

“Do Not Go Near a Woman:” But Didn't We All Stand at Sinai?

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1. Shemot 19: 14-15

וַיֵּרֵד מֹשֶׁה מִן־הָהָר אֶל־הָעָם וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֶת־הָעָם וַיִּכְבְּסוּ שְׂמֹלֵתָם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעָם הִיוּ נְכַנִּים לְשִׁלֹּשֶׁת יָמִים אֶל־תִּגְשׁוּ אֶל־אִשָּׁה:

Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman.”

2. Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*

There is perhaps no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses' warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stand at Mount Sinai ready to enter into the covenant... Moses addresses the community only as men... At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible... This verse sets forth a pattern recapitulated again and again in Jewish sources.... On the one hand, of course we were there; on the other, how is it then that the text could imply we were not there?

3. Phyllis Trible, “Depatriachalizing in Biblical Interpretation”

The women's movement errs when it dismisses the Bible as inconsequential or condemns it as enslaving. In rejecting Scripture women ironically accept male chauvinistic interpretations and thereby capitulate to the very view they are protesting. But there is another way: to reread (not rewrite) the bible without the blinders... the hermeneutical challenge is to translate biblical faith without sexism.”

4. Bereishit 3: 16-19

אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר ה' אֱרֹבָה אֶרְבֶּה עֲצָבוֹנָךְ וְהָרַגְךָ בְּעֵצָב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים וְאֶל־אִישׁךָ תִּשְׁוָקֶתְךָ וְהָיָא יִמְשָׁלֶכְךָ:

To the woman [God] said, “I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children. Your desire will be to your husband and he shall rule over you.”

וּלְאָדָם אָמַר ... בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוֹבֶרְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לֶקַחְתָּ...

To the man [God] said... “By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the earth from which you were taken...”

5. Shemot 19: 10-11

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה לֵךְ אֶל־הָעָם וְקִדְשָׁתָם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וּכְבָסוּ שְׂמֹלֵתָם וְהָיוּ נְכִימִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יֵרֵד יְהוָה לְעֵינֵי כָל־הָעָם עַל־הַר סִינַי:

The Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. And they should be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will descend before the eyes of all the people on Mt. Sinai.

6. Shemot 20:2

...לֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנָי:

You shall not have any other gods before me...

Ibn Ezra

דבר הכתוב אלהים כנגד מחשבת עובדימו...

The text speaks in line with the thoughts of those who worship them...

7. Bereishit 29: 23, 25, 30, 33

וַיְהִי בְעֶרְבַּ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לֵאָה בָתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ: ... וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַהֲנִיָּהּ הוּא לֵאָה...

Evening came and [Laban] took Leah his daughter and brought her to him and he cohabited with her... morning came and behold she was Leah...

וַיָּבֵא גַם אֶל־רָחֵל וַיֵּאָהֵב גַּם־אֶת־רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה... וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי־שָׂנְאוּהָ אֲנִי...

He cohabited with Rahel also, and he loved Rahel more than Leah... [Leah] conceived again and bore a son and said, “The Lord has heard that I am hated...”

Kli Yakar

אף על פי שבלידת בן ראשון אמרה כי עתה יאהבני אישי וכל שבן שלא ישנאה, ולמה זה אמרה כי שנאה אנכי. מכל מקום נראה שהיא סברה שיהיה כן...

Even though in her first birth, she said, “Now my husband will love me”—and he certainly did not hate her! Why did she [now] say, “I am hated?” ... it seems she thought so...

8. Mining and Undermining: Noah and Jonah

- Water, boats, “Yonah,” sin, threatened destruction
- 40 days, *chamas*

9. Song of Songs

דודי לי ואני לו

My beloved is mine and I am his (2:16)...

אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו

I am my beloved's and his desire is for me (7:11)...

היושבת בגנים חברים מקשיבים לקולך השמיעיני:

O you who dwell in gardens, a lover is listening. Let me hear your voice (8:13)...