

THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PENTATEUCH

The purpose of this paper shall be to show the status of woman as presented in the Pentateuch as far as her position in society and law were concerned. It is vital that the original status given to woman by God at creation be reviewed and that the study should give an overview of the changed status resulting from the fall.

The paper will then adhere to the following format:

Creation of Woman
Woman after the Fall
Woman's Status and Role as Daughter
Woman's Status and Role as both
Status and Role of Other Women (Widows, Divorcees and Slaves)
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CREATION OF WOMAN

The basic Pentateuchal record of the creation of woman is found in the following three passages as quoted from the New American Standard Bible (used here and throughout the paper).

1. Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

2. Genesis 2:18, 21-25

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

....

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept: then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place.

And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

3. Genesis 5:1-2

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man. He made him in the likeness of God.

He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.

In the use of the generic term '*adam*, translated "man," but more correctly should be "mankind," Moses includes both "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) without sex distinction in terms of superiority or subordination of the one to the other. As Hasel has correctly pointed out, "man and woman find their full meaning neither in male alone nor in female alone but in their mutual relationship and communion."¹

The fact that woman is included in the term '*adam* of Genesis 1, and yet her creation account is not detailed until Genesis 2, certainly suggests that the latter is not a separate account of creation as critical scholars contend,² but an expansion, giving more detail, and building upon the Genesis 1 account.

Further, the Genesis 2:18 (NASB) term "helper suitable for him" may give the wrong connotation suggesting one of inferior position created only to "help" or "aid" the "master." But the word *ezer* ("helper"), whatever its true meaning, is used to refer to God³ as the "Helper" for His people which in no way implies an inferior position but rather mutual

support for mutual benefit.

The implied original position of woman therefore is that she was fashioned by God from a rib (*sela*) taken from man's side,⁴ to be his equal in a partnership of complementary companionship—a suitable counterpart—forming an inseparable and perfect unity.⁵ Equality is implicit also in Genesis 2:22-23 where the terms *-is* and *-issah* are used for the first time and imply an equality that differs only in the sex—male and female—but presents no suggestion of superiority or inferiority.⁶ That they “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) also contributes to the concept of the equality and unity of the man and woman in God's original plan.

It is interesting and important to note that nowhere in ancient Near Eastern literature is there a parallel to the biblical account of the creation of woman, and nowhere in the ancient Near East is the woman held in such high esteem as in the inspired Mosaic account of creation by the Most High God.

WOMAN AFTER THE FALL

While many will agree that God's original plan was that man and woman should be equal from the viewpoint of status and that the husband and wife should be complementary to each other, the big question is, “What happened, if anything, to this status and relationship following the fall as far as God was concerned?”

The story of the temptation and fall recorded in Genesis 3 is familiar. Verse 6 (NASB) declares:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

The eating of the fruit from the tree in the center of the garden was explicitly forbidden by God on pain of death (Gen. 2:16-17), but Eve, against God's counsel, left her husband's side and placed herself in temptation's pathway by going to the tree. There she saw its fruit was “good for food,” thus desirable for the physical drives; “a delight to the eyes” and therefore emotionally and aesthetically satisfying; and “desirable to make one wise” which appealed to her ego.⁷

The woman, “being quite deceived” (I Tim. 2:14) fell into transgression and urged her husband to follow suit. Both sinned, and both entered into their new “knowledge” and “wisdom” with the same disastrous results. They were naked and ashamed (Gen. 3:7), they hid from the Lord God with whom they were accustomed to walk and talk with a clear conscience⁸ (Gen. 3:8),

and the hitherto inexperienced emotion of fear gripped them (Gen. 3:10). “Nowhere is implied an inferior position of woman after sin”⁹ at this point, and it is true that the loss of peace and harmony was experienced by both man and woman for both God and each other.

Judgment is now pronounced by God upon our first parents. “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” (Gen. 3:16-NA.SB). Pain is therefore to be the woman's lot, and her husband is to “rule over” her.

Does this last statement not seem to imply a change in status for the woman? Is she no longer to be equal with her husband but now be subordinate to him, ruled over by him, as he was to rule over the animals? Does this not prove the inferiority of the woman following the fall?

It is important to point out that the Hebrew text uses two different words to express rulership in the beginning of the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:26, 28 where man is told to “rule” or “have dominion” over the animals the word *radah* is used. However, the verb *masal* (Gen. 3:16) is used when expressing a husband's rulership over his wife. This latter verb is never used to express man's rule over the animal kingdom, which would certainly suggest that, through sin, the wife was not to be reduced to the level of the animals.

Another point to emphasize is that all facets of the judgment pronounced in Genesis 3:16 apply to the marriage institution. The travail in pregnancy, the pain in childbirth, the wife's desire for her husband, and the point that the husband would “rule” over the wife are all marriage related within the family and are unrelated to other spheres of a woman's activity and life.

That the wife was “placed in subjection to her husband”¹⁰ is clear, but does this make the wife a slave, lacking in individuality, initiative, or will of her own? Scripture would clearly give a negative answer, but even as sin had broken the harmony of the home and marriage, God saw that within the framework of the new circumstances which had been changed by sin, harmony, union, and smoothness could prevail only as the husband took the lead and the wife took the submissive but supportive role (I Cor. 11:3). “As the Father and Christ are equal and yet God is the head of Christ, so husband and wife are equal (4T. 36) but the husband is the head. He is the first among equals.”¹¹

This rulership therefore by the husband is to be done in love, following the pattern of Christ's love for the church (Eph. 5:25). However, sin rapidly brought degradation and an order vastly different from God's

original plan.

The Pentateuch reveals that the social and legal status of woman are strongly influenced by the patriarchal form of family life¹² in which the woman's principal function is fulfilled in her role as wife and mother. She does indeed take part in the religious, social, political and economic life of the community, and at times plays a part even in military affairs as will be seen in the following materials.

WOMAN'S STATUS AND ROLE AS DAUGHTER

Within a patriarchal society the husband longs for sons; and a wife who produces sons has established herself and her honor within the family and community. The birth of a son is cause for great rejoicing for the continuance of the family name and estate is assured. The birth of a daughter does little for her own family for upon marriage she takes the name and builds the family of her husband. Thus Lev. 12:1-5 reflects the greater desirability for sons.

When a genealogy is being related it is usual to mention only the sons. Only occasionally are outstanding daughters named (e.g. Gen. 37: 35 mentions "all his [Jacob's] daughters' yet only Dinah is referred to by name; Gen. 5:3,7,10 etc. mention "and daughters" but none are named.)

This in no way should be interpreted to mean that they were unloved and unwanted. When Jacob had left his father-in-law's home with his wives and goods while Laban was away shearing sheep, Laban followed in hot pursuit and said to Jacob you "did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters" (Gen. 31:28).

After settling his problem with Jacob "Laban arose and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them" (Gen. 31:55) and warned Jacob not to mistreat his daughters (Gen. 31:50).¹³

A great deal of liberty was enjoyed by women in Pentateuchal times. Both married and single girls mingled quite freely and openly with both sexes while carrying out the duties and amenities of ordinary life. Rebekah was unveiled while traveling in caravan until she came into the presence of her affianced (Gen. 24:64-65). Jacob saluted Rachel with a kiss in the presence of the shepherds (Gen. 29:11). Each of these young ladies was engaged in active employment, the former in fetching water from the well, the latter in tending her flock.¹⁴

It is interesting to note the extent of freedom Rebekah had when extending it to Eliezer, "We have plenty of both straw and feed, and room to lodge in" (Gen. 24:25), and all this before she had consulted the

family. She had also received presents of gold rings and bracelets weighing ten and a half shekels (Gen. 24:22) and from an apparent stranger. Might this have been considered payment for services rendered, or an act of appreciation and friendship? Or might she have been old enough to have recognized the first steps towards a proposition?

The fact that an outrage on a simple girl in the open field was visited with severe punishment (Deut. 22:25-27) is indicative of the fact that it was not considered improper for a young lady to go about unprotected. This point is strengthened by the fact that it was her duty to care for the family water supply (Gen. 24:16) and to water the flocks (Gen. 24:19-20), as well as to care for the sheep (Gen. 29:6, 9).

Daughters were expected to take part in Sabbath keeping (Deut. 5:14), in rejoicing before the Lord (Deut. 12:12), in playing instruments and dancing (Ex. 15:20), in presentation and eating of offerings before the Lord (Deut. 12:17-18),¹⁵ and in sharing the spoils of war or of the enemies of God's people (Ex. 3:22).

In matters of genealogy and inheritance sons play the dominant role. However, the daughters of Zelophehad appealed to Moses that inheritance laws include unmarried daughters of fathers who died with no male heir (Num. 26:33, 27:1-9). The appeal was granted under the guidance of God and daughters of fathers having no son may inherit the father's estate. The daughters may not marry outside of their tribe, to keep the inheritance within the family, otherwise all rights would be forfeited (Num. 36:2-4).

However, a daughter was subject to her father, and in many ways was treated as inferior to her brother. A father could sell his daughter into slavery where she could become the wife of the master or his son (Ex. 21:7-11), though Jewish tradition explains that the daughter must be under the age of puberty and her family must be suffering extreme poverty.¹⁶ Her master was forbidden to resell her. He could release her, but the law of release during the Sabbatical year which was applicable to men did not apply to women (Ex. 21:1ff; Lev. 25:40).¹⁷ She could choose to remain a servant "forever" by submitting to an ear-boring ceremony (Deut. 15:17).

Should a single girl make a "vow to the Lord" (Num. 30:3-5), or even a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:2ff),¹⁸ it was subject to the validation of the father which was not true for a son. Idolatry was punished with death by stoning (Deut. 13:6-11) and this was true for the daughter or wife.

While the father controlled his daughter he was forbidden to force her into prostitution (Lev. 19:29), even though the experience of Lot is recorded (Gen. 19:8) where he offered his two daughters to the men of Sodom to protect his two male guests. However, harlotry is condemned

and was generally punishable by death possibly with the idea of protecting God's people from being swept into the degrading rites and practices of the surrounding fertility worship. It would appear that the sin was considered more heinous for the woman than the man as is illustrated in the experience of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38). For a priest's daughter to become a harlot, especially in the light of local fertility temple rites, there was only one punishment--to "be burned with fire" (Lev. 21:9).

Fornication in general was condemned. If a daughter was seduced and she was not engaged, then the young man paid a dowry, she became his wife, and divorce was forbidden (Ex. 22:16, Deut. 22:28-29)¹⁹ If she was engaged, was forced, and she cried out, she was freed, but the man was slain. If she did not cry out, however, then both the daughter and the man were put to death (Deut. 22:23-27). Should the Fornication take place with another man's female slave, the man is punished, but not with death, and required to present a guilt offering to the Lord; but the slave girl was free, possibly because she was considered part of the other man's "belongings" (Lev. 19:20-22). Bestiality automatically was punished by death (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:23; 20:16) whether it was committed by man or woman.

The daughter, while being subject to her father, had many freedoms. She was loved. She served in the home and field chores, but was to keep herself chaste at all times prior to marriage.

WOMAN'S STATUS AND ROLE AS WIFE

Marriages in the Pentateuchal times were arranged by the parents (Gen. 24:3ff; 34:4, 12; Deut. 7:3, etc.), usually within the tribe and often to one's first cousin as is common in the Middle East today.²⁰ This is usually in the interest of keeping the wealth and estate within the family. First the consent of the father was given (Ex. 22:17; Deut. 22:16), then the consent of the family is sought but is not essential to the final arrangements for the marriage (Gen. 24:41). Finally the prospective bride is approached for her approval (Gen. 24:5, 8, 39, 57-58). Such statements as "the woman may not be willing," "We will call the girl and consult her wishes," and "Will you go with this man?" certainly suggest that the woman had some say in regard to her marital likes and dislikes, in spite of the authority the father had over her. Human nature being what it is, however, it would be unusual if this power were not abused, and in some cases, the abuse became the rule.

Conditions for marriage as seen in the Pentateuch include: a woman should be a virgin (Deut. 22:13-21; Gen. 24:16; etc.) and preferably beautiful (Gen. 12:11, 14; 26:7; 29:17; Deut. 21:10-14); she should be industrious for most of the household chores and management were upon her shoulders.²¹ The one she was to marry should be from the covenant community as evidenced

by his circumcision (Gen. 24:3; 28:1; 34:14-15; Deut. 7:3; etc.), and no unlawful relationship should be entered into (Lev. 18:7-20). It was preferable, though not an unbroken law, that the first-born daughter should be married before the younger (Gen. 29;26). No harlot or divorcee was permitted to marry a priest (Lev. 21:7), “because he is holy to his God.”

Once the agreement is settled, the father received a “bride price” for his daughter and thus a contract was sealed with the prospective husband.²² This is called the *mohar* or “price” (Gen. 31-15; 34:12; Ex. 22:17; etc.). It is the equivalent to the amount paid by a single man who seduces a virgin and thereby makes the commitment to take her as his wife (Ex. 22:16).

The question comes as to whether this is actually a “purchase price” for the transfer of chattel property or is it the price paid for “the surrender of authority over a woman by one man to another”²³ with the corresponding responsibility to love her and care for her welfare? The latter seems to be the case. Dembitz likens the *mohar* to the Babylonian *tirhatu* where it became customary for the bride's father to restore the money to the husband at the wedding in receipt of a contract to the wife “as a jointure, payable upon the death of the husband or in case of divorce... [It was therefore] a good security against divorce on insufficient grounds.”²⁴

After the engagement, the young lady veiled herself when in the presence of her husband to be (Gen. 24:65) and she was considered as if she were the wife (Deut. 22:23-24) for if she were violated by another man he would be charged with having “violated his neighbor’s wife.” Following the engagement her husband to be would be excused from war service until twelve months after the wedding.²⁵

A wedding is not described in detail in the Pentateuch. “God celebrated the first marriage,”²⁶ of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Nothing is given by way of description. Of Isaac it states that he brought Rebekah “into his mother Sarah's tent ... and she became his wife, and he loved her...” (Gen. 24:67) of Jacob and Leah, whom Jacob thought to be Rachel (but obviously a veil concealed her identity), it states that Laban “brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her” (Gen. 29:23). He is then said to have waited until “the bridal week” of Leah was complete, possibly similar to a “honeymoon” of more modern times, before Laban “gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife” (Gen. 29:27-28). Little is said of the wedding celebrations though Laban did gather “all the men of the place, and made a feast (Gen. 29:22). It is assumed, however, that the young lady also had her friends and the whole community to the celebrations.

In the Pentateuch a marriage gift from the bride's father of at least one handmaid was common. Laban gave Zilpah to Leah, and Bilhah to Rachel (Gen. 29:22-29). Sarah's handmaid was Hagar (Gen. 16:1). The purpose of the handmaid was not only to serve the wife but should the wife be barren or unable to produce sons, the wife could give the handmaid to her husband so that sons might be born. It would appear that in the latter event the handmaids were eventually referred to as "wives,"²⁷ possibly as secondary wives, but their sons were ranked along with those of the full wife (e.g., Jacob's 12 sons). The handmaid was totally in the control of the wife (Gen. 16:1-9), and apparently, as in the case of Hagar (Gen. 21:9-14), could be driven out of the family for insubordination, along with her child, if a natural child had been born to the family.

Following the wedding, the wife came under the authority of her husband (Num. 5:19-20) and she addressed him as *ba'al*, "master, lord," or *adon*, "lord" (Gen. 18:12; Judges 19:26; Amos 4:1).²⁸ It is interesting to note that this is the same title of address as was used by a slave addressing his master or a subject addressing the king. In Deut. 21:13; 22:22; 24:1, etc., to marry a wife is expressed by the Hebrew verb *ba'al* "to become master." This should not, however, be interpreted as a wife of an Israelite being on the level of a slave. As de Vaux²⁹ points out, a man could sell his slaves and even his daughter but never his wife. This was true even when the wife was acquired as a captive in war (Deut. 21:10-14). The wife was a "free" woman (as opposed to a bondwoman) who could be divorced even though she could not initiate the divorce. In case of divorce, however, she was protected by a letter of divorcement that restored her freedom (Deut. 24:1-4), and the *mohar* was to be restored to her.

Within the family she became well established and held in high esteem when the first child, particularly a boy, was born (Gen. 16:4; 29:31-30:24), it drew the husband and wife closer together and she was revered by the extended family, the community, and particularly by her children who owed her honor, respect, and obedience. The wife was not addressed as a slave or part of a man's chattels for in Gen. 12:13 (NASB) Abraham addresses Sarah with the words, "Please say that you are my sister..." This is a respectful request, not an order. And, contrary to a common custom currently prevailing in the Middle East where the wife walks while father and the children ride. Gen. 45:19 and Ex. 4:20 indicate that wagons and donkeys were supplied for the transportation of wives and children.

The view of women in Old Testament times expressed in Harper's Bible Dictionary³⁰ that they "were tireless drudges whose lot was little better than that of cattle or slaves" is most unfortunate and shows little understanding of the Old Testament times and the situation of the wife, or it reflects an evaluation made outside the framework of those days, which

would therefore lead to wrong interpretations and views.

Certainly the wife that entered into her role in the right spirit in Pentateuchal days would have worked hard, but, if done in the spirit of love as a homemaker, wife and mother, all this “far from lowering her status” would have “earned her consideration” and honor.³¹

The wife's role included: childbearing and child rearing (Gen. 4:1-2; 16:1-4; 18:12; 25:21; 29:32-35; 30:1, 23; 41:50; Ex. 2:3-10, 21-22; 6-20, 23; etc.):³² preparation of meals (Gen. 18:6; 27-14; etc.): water carrying (Gen.24: 11ff; Ex. 2:16; etc.); weaving and spinning and thus the making and caring for the clothing of the family (Ex. 35:25-26; etc.): manual labor which might include work in the field, even the making of the ark for Moses (Ex. 2:3): teacher,³³ who presents the first rudiments of education to her children, especially the principles having to do with their moral formation: occasionally a nurse (Ex. 2:7-10; Gen. 24:59; 35:8; Num. 11:12, etc.); or a midwife (Gen. 35:17; 38:28; Ex. 1:15-22- etc.); These and multitudinous other privileged duties as wife and mother were hers, but these, performed well, only brought joy and honor to her.

Of course, one might expect abuses on the parts of both the husband and the wife but these cases do not describe the general picture correctly as presented in the Pentateuch.

Genesis 38 and Deuteronomy 5:15-10 describe the provisions for levirate marriage whereby a wife, whose husband dies before children are born, is given to the next oldest brother-in-law and the first-born son of that relationship is counted as the seed of the dead husband to perpetuate his name and care for the estate. In the case of Judah's three sons, the eldest, Er, married Tamar and he died. Tamar was then given to Er's brother, Onan, who did not want to raise a son for his brother but entered into an illicit relationship with Tamar for sensual gratification only, instead of going through the process of refusing to act as levir to Tamar, and God slew him. Tamar should therefore have been given to the third brother, Shelah, but Judah delayed with obvious intent of refusing to follow the law. Tamar, after waiting a reasonable time forced the issue by playing the harlot, or “temple prostitute” (NASB), thus entering into a Forbidden relationship with her father-in-law as well as feigning to be a forbidden “temple prostitute.” Her life was spared when Judah realized the wrong done to her by him. Though the record nowhere suggests she was ever given Shelah, it does state that she had twins, the elder of which became a progenitor of the Messiah.

While this narration ended with reasonable satisfaction for Tamar, cult prostitution was forbidden (Deut. 23:17-18), whether male or female, and wages from such a practice were forbidden in the temple as an abomina-

tion. Adultery and Fornication in all their forms were forbidden and punishable by death or condemnation to childlessness (Lev. 10:10-21: Num. 25:1ff; Deut. 22:30; 27:20).³⁴

Some other things were also forbidden to a wife. She should not make vows that were not validated by her husband (Nun. 30:6-8); she should not wear man's clothing (Deut. 22:5) thereby attempting to deceive and to enter into the forbidden role of a male. In defending her husband who might take part in a physical fight with another Israelite, she was forbidden to seize the genitals of the assailant on pain of having her hand cut off (Deut. 25:11-12). Yet Zipporah, the wife of Moses, saved the life of her husband by circumcising her son in front of her husband (Ex. 4:25).

The question of bigamy and polygamy should be mentioned at this point. The first reference to a bigamous marriage is to Lamech (Gen. 4:19-24), of the line of Cain, who married Adah and Zillah, and was a perversion of God's original plan for man as well as a down-grading of womanhood. It is true that in an agricultural society "many hands make light work" and that this might have been the original basis for bigamy, yet its related problems—multiplied in polygamous marriage-- seem to outweigh the advantages. Jacob married Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:23, 30), though Leah came not by his choice. It resulted in broken harmony and jealousy (Gen. 30:1) in the home.

To control this ill-begotten state of affairs, laws were formulated (Deut. 21:15-17) which at least handled matters of inheritance. If a second wife was not taken, then it became common for part-wives, called "concubines," to be taken, as in the cases of Nahor (Gen. 22:24) and Abraham (Gen. 25:6). This tended to degrade womanhood even further. Then Esau, who at first took two pagan wives, Judith and Basemath (Gen. 26:34) to displease and bring grief to his parents (Gen. 26:35), began to multiply wives (Gen. 36:2-3) and concubines (Gen. 36:12, etc.), and the more so as he "saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac" (Gen. 28:39). This probably was encouraged by the earlier deceptions by his mother (Gen. 27:7-28:2) and brother, indeed a fitting example of the possible evil to result from a mother's deception and evil connivings.

Seeing the evils of polygamy, the Lord forbade the practice especially for a ruler of Israel (Deut. 17:15, 17), "lest his heart turn away" showing the effect of a wife upon the husband. It seems obvious that the Mosaic laws were aimed at "mitigating rather than removing evils"³⁶ which appeared to be almost inseparable from the then existing state of society. The enactments sought to raise the standard of womanhood; discourage polygamy; counteract and correct injustices caused by abuse of the male within a patriarchal society; restrict divorce; and encourage, if not enforce, a purity of life within the bonds of matrimony. More will be said under the subheading "Woman and Legal Rights" below.³⁷

WOMAN'S STATUS AND ROLE AS MOTHER

The woman's chief function was childbearing (Gen. 3:16), and a good mother would enjoy the praise and respect of the father and their children (Prov. 31:28).³⁸ Because the mother was responsible for feeding, clothing, training, and guiding her children they were commanded to “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3). “The position of the mother is higher under the Mosaic law than under any other system in antiquity.”³⁹

So highly respected was the mother that it was thought to be unthinkable that Joseph's “mothers” would bow down to their “sons” (Gen. 37:10). Reverence for her was demanded by law (Lev. 19:3), though a good mother earned it by her love and actions. To curse or strike one's mother or father (note, that no differentiation is made between mother and father in this and other cases) brought an automatic death penalty, as did an incestuous relationship between a son and his mother.

An interesting reference in one place (Gen. 24:28) suggests that at least in Padan-Aram, in Rebekah's home, with the passing of her father Bethuel, it is recorded that Rebekah “ran and told her mother's household” her story. The emphasis is on “her mother's household.” Usually the mother did not inherit from her husband but all was controlled by the eldest son. This is indeed a suggestion of a possible exception to the rule, maybe because of the very high respect accorded to Rebekah's mother.

Upon the death of outstanding mothers there was a period of weeping and mourning (Gen. 23:2; 35:8; 38:12; etc.), and occasionally even a pillar memorial was raised in her honor as in the case of Rachel (Gen. 35:20).

STATUS AND ROLE OF OTHER WOMEN

a. Widows

By levirate law (Deut. 25:5-10, illustrated in Gen. 38) a childless widow could and did continue as part of her husband's family while there was a levir (brother-in-law). In the event that there was no levir or that the levir refused to honor his role, the widow was free to remarry outside of the family, but would in the meantime leave her former father-in-law's home to live with her parents (Gen. 38:11, cf. Lev. 22:13). In the case of Tamar, while she was waiting for Shelah to mature, she apparently lived with her parents though still under the partial control of Judah (cf. Gen. 38:11, 24).

Upon the loss of her husband the widow donned mourning garments for an unspecified period (Gen. 38:14). She was at liberty to find food from the gleanings of the field, olives and grape harvests (Deut. 24:19-21). She was also given of the tithe of the increase “in the third year, the year of

tithing” (Deut. 26:12-13). She was protected by law from affliction (Ex. 22:22), distortion of justice (Deut. 27:19), and from being forced to give a garment in pledge (Deut. 24:17). Should she make a vow before the Lord she would be held accountable to fulfill the vow (Num. 30:9 as with a man v.2). And should she have a child by her husband it was her privilege to take a wife for her son (Gen. 21:21).

Her plight was a piteous one and she was commended to the charity of people along with orphans and resident aliens.⁴⁰

b. Divorcees

Prior to the law concerning divorce in Deut. 24:1-4 men apparently divorced their wives by ordering them out of the house⁴¹ which put the divorcee into an almost impossible situation, with the divorce law the divorcee was given a certificate of divorcement so that she could legally and properly become the wife of another man without any stigma attached. At the time of the divorce the husband should also return the *mohar* to the wife, which became somewhat of a deterrent to gaining a divorce on insufficient grounds.⁴² The law thus partially protected a woman from a capricious husband.

Should a divorcee make a vow to the Lord, she was held accountable to honor the vow as was the widow or the man (Num. 30:2, 9).

c. Slaves

Male and female slaves from pagan nations could be purchased and become part of one's possessions, but this was not possible with a Hebrew (Lev. 25: 59-46). In the case of the purchase of a Hebrew man or woman, only six years service can be demanded for in the seventh year they should be set free (Deut. 15:12). However, this apparently contradicts Ex. 21:7-11 where the female Hebrew slave may not be released in the seventh year. Rainey suggests that “The divergent law of Deuteronomy 15:12-17 seems to contemplate the possibility of an Israelite woman being sold into bondage for service only (perhaps as the wife of a man who sells himself into slavery because of his poverty.”⁴³

A daughter may be sold into slavery to pay a debt or because of the extreme poverty of the family (Ex. 21:7) but in no case may she be sold into prostitution (Lev. 19:29). A daughter thus sold with an idea of her marrying the master may be redeemed if she was found displeasing to him. In the event that she was designated for the master's son then she should be treated as a daughter. In no case may she be re-sold to a foreign people, but if she be found unacceptable then she is to be released freely with no payment (Ex. 21:7-11).

The slaves, male or Female, were considered property of the master (Ex. 21:20-21; Lev. 22:11), and may be punished or corrected by the master. Abuses were handled mildly however for if after a beating the slave, male or female, died the same day, then there would be unstipulated punishment, but if the slave should die after a day or two, no punishment would be meted out because the slave was his property (Ex. 21:20-21). However, in the event that an eye or a tooth were lost, then the master was duty-bound to release the slave, male or female (Ex. 21:26). Should a male slave be given a female slave as a wife by the master, and children be born of the union, then this could secure the release of the male slave, while the female slave and her children had to remain the master's property (Ex. 21:4).

In the case of Hebrew slaves the female was in a far more discouraging position for unless she were found unacceptable as a partner, or she lost an eye or a tooth, there was apparently no hope for her release.

WOMAN AND INHERITANCE

Little more can be said than that recorded above that in no case did an inheritance go to the mother,⁴⁴ but the daughters of Zelophehad (Num. 26:33; 27:1-9; 36:2-4) had the inheritance law changed so that it reads, "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter..." This inheritance is conditional upon the daughter marrying within the tribe. To marry outside the tribe would mean the forfeiture of the inheritance to the father's brothers.

WOMAN AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

The woman's role in organized worship was in general of a secondary nature. While she could be called to be a prophetess, and could lead the people in music, singing and sacred dancing (Ex. 15:20, etc.), yet she could not serve as a priest(ess).⁴⁵

Women, including daughters, maidservants and widows are specifically mentioned along with "all the congregation of Israel" (Ex. 12:3; Deut. 16:14) as taking part in the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. They were, however, represented as part of the covenant community of Israel through the circumcision of their fathers or husbands, and their sins were forgiven through their faith in the offerings made by the priests, their fathers or husbands.

They were credited with contributions for the tabernacle (Ex. 35:22-29; 38:8), and the daughters of the priests could take part in the eating of the breast and thigh of the wave offering (Ex. 10:14).

However, in Israel there was no place for the pagan temple or cult prostitute (Deut. 23:17-18; Num. 31:15-16; 25:1ff; see also Gen. 38:21-22). In the pagan fertility worship they had their part in the act of fertility of man, beast, and soil, by transferring through sympathetic magic the fertilization of the cult prostitute to the respective area to be made fertile. But while Israel's society was agriculturally based, there were no such fertility rites in their religious practices and therefore there was no such need for temple prostitutes. Their presence would only debase Israel and they were therefore condemned to death.

There also was no place in Israel for the sorceress or spirit medium. It was directly connected with Satanic powers and worship and anyone therefore connected with the practice was condemned to be stoned to death (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:27; etc.).

Thus the major part the woman played in the religious life was in the instruction and training of the children, and the instilling in their young hearts basic spiritual principles and truths. Then, as the family took part in the major feasts at the tabernacle so she would play her part in singing, praise, prayer, and heart preparation of herself and her children.

WOMAN AND SOCIAL LIFE

The Pentateuch reflects a certain stratification of the female Hebrew society. Deut. 28:56 (NASB) talks of "the refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement..." which is an obvious description of the elite, aristocratic woman at the top. At this period of time there was little or no middle class of specialists and business people, or *nouveaux riches*, which made the next class to be the "free" married women. Then would come the unmarried "free" woman, the divorcee and the widow. The final group would appear to be the handmaids who had become secondary wives, the concubines, and the female Hebrew slaves. The last group represent those in various states of bondage.

At public festivals and celebrations women played a prominent part in music, singing and dancing (Ex. 15:20-21). This was particularly true at the times of tribal and/or national victory, annual feasts, weddings, and (on a smaller scale) upon the birth of sons.⁴⁶ The ladies were also responsible for the food and drink at all times, and, while they might sing and dance, there is no evidence in the Pentateuchal times of the sensual type of dancing common to pagan festivities. The ladies also participated both as guests and attendants of guests.⁴⁷

Little detail is given in the Pentateuch regarding funerals and the woman's part at such times. However it was usual that the eyes of the dead were closed (Gen. 46:4) and then the body was wrapped but usually not placed in a casket. The nearest relatives embraced the body (Gen. 50:1). The men would tear their garments and put on sackcloth (Gen. 37:34). The pagan custom of cutting oneself and shaving the hair and beard were condemned (Lev. 19:27-28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1). The women were to care for food, usually a special dish for such occasions, and drink, and to weep and lament, though in the early days this was also done by the men (Gen. 23:2; 50:10). Later, the laments and songs were prepared and sung by women who looked upon it as their trade or profession to be taught to their daughters (Jer. 9:16ff).⁴⁸

WOMAN AND LEGAL RIGHTS

Many Hebrew laws treat men and women equally; both parents must be honored and revered by their children (Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16; 27:16), death being meted out to the child, male or female, that either strikes or curses the parents—either mother or father (Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:16); both adulterer and adulteress were to be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22); both male and female partners were to die if caught in an incestuous relationship (Lev. 20:11, 17-18); the punishment of leprosy was no respecter of sex and both male and female sufferers were banished from society as unclean (Lev. 13:29, 38; Num. 12:1-2, 10ff); punishments for striking, goring by an ox, cursing, or killing mother or father, male or female slave, man or woman, son or daughter were the same whether committed by a male or female (Ex. 21:15-32).

However, certain laws do reflect a different status for certain women under special circumstances: a daughter was less desirable than a son (Lev. 12:1-5); it was possible, under conditions of extreme poverty, that a father might sell his daughter to pay a debt (Ex. 21:7-11), this was however with the idea that she would become the wife of either her master or her master's son. Should she be found to be unacceptable then she was to go free without payment. Under no circumstances was she to be sold to foreigners. If sold into slavery, she was not, like her male counterpart, permitted to go free in the seventh year (Lev. 25:40). While she was not to be forced into prostitution by her father (Lev. 19:29), Lot certainly offered his daughters to the Sodomites to protect his male guests (Gen. 19:8; cf. Judges 19:24). A vow made by a single girl or married woman needed the approval of the father, husband or guardian to be valid. Without this the vow was made null and void (Num. 30:4-17). However this was not true of a widow or divorcee whose vows were as valid as any man's (Num. 30:2,9). In the evaluation of special vows the differentiation between the male and the female becomes evident (Lev. 27:2-7). For example, the value of the vow is "according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord": a male

between 20 and 60 years of age is evaluated at 50 shekels of silver, while a female of the same age group is evaluated at 30 shekels of silver. A male 5 to 20 years old is 20 shekels of silver while a female of the same age is 10 shekels of silver. A male up to three years of age is 5 shekels of silver, while a female of the same age is only 3 shekels. A male over 60 years is evaluated at 15 shekels of silver, while a female of the same age is rated at 10 shekels of silver. Roughly the value rating for the woman is approximately two-thirds that of the man.

One cannot therefore break from the conclusion that in the Patriarchal society in Pentateuchal days the woman, in general, had a lesser rating than the man, though as wife and mother she was revered, honored, respected and held in very high esteem.

SUMMARY

Initially there was full equality between man and woman as they came from the Creator's hands.⁴⁹ They were equal, complementary and compatible partners created in the image of God, given the same privilege of “subduing” the earth, and the same responsibility to people the earth with God-loving, God-worshipping, and God-like children. Under the shared blessing of God in a perfect surrounding, with God and angels as their teachers and companions, unbelievably they chose to sin, to go their own way.

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.⁵⁰

In their marital relationships Eve was placed in subjection to her husband, for he was to “rule” (*masal*) over her (Gen. 3:16), to be the head of a relationship of equals as Christ rules the church (Eph. 5:25, 28) and God the Father is the Head of Christ (I Cor. 11:3), but not to “rule” (*radah*) over her, as a master his slave, or as he was to control the animal world.

Unfortunately, as one leaves the first three chapters of Genesis, man's adulteration and abuse of his powers to rule, debased womanhood.

This abuse spread far outside the marriage relationship to include all women, and to reduce their position in some societies to little more than goods and chattels—property owned by the man as he owned a house, furnishings, land, animals and slaves.

God's original plan of monogamy quickly spread to bigamy, then polygamy, and the Mosaic laws, which were given within the framework of a polygamous society in which women were downtrodden, were aimed at relieving and improving conditions within the setting.

Kings were told not to multiply wives (Deut. 17:17) and, in the event of bigamy, two sisters should not be married (Lev. 18:18) because of rivalries and jealousies that were bound to arise. Each wife was given certain matrimonial rights (Ex. 21:10-11); and a eunuch, considered essential in a polygamous society, was banned from the “assembly of the Lord” (Deut. 23:1). Thus there was an attempt to discourage this occupation and, therefore, the system that brought it into existence.

Divorce, that was so simply and irresponsibly finalized by the husband, thus causing the most distressing results for the former wife, was now brought into some control (Deut. 24:1ff). This demanded time for re-thinking, emotions to cool, the intervention of a third party to attempt reconciliation, and the giving of a “Certificate of Divorce” by the husband to his former wife. This certificate gave her a clean bill of health to remarry.

Humane regulations improved the positions of slaves (Ex. 21:2-6); purchased wives (Ex. 21:7-11); captives (Deut. 21:10-14); and distribution of property to the children of different wives (Deut. 21:15-17).

Laws condemning fornication, adultery, and bestiality in all their forms, punishing the violators with death, served to curb the sins of carnality that were growingly prevalent at that time.

Man, however, was dominant, and this is reflected in social, religious, and legal affairs in the Pentateuch. Genealogies were given by the father's line with women rarely mentioned (Num. 26:46, 59; etc.). The father had absolute authority over children, married sons living with him, his wife (wives), and the whole household, this power extended even over life and death in some cases (Gen. 38:24).⁵¹

However, women who became good and industrious wives and mothers were respected and occupied an important place in Israel.⁵² God's plan, however, is reflected in its fullness not in the Patriarchal society of the Pentateuch but rather in Genesis 1 and 2 where man and woman were created equal, complementary, and compatible within the divine sphere of operation assigned to each. As the remnant church concerns itself with the presenta-

tion of the full gospel message to all the earth, and to the restoration of the image of God in each person, by God's grace, it becomes more and more imperative that man and woman be brought back from the ruinous situation into which sin has led them, and by the power of the Spirit re-establish the original unity, equality, and harmony in relationships that were characteristic of the original creation. However, until sin is removed the complete and perfect attainment of that standard will not be possible, but should this not indeed be the goal to which all are striving?

FOOTNOTES

1. G. F. Hasel, The Relationship of Man and Woman in the Beginning and at the End, unpublished paper Presented to the Biblical Research Institute, September 4, 1973, p. 5.
2. See for example H. H. Rowley, The Growth of the Old Testament, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 18.
3. Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9; 121:1-2; 124:8; 146:5; Dan. 11:34; Hos. 13:9.
4. See E.G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, Mountain view, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958, p. 46, “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.
5. C. F. Keil, The First Book of Moses (Genesis), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949, Vol. 1, p. 89.
6. William L. Bevan, art. “Women.” p.1785, W. Smith (Ed.), A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 3, London: John Murray, 1863. See also Anson Painey, art. “Woman,” cols. 623-625, Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 16, Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971.
7. Compare I John 2:16 and White, op. cit., p. 56.
8. White, op. cit., p. 57.
9. Hasel, op. cit., p. 14.
10. White, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
11. Hasel, op. cit., p. 18.
12. Poland de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961, p. 20; O. J. Baab, art. “Woman,” The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 4, New York: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 864

13. See also Gen. 29:11, etc.
14. Bevan, loc. cit.
15. For daughters of priests see Lev. 22:12-13.
16. Lewis N. Dembitz, art. "Woman, Rights of," p. 556, The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 12, New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1907.
17. See also Painey, op. cit., cols. 624-625.
18. Ibid.
19. This is illustrated in the story of Dinah and Shechem (Gen. 34:7-31), but the fact that a daughter had been forced left deep-seated hatreds which in this case led to the death of the Shechemites.
20. Gen. 24:4, 15, 29, 38; 28:2; etc.
21. Bevan, op. cit., pp. 1785-1786.
22. Baab, op. cit., p. 865.
23. Ibid. In Gen. 14:16, "the women"/wives were separated from "his possessions." In Deut. 5:21, "neighbor's wife is separated from house, field, animals and servants, yet she does belong to her husband as the husband belongs to her.
24. Dembitz, op. cit., p. 557.
25. Compare Deut. 20:7 and 23:5.
26. White, op. cit., p. 46.
27. See Gen. 37:2 where Bilhah and Zilpah are referred to as "his father's wives." The Hebrew word *nasim* "wives women," is used. These were considered above a concubine in rank (Hebrew: *lehenah* or more commonly *pilagas*), who were half wives, sometimes taken from among slaves (Gen. 16:2-3), and their sons were considered inferior to those born to full-fledged wives (Gen. 25:6; Judges 8:31; 9:18; etc.).
28. de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 26, 39.
29. Ibid.

30. M.S. Miller and J. L. Miller, art. "Women," p. 821, Harper's Bible Dictionary, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952.
31. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 39; Bevan, loc. cit.
32. Painey, op. cit., pp 623-624.
33. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 49.
34. Miller and Miller, op. cit., pp. 821-822.
35. See note #27.
36. W. L. Bevan, art. "Marriage," pp. 241-242, W. Smith (Ed.), A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 2, London: John Murray, 1863.
37. For a discussion on the effects of polygamy in the Old Testament, see Bevan, "Women," op. cit., p. 1786.
38. Painey, op. cit., col. 623.
39. Dembitz, op. cit., p. 558.
40. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 40. See also Ex. 22:21; Deut. 10:18; 24:17-21; 26:12-13; 27-17; etc.
41. S. H. Horn, art. "Divorce," p. 275, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1960.
42. Dembitz, op. cit., p. 557.
43. Painey, "Woman," op. cit., col. 625.
44. Dembitz, op. cit., p. 556. Unless Bethuel, Rebekah's Father, left the inheritance to his wife so that Rebekah's home was called "her mother's household" (Gen. 24:28).
45. Baab, op. cit., p. 866. It is suggested that this might be because of the sexual nature of the woman and her periods of ritual uncleanness. See Lev. 12:2, 5; 15:18-33; and the purification procedures in Lev. 12:6-8. See also Painey, loc. cit.
46. See Bevan, "Women," pp. 1785-1786; de Vaux, op. cit., p. 39.
47. Bevan, loc. cit.; Baab, op. cit., p. 865.

48. de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

49. See Hasel, op. cit., pp. 22-24, for the summary and implications of the record of Gen. 1-3.

50. White, op. cit., p. 59: see also F. D. Nichol, Ed., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 1, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1953, p. 234, commentary on Gen. 3:16.

51. See de Vaux, op. cit., pp. 20, 39: E. W. Heaton, Everyday Life in Old Testament Times, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956, p. 69; Baab, op. cit., pp. 864-865.

52. See the review by Louis Jacobs, art. "Women," cols. 625-628, Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 16, Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971.

