claim, the role of prophet(ess) in Scripture entails leadership of men just as surely as the role of a teacher. Some seek to make a distinction between the prophet—who is only a messenger of God, and has unusual authority only because of being a prophet, with no leadership authority on his/her own to do more than deliver the prophetic message—and the teacher, who has an office of leadership authority to explain or apply the message.²⁷⁸ But the prophetic witness throughout Scripture, including the narrative of Deborah, belies this false distinction, showing that if anything, the prophet has *more* authoritative leadership—including the authority to explain and apply the divine message—than the teacher.²⁷⁹

A nineteenth-century activist for woman’s suffrage provided an apt summary analogy of Deborah’s status when she noted that Deborah “appears to have been much the same as that of President of the United States with the additional functions of the judicial and religious offices of the nation. Hence this woman was President, Supreme Judge, and Right Reverend in the theocratic Republic of Israel.”²⁸⁰

There is no indication in the Judges text that such female leadership of men as well as women in the

covenant community was looked upon as opposed to the divine will for women. “Deborah performs in this authoritative capacity normally and in all its complexity.”²⁸¹ There is intertextual evidence that Deborah as “judge” was in fact an “elder” of Israel.²⁸² She calls herself a “mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7), which seems equivalent to the “father” imagery used as a “leadership title” in Israel (1 Samuel 10:12; 2 Kings 2:12).²⁸³ Her role of “mother” is “not the soft, gentle, nurturing qualities that are often associated with maternity. Abruptly, we are pushed to associate mother and military commander.”²⁸⁴

This juxtaposition of “woman of spirit” with “mother in Israel” is the same that appears in Prov 31 with the description of the *’eshet kayil* “woman of strength/valor,” utilizing the term *khayil* “strength, might” that usually occurs in the depiction of military warriors.²⁸⁵ In the public arena Deborah acts in relative independence of her husband (if she had one), son, or other male kinfolk. The Song of Deborah “celebrates the women who do not wait for sexual violence, capture, or death, women who do not wait to be acted upon, but who take action themselves.” At the same time Deborah “does not stand over against the patriarchy.”²⁸⁶ This story is not about “*female* power directed against patriarchal oppression”²⁸⁷ as so many have suggested. Patriarchy, according to the biblical ideal, is *not* oppressive of women: while providing the husband’s protection of his wife in the home sphere, it does not prohibit women from assuming positions involving leadership of men in the public arena. Such examples of female community leadership are not numerous in the OT, since women’s counsel, inspiration and leadership were focused upon the raising of her children in biblical times. Nonetheless, the leadership roles of women like Deborah in the covenant community, clearly accepted by society and given the blessing of God,

reveal that such are not opposed to biblical patriarchy nor the divine will.

Women preachers during the time of David. Psalm 68:11—a verse unexplainably ignored in major treatments of women in the OT—embraces a most powerful affirmation of women as proclaimers of the word of the Lord: “The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it!” The thrust of this verse is largely overlooked perhaps because the feminine gender of “company” is obscured in most modern translations. However, the NASB catches the import of the Hebrew: “The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the *good* tidings are a great host!” Here is a portrait of women preacher-evangelists—a great host of them! And there is no hint of them being in their “proper subordinate position” under the leadership of men.

Exclusion of women leaders with the rise of the Monarchy under Solomon. Carol Meyers has set forth evidence suggesting that during the rise of the monarchy there entered both a systematic abuse of patriarchy and the exploitation of women.²⁸⁸ God had warned of the dire consequences to the nation should Israel insist on having a king (1 Samuel 8). The king and his court—and not the patriarchal system—would become absolute in its control over the lives of the populace (vv. 11–18). God’s prediction came true. With its “centralized mechanism for redistributing resources and for establishing a strong military presence” came a high price: it meant a “hierarchical structure” with “a complete break with the social, political principles on which tribal society is based.”²⁸⁹ It meant that “the locus of power moved from the family household, with its gender parity, to a public world of male control.”²⁹⁰

This shift from patriarchy to state control is portrayed in the bureaucratic re-structuring of the kingdom carried out by Solomon accompanied by a demographic shift from rural areas to the cities

(1 Kings 9–10; 2 Chronicles 8–9). The wealthy wives of the urban bureaucrats no doubt led lives of leisure and boredom but lost the former parity with men in the maze of bureaucracies and political hierarchies; they are probably among the referents of the negative comments against women in the Prophets and Wisdom literature (especially Proverbs). There also developed a strong contrast between the upper and lower classes, with the inequalities that accompany such a situation. In the rural areas the egalitarian ideals were probably maintained for some time, although the restructuring of trade into a market economy and the burden of taxation and indenture certainly affected the patriarchal households there as well, especially by the 8th–7th cent. B.C.E. (see, e.g. Isaiah 1:17, 23; Micah 2:9).

The radical sociological shift which may be observed with the rise of Israel's monarchy is highlighted by an intertextual reference that seems to further confirm our suggestion made above regarding the interpretation of the word *mashal* ("to rule") in Genesis 3:16. There I proposed that it was God's intention for the *mashal* relationship be confined to the family setting, with the husband exercising servant leadership as necessary to preserve the unity and harmony of the home, and that there is no justification in the text for the *mashal* role of husband with regard to his wife to be extended to men in general in the public sphere. I find it significant that during the time of the Judges the people requested that Gideon *mashal* ("rule") over them, and Gideon refused, stating emphatically: "I will not rule [*māšal*] over you, nor shall my son rule [*mashal*] over you; the Lord shall rule [*mashal*] over you" (Judges 8:23). Even more significant, the first time Scripture utilizes the term *mashal* to describe someone in Israel ruling in the public sphere comes with the rise of the monarchy, in connection with the reign of Solomon: "So Solomon reigned [*mashal*] over all the kingdoms,

from the River to the Land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt" (1 Kings 5:1).²⁹¹ It does not seem to be mere coincidence that the first extension of the *mashal* role from the husband in the family to the public arena of the covenant community is found with the rise of the monarchy and Solomon's political shift from patriarchy to state control. This intertextual linkage with Genesis 3:16 seems to indicate that although God condescended to work with the institution of the monarchy, at the same time such extension of the *mashal* role to the public arena was not His will for Israel. In such extension of the role of *mashal* to men in the wider covenant community, women inevitably suffered.

Despite the systematic abuse of patriarchy and the exploitation of women resulting from the establishment of the monarchy, women as a class were never deemed inferior in the Hebrew Bible, even during the time of the monarchy and beyond. The OT writers maintained the Edenic ideal and despite the moral degradation of society the biblical narrators continued to portray the dignity and value of womanhood, both by the narrative clues in the texts and by the employment of strong female imagery. Despite the monarchical setting in which male dominated, nonetheless women still occasionally appear in leadership roles—especially in the capacity of prophetesses and wisdom figures—implying a continuing "intrinsic acknowledgment of female worth and even authority."²⁹²

Wise women. Women of wisdom recorded by the biblical narrator during the early period of the monarchy include samples from various parts of the land and beyond. The woman of Tekoah in the south (2 Samuel 14:2–20), is specifically referred to by the narrator (v. 2) as a "wise woman" (*'ishah kakmah*),²⁹³ and in her speech to David displays a perceptive understanding of the nature of justice and mercy and a grasp of exquisite literary techniques.²⁹⁴ Note

also that she speaks with a voice of authority, and men listen!²⁹⁵ The wise woman of Abel in the far north of Israel (2 Samuel 20:14–22) likewise speaks with an authoritative voice, utilizing poetic speech (proverb), and men listen and obey!²⁹⁶ Her attributes include “sagacity, faithfulness, a commanding presence, and readily acknowledged influence with peers.”²⁹⁷ Note that the wise woman calls herself “a mother in Israel” (v. 19), perhaps modeling her role of deliverer at this juncture with that of Deborah who used the same title. The Queen of Sheba, who visits Solomon from Southern Arabia (1 Kings 10:1–13; cf. 2 Chronicles 9:1), is a “spectacularly colorful woman” who “travels freely and interacts with Solomon as an equal;”²⁹⁸ she has been described as “Woman Wisdom, cast in narrative form.”²⁹⁹

During the period of the monarchy the “great/notable”³⁰⁰ woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8–37; 8:1–6), is presented as a woman of wealth and self-reliance.³⁰¹ Claudia Camp reaches for superlatives in her characterization of the Shunammite: “The portrayal of this unnamed woman is one of the most remarkable in the Bible. Both independent and maternal, powerful and pious, she brings to mind a number of other female characters, yet surpassed them all.”³⁰² Camp emphasizes this woman’s verbal skills and competence, and her initiative and self-reliance (in contrast to her husband)—“a self-sufficiency and an authority independent of motherhood.”³⁰³ Several studies argue that in the perspective of the narrator, this great woman in some respects even overshadows the prophet Elisha with whom she interacts.³⁰⁴

Huldah. Narratives from the time of the monarchy also spotlight one woman of special divine calling, Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14–20). Against those who argue that God never calls women to an office which involves the authoritative teaching of men, note that when King Josiah commanded the

priest and scribe to “Go, inquire of the Lord” (v. 13) regarding the discovery of the Book of the Law, they went to Huldah the female prophet for divine counsel, when the male prophets such as Jeremiah could have been consulted. A woman was chosen to authenticate that the scroll found in the temple was authoritative Scripture! According to 2 Kings 22:14, Huldah lived in Jerusalem in the *mišneh*, which most versions translate as the “Second Quarter,” but the NJPS (Jewish translation) transliterates as “Mishneh” and the KJV translates as “college.” This latter translation may actually represent the best one, inasmuch as some scholars have suggested that this term has reference to an academy perhaps even headed up by Huldah. This was apparently the view of early Judaism, who held Huldah in such high regard that the gates at the southern entrance of the Temple were named after her.³⁰⁵

Despite the few examples of notable women (mostly) in private life during the monarchy which have been surveyed, as pointed out above the institution of the monarchy, especially after its bureaucratization during the reign of Solomon, spelled the historical demise of any prominent place for (non-royal) women in public life. As Frymer-Kensky summarizes:

*None of Israel’s bureaucracies—the palace, the army, the law courts, even the ‘Sages’—had any room for women. Once the state was consolidated, women had no role in the pyramid of power; they were not leaders outside the domestic sphere. They could still be wise, but they were no longer Wise Women. From the standpoint of political power, the days before the state were the good old days to women. Once the state was established, they could exercise considerable family power as wives and mothers—but only queens had an impact on the destiny of the nation.*³⁰⁶

Esther. The story of Esther indicates the estimate of human worth God places upon woman, and the qualities of leadership demonstrated by a woman.³⁰⁷ In the providence of God (although the name God never appears in the book) Esther was indeed “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14)—to be a savior of the Jews from the death decree of Haman under King Xerxes. Although Esther was of worth in the king’s eyes because of her physical charm, yet according to the story, the ultimate value of her personhood was in her inner beauty—the character qualities of loyalty, courage, and obedience to God. The character of Esther is a model for life in a severe crisis. Michael Fox summarizes the author’s shaping of the heroine Esther:

He respects Esther as a woman of courage and intelligence who does not abandon her dignity even when facing an enemy and struggling to influence the erratic will of a despotic husband. Moreover, the author depicts a successful relationship of power-sharing between male and female, in which both attain prestige and influence in the community. In the pivotal scene in ch. 4, man and woman each give each other mutual obedience. What is more, the book takes as its hero a woman whose importance to the Jewish people does not lie in childbearing; there are only a handful of such cases in the Bible.³⁰⁸

Similarly, Sidnie Ann White concludes that “[Esther’s] conduct throughout the story has been a masterpiece of feminine skill. From beginning to end, she does not make a misstep.... She is a model for the successful conduct of life in the often uncertain world of the Diaspora.”³⁰⁹

Not only is Esther a model character; she is also a woman of influence and leadership. Starting out as a docile figure, “her personality grows in the

course of the biblical story, as she moves from obeying to commanding. It is she who commands the fast, develops a plan and implements it. Ultimately she institutes the festival of Purim. Esther takes charge.”³¹⁰ Esther’s influence as a woman is also revealed by an emphasis upon her wisdom: the narrator makes use of intricate intertextual linkages between Esther and the Joseph narrative to present Esther as a wisdom heroine.³¹¹ And finally, according to the epilogue of the book (9:16–32, esp. v. 32), Esther is “the one with the authority to codify and authenticate for later generations the celebratory practices begun by the Jewish populace at large.”³¹²

Women leaders in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah. Tamara Eskenazi presents important evidence (from the Elephantine papyri and Ezra-Nehemiah) that after the Babylonian exile with the dissolution of the monarchy there was a trend back toward gender parity and women in leadership on the part of the postexilic Jews.³¹³ Eskenazi shows how women in the 5th cent. B.C.E. Jewish community in Elephantine were able to divorce their husbands, buy and sell, inherit property even when there are sons, and even rise from slavery to an official temple role. Ezra-Nehemiah provides hints of a trend in this direction of gender parity and women of prominence in the contemporaneous community of Jerusalem: the probable mention of a female scribe (Ezra 2:55; Nehemiah 7:57), a clan which appropriated the mother’s and not the father’s family name (Ezra 2:61; Nehemiah 7:63), female as well as male singers (Ezra 2:65; Nehemiah 7:67), descendants of a possible famed princess Shelomith (Ezra 8:10; 1 Chronicles 3:19); women as well as men who repaired the walls of city (Nehemiah 3:12), and a woman prophetess Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14).

In summary of this subsection, we may conclude that the pattern of Genesis 1–3 is continued in the remainder of the OT: the husband

As women were called and gifted by the Spirit for these positions of leadership, they were recognized and accepted by the covenant community.

servant-leadership model in the home is not broadened in order to bar women from positions of servant leadership in the covenant community. Despite a largely patriarchal society in OT times, and even despite the rise of the hierarchical structures of the monarchy, one finds numerous examples of women in public ministry, including positions involving leadership in the covenant community.

During OT times, there were eight major different kinds or positions of leadership according to God's ideal: (1) priests; (2) prophets; (3) elders; (4) judges; (5) military leader; (6) sages; (7) musicians/worship leaders; and (8) preachers/proclaimers of the Word. (I am omitting the position of monarchy/kingship, inasmuch as this was not God's original plan; He warned of the dire results of choosing a king, Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 8-9.) It is important to notice that all eight of these positions of leadership were open to, and filled by, women, during some period of OT history! Women were (1) priests (Eve, and all Israelite women according to God's original plan in Exodus 19), (2) prophets (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Noadiah), (3) elders (Deborah, and possibly some of the seventy elders), (4) judges (Deborah), (5) military leader (Deborah), (6) sages (the wise woman of Tekoah and of Abel, and Abigail), (7) musicians (Miriam and the musicians in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah), and (8) preachers (the great host of preachers in Psalm 68:11). The only position of leadership not open to women was that of monarch, an office which was not according to God's original will for Israel, and concerning

which He warned would bring about an oppressive/hierarchical style of leadership. But note that in settings where a woman could be monarch, the wise foreign Queen of Sheba and the Jewish Queen Esther of Persia modeled sterling servant leadership.

There is no separation of the prophet, fulfilling a "non-headship" role, as opposed to or different from other positions of leadership where "headship" is apparent, as opponents of women's ordination often claim. All of the eight major positions of leadership in the OT approved by God were characterized by an inverse-hierarchical servant leadership style, and functioned (in God's original purpose) on the basis of Spirit-gifting. As women were called and gifted by the Spirit for these positions of leadership, they were recognized and accepted by the covenant community. At the same time the remedial provisions of patriarchy and male-dominated positions of leadership, and the hierarchical structures of the monarchy, prevented women from entering all the positions for which they might have been qualified, called, and Spirit-gifted. Thus the records of OT history indicate only a partial and imperfect return to God's original ideal for women in leadership.

VII. MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FUTURE

The OT prophets announce that in the eschatological Day of the Lord, in connection with the coming of the Messiah, there will be radical changes in the status quo. The patriarchal society, and other remedial provisions of OT times, will give way to a new

social order which returns to the divine ideal for male-female relationships as in Eden before the Fall. Several startling predictions jolt us in this direction.

A. Jeremiah 31:22

Jeremiah makes an enigmatic but incredible statement about the eschatological Day of the Lord: “For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth—a woman shall encompass a man”! (Jeremiah 31:22) The last clause literally reads: “female [*neqebah*] surrounds [Poel impf. of *sabab*] (strong) man/warrior [*geber*].” The noun *neqebah* “female,” which is the generic term for all females used in Genesis 1:27, is here “an inclusive and concluding referent” which “encompasses poetically all the specific female images of the poem...and it is other than all these images, for it is Yahweh’s creation of a new thing in the land.”³¹⁴ Kathleen M. O’Connor summarizes the possible interpretations and the profound implications:

*Perhaps it refers to future sexual relationships in which women will be active agents in the procreation of a restored people. Perhaps it speaks of a society at peace so that women will be capable of protecting warriors. Or perhaps it anticipates role reversals of a different sort. What is clear is that the surprising new role of women symbolizes a changed order of relationships in a reconstituted and joyous society.*³¹⁵

Does this passage, by its terminological allusions to the creation narrative in Genesis 1 (e.g., the use of key terms *neqebah* “female,” *bara’* “create,” and *erets* “earth”, Genesis 1:1, 27), perhaps envision the reversal of the “curse” of Genesis 3:16 regarding the husband’s “rule” over his wife, and announce the full return to the pre-Fall Edenic model in which there are no hierarchical relationships, and in which the

female again takes a fully egalitarian position involving a reciprocal “encircling” the male with active protection and care, both in the home and in the covenant community (church)?³¹⁶

Does the passage envision the reversal of other remedial gender structures of society, put into place by God as less-than-ideal provisions for a fallen humanity, such as patriarchy, and male-dominated positions of leadership, and a return to full reciprocity of public ministry, as in Eden when both Adam and Eve were officiating priests in the Garden Sanctuary?

B. Isaiah 61:6; 66:18–21

Isaiah 61 is a powerful portrait of the coming Messiah, announcing His salvific mission. The first four verses were chosen by Jesus to announce His public ministry (Luke 4:16–22). In verse 6, Isaiah announces to the people of Zion (v. 3) that in the Messianic Kingdom, “you shall be named the Priests of the Lord.” Here is the unmistakable and incredible announcement of “the hitherto unrealized ideal of Exodus 19:6.”³¹⁷ God’s plan for the eschatological future included not just a few male priests, but all Israel, male and female, as “priests of the Lord.”

But there is more. In the closing chapter of his book, Isaiah describes the eschatological gathering of all nations (Isaiah 66:18) at the time when God makes “the new heavens and the new earth” (v. 22). God’s glory will be revealed among the Gentiles (v. 19), and Gentiles will come to Jerusalem, to God’s holy mountain (v. 20). Then comes the “shocker.” God announces: “And I will also take some of them [Gentiles] for priests and Levites.” No longer will the priesthood be limited to a single family of a single tribe of Israel. The priesthood will include Gentiles. And there is no indication that all of these Gentiles will be male. There is an inclusiveness that extends the priesthood far beyond the sons of Aaron, and

far beyond all the people of Israel as “priests of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:6) Both Isaiah 61:6 and 66:18–21 “are anticipatory of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ in the New Testament.”³¹⁸ The NT announces the fulfillment of these prophecies, in reestablishing the “priesthood of all believers”, in which all the people of God, male and female, are considered “priests to our God” (Revelation 5:10; cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 20:6).

C. Joel 2:28–29 (Hebrew Bible, 3:1–2)

In the context of the eschatological Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11–27), God gives an amazing promise regarding His repentant people:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Joel 2:28–29 ESV [Hebrew Bible, 3:1–2])

This prophecy harks back to the incident of the Spirit resting upon the seventy elders of Israel, when they all prophesied as a sign of their having received the gift of the Spirit (Numbers 11:24–30). At that time, two of the seventy elders were not personally present, but also received the gift of the Spirit. When Joshua, jealous for Moses’ reputation, expressed his dismay at this development, Moses replied: “Are you zealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!” (v. 29). It seems that Joel envisioned the future outpouring of the Spirit as the fulfillment of Moses’ prayer.³¹⁹

Joel was not predicting that all Israel in the future would necessarily have the full-time role of a prophet, any more than the seventy elders at the

time of Moses became full-time prophets. They received an initial signal evidence of their spiritual gift of leadership when “the Spirit [*ha-ruakh*] rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again” (Numbers 11:25). The same was true when at Pentecost Peter announced the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy: all those in the upper room had the Spirit rest on them, and an initial signal evidence of the Spirit’s outpouring was given: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The fact that Joel particularly has in mind the Spirit-gifting of the OT elders (Numbers 11) may indicate the special fulfillment application of this prophecy to the Spirit-gifting of the elders in NT times. In such case, there is no dichotomy between the gifts of the Spirit and the office of elder for which believers (both men and women) are to be Spirit-gifted. Sharply distinguishing between and separating gifts and office is artificial and non-biblical.

Likewise, the reference to sons/daughters prophesying, young men seeing visions, and old men dreaming dreams, does not limit those gifts only to the segment of society to which they are attributed in the poetic passage. “The meaning of this rhetorical individualizing, is simply that their sons, daughters, old persons, and youths, would receive the Spirit of God with all its gifts.”³²⁰

The primary emphasis in this passage is upon the universal inclusiveness and democratizing of the gift of the Spirit: no one will be excluded on the basis of gender, age, or social status.

The major characteristic of the outpouring of the Spirit is its universality. All the people of God receive the Spirit. The text specifically erases the major social distinctions of the ancient world: gender, age, and economic status. In an era in

which men (not women), the old (not the young), and the landowners (not slaves) ruled society, Joel explicitly rejected all such distinctions as criteria for receiving the Holy Spirit. For Paul the fulfillment of this text is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, and neither slave nor free (Galatians 3:28).³²¹

In v. 30 (Hebrew 3:2), as in the previous verse, special emphasis is placed upon women as well as men: “It is perhaps noteworthy that Joel, in extending the promise of the Spirit to slaves, again asserts that both males and females will receive the gift. It is as though he wanted to insure that there be no possibility that a segment of society has been excluded.”³²²

The reference to “all flesh” (*kol basar*) in v. 28 (Hebrew 3:1) refers primarily to the covenant nation (cf. the reference to “*your sons and your daughters... your old men...your young men*”), meaning that within the nation limits of gender, age, and status are abolished. But note that the reference to “male and female servants” (v. 29 [Hebrews 3:2]) does not have contain possessive pronoun “your” and may well have included non-Jews. In fact, in this entire passage “we must not restrict the expression ‘all flesh’ to the members of the covenant nation, as most of the commentators have done. . . since it cannot be proved that the specification in verses 2 and 3 [English, 2:28] is intended to exhaust the idea of ‘all flesh.’”³²³ The climax of this passage, Joel 2:32 (Hebrews 3:5), clearly includes believers from all nations within its purview, as recognized by the apostle Paul (Romans 10:13).

The radical character of this prophecy is highlighted by Raymond Dillard:

It is important that the modern reader not miss the radical character of what Joel announces. In

the world of ancient Israel, the free, older Jewish male stood at the top of the social structure: most of Israel’s prophets had belonged to this group. Joel envisages a sociological overhaul: the distinctions between old and young (“your old men...your young men”), slave and free (“slaves and slave girls”), and male and female (“your sons and daughters,” “slaves [masc.] and slave girls”) are swept aside. This statement from Joel must be contrasted with the ancient daybreak prayer of the Jewish male: “I thank you God that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.”³²⁴

Hans Wolff speaks of this prophesied outpouring of the Spirit as introducing “an element of social revolution.” He refers specifically to the Spirit gifting of male and female slaves. Not a single case appears in the OT where a slave receives the gift of prophecy. But “In the coming age they shall be incorporated fully into the community of the free, by being deigned worthy of the highest distinction along with all the rest.... Yahweh by his power wants to establish life in full community among those who are rootless and feeble.... Before the wealth of such an outpouring, all distinctions of sex and age recede completely, indeed even the contrasts of social position. Such is the future towards which Israel moves.”³²⁵

The portrait is one of inverted hierarchy. “The new people of God no longer recognize privileged individuals.”³²⁶ The Messianic Age will introduce the quality of servant leadership that God had intended from the beginning, and the Messiah himself will rule as the Servant/Slave of the Lord (Isaiah 42–53)! All His followers will experience that inverted hierarchy where power and privilege and position give way to servanthood. Such is the experience that Jesus and the NT apostles and prophets announced was to be fulfilled in the NT covenant community!

CONCLUSIONS

The following major conclusions have emerged from our look at the OT materials:

Genesis 1–3 is foundational for understanding God’s original and ideal plan for man-woman relationships.

Before the Fall Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, equal “in all things,” including constitution, relationship, and function, without hierarchical gender role distinctions, but rather displaying mutual submission to one another. Male headship was not part of the creation order.

Adam and Eve’s relationship before the Fall modeled the mutual submission of the Godhead in Their intra-divine deliberation among Equals to create humans.

The nature of human dominion/authority over animals before the Fall was one of “inverted hierarchy,” or servant leadership, modeling the Godhead’s submission in entrusting His authority over the earth to humans, and in giving humans freedom of choice.

The hierarchical relationship with asymmetrical submission on the part of Eve to Adam came only *after the Fall*. (This is in direct contradiction to the hierarchicalist interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, which views Genesis 3:16 as reaffirming the pre-Fall hierarchical headship of Genesis 1–2.)

This hierarchical relationship depicted in Genesis 3:16 was a temporary remedial/redemptive measure, provided by God to Adam and Eve and succeeding generations so that union could be maintained and harmony preserved in their marriages.

The hierarchical remedial arrangement of Genesis 3:16 was limited to the marriage (husband-wife) relation, and not extended to general men-women relationships in the church.

The subjection of the wife to her husband was part of the divine judgment/curse; and the “plan of redemption” gives the race an opportunity and

encouragement to reverse the “curse” and return to the original egalitarian plan for marriage whenever possible.

Throughout the OT the Genesis 3:16 pattern for husband-wife relations with the husband as servant leader in the home is not rejected, but in practice among God’s people there is a trend (with many bumps along the way) toward gender parity in the marriage as in Eden before the Fall, as set forth in Genesis 2:24.

The Song of Songs is the pivotal OT inspired commentary on Genesis 1–3. This book highlights the divine call to return as far as possible to the original plan for egalitarian marriage, as in Eden, showing that such egalitarian relationship can be truly experienced after the Fall, through the divine empowering from “the Flame of Yahweh.”

Adam and Eve were assigned by God the role of priesthood both before and after the Fall, without any hint of hierarchy of one over the other, thus implying that servant leadership is equally available to both men and women in the church.

The OT witness regarding male-female relations in the covenant community indicates that despite the patriarchal culture and divine condescension to the hardness of human hearts, the way back to the Edenic ideal for equality in gender relations was upheld in that all the various kinds or positions of leadership according to God’s ideal were open to, and filled by, women: (1) priest, (2) prophet, (3) elder, (4) judge, (5) military leader, (6) sage, (7) musician/worship leader, and (8) preacher/proclaimer of the Word. Only the position of monarch was not open to women in Israel, but this was the one position not part of God’s original plan, and concerning which He warned would bring about an oppressive, hierarchical style of leadership. Outside of Israel, however, women such as the Queen of Sheba and Esther ably filled the royal role.

The “return to Eden” movement in Scripture regarding gender relations is parallel to many other remedial provisions given by God for the hardness of human hearts in OT times, such as laws concerning clean and unclean foods, divorce, and slavery. The divine design of vegetarianism, permanence in marriage, and racial equality, given at the original creation, is the ultimate norm, with subsequent laws/practices prescribed or affirmed or tolerated by God as part of his redemptive program leading humanity back toward the Edenic paradigm. This “back to the beginning” principle, affirmed by Jesus Himself (Matthehw 19:8), does not allow culture to drive the church to unbiblical positions, but simply puts back into place what was God’s will from the beginning. This is in radical contrast to homosexual practice, which was already rejected as part of the divine plan in Eden [Genesis 2:24], and was condemned univocally throughout the entire OT and NT witness, with no “back to the beginning” principle in operation.

The OT points forward to the eschatological

future, when in the context of the coming of the Messiah, there will be radical changes in the status quo. The patriarchal society, and other remedial provisions of OT times, will give way to a new social order which returns to the divine ideal for male-female relationships as in Eden before the Fall. The “curse” of Genesis 3:16 will be totally reversed; all will become priests, including women and Gentiles; the Spirit will gift “all flesh”, and limits of gender, age, and status will be abolished. All God’s followers will experience the inverted hierarchy where power and privilege and position give way to servanthood.

The NT announces and describes the initial realization of this inspired OT vision of social revolution “back to the beginning” with the coming of Jesus and during the time of the NT church. Will the Seventh-day Adventist Church in these last days allow God to complete this upside-down revolution in our midst by recognizing and affirming, yes, ordaining, all those—including women—gifted by the Spirit for positions of leadership? ■



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