

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE I

Tsippy Levin Byron
(Bar-Ilan University)

Summary

- 1.- Eve;
- 2.- Sarah.

1.- Eve

The book of the Bible was edited and concluded in the text that we have before us today, about 1800 years ago. Since then, in every generation, commentators have risen up to explain and interpret it in accordance with the spirit of their time and the needs of their community or their own needs. Of course, the interpretations throughout the generations are many different and often contradict and debate.

The commentators do not dispute one thing: the writing, the collection, the editing and the sanctification of the text were not done for literary reasons, historical appreciation, or the necessity of observing the law.

The book in all its genres is recruited for one goal: to bring about a religious-existential revolution. A monotheistic revolution within a pagan world, which will bring with it several central and revolutionary principles:

One God created the world.

This God is universal and abstract.

God is moral.

The man was created to run the world for God.

God desires the good for the man.

The man, like God, is bound by the same moral law.

This is a real revolution in the thought of the pagan world, which is partly similar to modern nihilistic thought.

Eve appears in the first chapters of the book of the Genesis. The story of her creation alongside the creation of the man appears in the first two chapters.

These two chapters bring different and contradictory accounts of the process of the creation of the couple.

A fundamental question arises: if the Bible wants to persuade me to start thinking differently, how does it describe the story of creation as a fact and its opposite? Who would be inclined to believe a revolutionary whose words are incoherent? That presents a single factual basis and immediately contradicts it?

We will answer this question at the end of our discussion of the character of Eve in both versions.

In the first version, in Chapter 1, Eve was created together with the man. Male and female created equal. The creation of both is the culmination of the creation process. They were created at the same time and on the same assembly line. Both receive God's blessing for power and fertility. Woman and man are both called the human species, and both are ontologically equal.

In Chapter 2, the story is completely different. At the beginning there was a garden that needed a gardener to manage the irrigation system. For this purpose, God creates the man from the earth and breathes life into him. The first mistake occurs when God notices the man's loneliness and it was not

taken into account in the preliminary plan and is not right in His eyes. He does not consult with the man. Is loneliness also difficult for him? God tries to find a cure for man's loneliness by creating animals to associate with Him. Although the man gives them names, in God's eyes the problem of human loneliness is not solved. In the wake of the first mishap, God turns to a different solution. Again, without consulting the about his needs or obtaining his consent, he puts him into a coma, takes a rib from him and improvises a woman from him. It is worth saying that the woman was created differently: from different materials and in a different way.

The situation now is this: the man has to solve the task of preserving the garden and his wife was created to solve the problem of his loneliness. In order to emphasize their different status, the man gives it a name as he did to the other animals, thus expressing his mastery over them and then over her. And in order to give divine-legal approval to their different status, the man is given instructions to regulate and protect his relationship with God and the trees around, before the creation of the woman. Instructions that are also not given to her.

He is permitted to eat all the fruits of the trees of the garden, except for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve, on the other hand, receives no guidance or warning. Even a person who is her spouse does not share the knowledge he has with her.

The solution to loneliness doesn't seem to work this time either. Instead of talking to her, he wanders. Based on his wandering and eating the fruit, she probably recognizes that from one tree, he is not picking fruit. The snake enters the vacuum of silence between them. He explains to her what God or the man should have explained. His distortion fits in nicely with what she may have already expected: there is a tree in the garden that is different and it is forbidden. When she approached the tree to pick its fruit, her man knew it was the forbidden tree. Even when she approached him, he does not warn her. He uses her like a police robot: approaching a suspicious object. Let's see what happens in the dangerous area without risking myself. And behold, it is a wonder: nothing happened. The fruit is in her hands and she did not die. The fruit is bitten and she is alive. When she lets him taste the fruit, he knows without a doubt from which tree it was plucked, and he also realizes that picking the fruit that was forbidden to him is not killing. He also sees that she ate it and was not immediately punished with death. On the other hand, based on the serpent's words, she understands that this fruit will transfer her to another consciousness. It will open her eyes, it will expand her ability to be educated, it will bring her closer to divine awareness that endangers God's exclusive rule, and all of these intrigue her. She wants to grow and develop herself.

In contrast to her man, who keeps the knowledge he has received or accumulated only for himself, she immediately shares the possibility of development. She does not leave him behind. She is not in favour of an aristocratic structure between her and her partner. She is in favour of equality. She will not control him because of her intellectual superiority. Even when the fruit is approaching, he still does not tell her that he is forbidden. After he sees her eat and stay alive, he does the same. Again, he used her like a police robot.

Then came the encounter with God. God addresses the man, not Eve, the initiator. Again, to teach us that she did not accept God's command and was not informed by her spouse, she is an auxiliary device to dispel loneliness. But the ignorance of the law, of course, does not solve it, and therefore she is punished like him. They both try to shift the blame onto others, but he seems ungrateful while she is scared.

The difficult life outside of heaven also brings them closer to each other, and when she is pregnant, she hopes for a pardon. Or at least a reduction in the punishment. Or at least a true closeness between her and her partner. The child to be born will give her a better place in her husband's heart and perhaps even appease the God whose fertility commandment she fulfils.

Eve seems to be copying the discriminatory hierarchy of heaven into her home. She knows nothing else. Therefore, just as the male was preferred by God the Father over the female, perhaps because he was created first, so too she gives deep meaning to the first son who continues his father's work of the land while the second is Abel. He is meaningless and he also wanders with his flock and does not

invest his power in the land. Perhaps her discriminatory behaviour among the sons causes God to intervene and favour the discriminated son over in order to balance a little. Perhaps this is why, after Abel's death and Cain's departure for a life of wandering, she gives birth to another son and sees her new baby born as an indirect relationship and a present from God.

The God who expelled her and whom she sought to please upon the birth of Cain is the God who gives her sperm after the murder of Abel. And she does not beautify reality and does not wrap it in lenient explanations. God sat down with me, that is, He related to me and my distress and comforted me with the birth of the third son, because Cain killed Abel.

Eve is a woman who is created into a weakening, discriminatory and unfair system. She is equivalent to an animal and her purpose is instrumental: to relieve loneliness and give birth to children that will continue the existence of humanity.

Out of ontologically inferior conditions, she manages to learn reality, tries to improve it and especially develop in it. Eve does not tear under the difficulty. She tries to improve her status in her relationship with the man and with God. She has a voice. She has aspirations. She has a plan. Like God, her plan has flaws. And there is murder. But the crushing failure of the sibling relationship does not discourage her and does not paralyze her. She continues to try to act in reality and even when she falls, she gets up. Her speech stands out against the background of Adam's passive silence.

After Abel's murder, she wakes up from mourning for Seth's birth. In the words «God gave me another seed under Abel, for they killed Cain», she boldly says a few things:

1. Thank God for the extra opportunity for remedial parenting.
2. Cain killed Abel. This is the murder of the younger brother at the hands of the eldest. It is impossible to obscure these harsh facts.
3. Indirectly, it sounds to me that she admits that the person who was supposed to educate in order to prevent this murder was me. His mother.

Eve teaches us that she and Adam are the first root of all of humanity. A couple and two children formed the entire human family. The Scandinavians and the Africans, the Chinese, the Polynesians and the Jews all descended from one pair of parents. Therefore, ontologically, they are all equal and have equal rights. And if this is the case, in fact, every couple who establishes their home and family and gives birth to two children can have the potential for an entire humanity. Education, imparting values, manners, consideration for the other's different existence and absolute acceptance of their equal rights are all the unquestionable responsibilities of parents raising their children. This responsibility is not easy. Sometimes it is unpleasant for the educator and the pupil. Sometimes the educator is tired of the work of education. He would have liked to embrace his child more than to torment him. Sometimes he finds it difficult to struggle and prefers to be hugged and loved. «He who saves his tribe hates his son» is not necessarily just a stick. Criticism or clarification of red boundaries is also unpleasant to the child's ear. But the adult who spares these from his son does not do him any favours. On the contrary, prevents him from restraining and controlling his instincts, improving himself. Eve indirectly admits her failure and hopes to improve her maternal duties with the birth of Seth. Adam, on the other hand, is silent.

Why are two contradictory stories presented at the beginning of a book that tries to teach us new thinking?

It seems that the author who edited the book was familiar with different cultures and different social approaches regarding the purpose and degree of women's participation in the public sphere. Every man has a woman that he wants to elevate and protect her rights: usually it is his mother or daughter. Perhaps at the same time, he also has a woman whom he wants to restrict and whom he wants to control. It is therefore not impossible that conflicting thoughts and desires run through the heart and mind of that man. He also wants them to be his equal for the sake of his mother, his sister and his daughter and he is also afraid that they will be too independent and not sufficiently disciplined and

loyal to his worldview in his home. The author and editor were preceded by these two worldviews, and both are equally distributed and equal in weight. Therefore, he left it to the reader to choose his own path between the two.

In doing so, he created a precedent in biblical stories. The story is not the ultimate truth. The story does not hide things that he is not comfortable with. The story does not determine definitively what is true and what is not. He believes in the active part of the reader. The reader is the writer's partner. He believes in the common sense of the reader. In his understanding, one thing from another. And he relies on his meticulous attention to detail. He gives the reader the data and the active reader will exercise his judgment and find his way.

The courageous and active approach to Eve of the author serves as a source of inspiration for me.

2.- Sarah

Sarah (originally Sarai) is presented for the first time in Chapter 11 of the Genesis in a genealogical list that describes the history of the house of Abraham. It is strange that next to the mention of her marriage, it is said that she is barren and has no child. After all, we are only a little after the wedding. How has the sentence of her barrenness already been decided? And more: Isn't it enough to say that she is barren? Why double the meaning and say she doesn't have a child?

It is not said where she came from. Who are her parents? As it is said about Milka, the wife of Nahor. Barren Sarah. This is how we first know her. This is her ID card.

Of course, she is not a partner in the mission and the decision to go to the land of Canaan.

Moreover, she is not a partner in the decision to go down to Egypt, and it seems that Abraham is trying to hide it from her until he approaches the border with Egypt. Why is he hiding? Maybe he was afraid that she wouldn't go with him?

On the border of Egypt, we hear for the first time two important things: that she is beautiful on an international scale and not just local. Abraham fears that because of her beauty, he will be threatened and killed in order to obtain her, and therefore he implores her to say that she is his sister and thus his life will be saved and they will be able to enjoy the riches of her beauty.

She doesn't answer him. She does not express her opinion on the plan, which is in fact imposed on her.

What happened to her at the king's palace where she was taken after the border crossing police reported a rare, beautiful woman coming to Egypt? We don't know. What did she think of Abraham's choice in times of famine to go down to Egypt and give her to the ruler instead of returning to his homeland and not endangering her? What closeness did she have to the Egyptian king? How long did she stay in the palace? Did Abraham visit her? Did they hope to be a couple again? Is the great wealth that Pharaoh gives Abraham proof of his great affection for Sarah? What does Sarah think about the price of this enrichment? We don't know about these either.

Against the backdrop of Chapter 15, in which Abraham doubts God's promise that he will have a son, Chapter 16 continues. Sarah is aware of Abraham's distress and her limitation as a barren woman who delays the fulfilment of the divine promise. She finds a solution: Hagar will conceive Abraham's son, and Sarah will build up her status and motherhood as the child's mother. Abraham immediately complies. All of this happens exactly ten years after they have lived in the land of Canaan. As far as Babylonian law is concerned, which is practiced according to Jewish law to this day, marriages that were not fulfilled through the birth of a continuing child lose their validity and the woman can find herself expelled. As if to say that she did not fulfil the main expectation of her with her marriage. Sarah initiates the move at the point in time when her marriage is legally valid. She makes an offer and Abraham immediately accepts it and turns to implement it. This raises the suspicion that Sarah is trying to profit from an intolerable situation. To make lemonade out of lemon. Certain relationships probably already existed, and she tries to use them to her advantage as well. In order for the proposal

to be attractive to Hagar and Abraham, she turns an Egyptian slave into a woman with equal rights. Abraham's silence in the face of Hagar's disdain for her mistress can also hint that his relationship with Hagar did not just start with Sarah's suggestion.

Sarah is caught between the fear that she will be divorced as an erroneous bargain and her attempt to regain her dignity and exclusive status in her home.

With great courage, she accuses Abraham of his silent guilt in the face of her humiliation by her maidservant and demands a just judgment that only God can decide, since Abraham did not apparently harm her. But he remained silent in face of injustice that had been done in his home, and thus he didn't react... To Abraham's credit, it can be said that he entrusts Hagar to Sarah and admits that she is her slave.

Indeed, the angel of God, who was revealed to Hagar after she fled to the desert because of Sarah, asserts emphatically: «Hagar, Sarai's handmaid... Return to your mistress and suffer under her hands». Sarah's maidservant and not Abraham's wife. Sarah is the lady and Hagar is her slave. The angel does not associate her with Abraham.

Sarah once again appears behind the scenes of Abraham's meeting with the angels. In Chapter 18. Here, God is not revealed only to Abraham. She is responsible for serving the food. But she listens to the conversation from behind the curtain of the tent and even laughs and expresses doubt about the feasibility of the divine promise.

God wonders why Sarah laughed. Is this an expression of disbelief and perhaps even contempt? Sarah is like Eve, frightened and in denial. Here too, Abraham does not cover up or protect her, and it seems that he or God is rebuking her, «not because you laughed».

When Sarah gives birth to Isaac, she continues the dialogue with God. «God made me laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh at me», her laughter was a perfectly reasonable response. The reaction of every listener. And the laughter this time is not clear. Is it a laugh of joy or a laugh of ridicule? Sarah is talking to God indirectly. Through her son's name. It seems that Isaac's birth once again dramatically changes the relationship at home. Hagar and her son are no longer alone. But Sarah also sees into the future. She sees potential danger. She is an old mother, her future is short and a tender baby depends on her protection and constant supervision. If she dies, Hagar and Ishmael will not hesitate to get rid of the additional heir that has appeared. She understands that there is no room for the two sons in the same house and demands that Abraham send away the son of the maidservant and his mother. Hagar is not Abraham's wife, and Ishmael is not his son but the son of the maidservant. Abraham does not see what Sarah sees. He sees his own needs. Ishmael is his son in every way. Only divine intervention that again justifies Sarah's conduct. Only then, after he is told «Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice», he gets up and sends Hagar away.

In the Sacrifice Chapter, Sarah is absent. Abraham wakes up in the morning so that she will not ask, interfere or delay him from carrying out his mission. But in the next chapter she is dead. It seems that the astonishment at the sight of Yitzchak on his return from that place had a severe effect on her old heart. It seems that the willingness to slaughter the child finally broke the bond between them. He lived in Beersheba and she lived in Hebron; her heart was filled with bitterness for with the man with whom she shared her life. She died in Hebron and was buried there.

I love Sarah's restrained and noble silences and her just outbursts of rage. I love her laughter, which is both condescending but also sinful. I love her courage to go from safe life to another life in her old age. Don't be afraid. To believe in her power to comfort and benefit her child who may have needed rehabilitation after his father's killing-attempt-trauma. She dedicated herself to being a loving, inclusive and embracing mother of her emotionally injured son. I learn from her to believe in her values and not to be afraid to step out of her comfort zone in the twilight of her life.

SOMMARIO

L'analisi delle figure bibliche femminili permette di trarre degli insegnamenti morali in validi anche per l'attualità. Naturalmente, l'interpretazione del testo cambia sempre nelle varie epoche. Emblematiche, in particolare, sono le figure di Eva e Sara.

ABSTRACT

The analysis of female biblical figures allows us to draw moral lessons that are still valid today. Of course, the interpretation of the text always changes in different eras. Particularly emblematic are the characters of Eve and Sarah.

PAROLE CHIAVE

Bibbia
Genesi
Donne
Eva
Sara

KEYWORDS

Bible
Genesis
Women
Eve
Sarah

Contributo, come da regolamento, non sottoposto a procedura di referaggio “double blind”.