

PREFACE

*Translation is an abbreviated form of exegesis:
exegesis that does not have the space to explain
or justify itself.* —Adele Berlin

THE PRESENT TRANSLATION adapts the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) version only with respect to *social gender*.¹ To keep the presentation simple, this edition recasts the invaluable footnotes of the NJPS translation committee as endnotes; such notes are now called out in the translation via asterisks (*). As revising editor, I have added new endnotes that relate to social gender; such notes are called out via circles (°).²

THE NEED FOR A GENDER-SENSITIVE VERSION

My adaptation effort has followed the pioneering trail of the translation committee that produced NJPS. The driving force behind NJPS was the late Harry M. Orlinsky, who served as editor-in-chief of its first section, *The Torah*.³ He stated with justifiable pride that NJPS was “the first translation of the Hebrew Bible that went behind all previous translations”—looking afresh at the original Hebrew text, in order to take full account of the tremendous advances in knowledge about the ancient Near East made possible by the modern study of the distant past. At the same time as it drew upon the findings of history and science, it took stock of those traditional rabbinic interpretations of the biblical text that accorded with the translators’ plain-sense approach.

Orlinsky explained that NJPS relied rigorously on philology: “the meaning and nuance of every word and phrase and verse, in context, was considered anew and carefully before its equivalent in the idiom of the English language was decided upon.” Its translators did

not strive, as some do, to show how ambiguous the original text is, nor to convey how the text made meaning via rhetorical strategies. Rather, their aims were to convey the plain-sense meaning; to value clarity of expression; to employ idioms familiar to the contemporary audience; and to emphasize a religious message.

That distinctive set of characteristics has made NJPS the ideal basis for a gender-sensitive translation.

Inherent Strengths of NJPS

In 1969, Orlinsky authored another pioneering work, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (1969)—“the first time that a committee responsible for an official translation of the Bible [had] attempted a public and systematic exposition . . . of its labors and reasoning.” Shortly thereafter, he began to address a new topic in translation: gender. Lecturing widely, he would point out that the best-known Bible versions had too often rendered certain Hebrew nouns mechanically as referring to men—thus making women appear relatively invisible. For example, the Decalogue in the classic King James Version (KJV) of 1611 had God “visiting the iniquity of the fathers (*’avot*) upon the children” (Exod. 20:5) even though logic dictated—and other biblical passages indicated—that also in view were mothers and *their* sins. Orlinsky saw such customary renderings as misrepresenting the biblical text; and in his view, the solution lay in a contextual, idiomatic approach to translation—of which NJPS was the exemplar. (NJPS reads: “visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children.”) He would reiterate that its philological approach has no inherent ideological bias, but rather “seeks to determine within the context and in the light of pertinent data elsewhere in the Bible and in related extra-biblical societies what the author meant to convey.”

Where the Torah’s language suggested a neutral sense, NJPS avoided misleadingly ascribing gender, not only by rendering inclusively some “male” nouns, but also by rendering masculine inflections and pronouns idiomatically rather than literally. Thus, for example, what KJV had rendered as “thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in *his* cause” appears in NJPS as “you shall not subvert the rights of your needy in *their* disputes” (Exod. 23:6).

In short, NJPS inadvertently led the way among contemporary translations in “gender-sensitive” rendering.

Limitations of NJPS

Despite its overall strengths, the gender ascriptions in NJPS can still be called into question on a number of counts. I will now discuss, as two distinct categories, how NJPS handled the biblical text’s references to human beings and to divine beings.⁴

REFERENCES TO HUMAN BEINGS

Like every translation, NJPS contains some internal inconsistencies. For example, NJPS renders *’avot* in the same phrases and in similar contexts using terms with differing social-gender senses—NJPS reads “parents” in Exod. 20:5 (as noted above) yet “visiting the iniquity of *fathers* upon children” in Num. 14:18.

Meanwhile, at times the NJPS translators rendered in unduly male terms. For example, the Hebrew wording in Numbers 14 is ambiguous as to who is to be punished for brazen faithlessness: the men, or the people as a whole. Seeking the plain sense, the translators quite reasonably opted for the latter view (in contrast to some classic midrashic readings). Yet to render two Hebrew phrases that do not themselves specify gender, they employed English idioms at odds with their overall interpretation. We read that Moses urges an incensed God not to “slay the people to a *man*” (14:15), and that God then condemns a generation of Israelites to die in the wilderness “to the last *man*” (14:35).

Ironically, in some other cases NJPS reads neutrally where a *non*-inclusive rendering was actually called for. Three examples should suffice. First, NJPS could render *yeled* contextually as “lad, boy” (e.g., Gen. 4:23, 37:30); yet it unconventionally cast the plural *yeladim* as “children” in Gen. 32:23 even though in that context the term can refer only to Jacob’s sons (not to his daughter, Dinah). Similarly, NJPS rendered the noun *’edah* five different ways in the Torah; yet its rendering states that Moses was instructed to take a census of the Israelite “community” (*’edah*, Num. 1:2) although ancient censuses counted men only. And unlike prior translations, NJPS renders *banim* as “children” in Lev. 10:13–15, although the topic is donations that are restricted to priests—i.e., Aaron’s “sons.”

When it comes to women's biological functions, NJPS sometimes echoes older translations by resorting to idioms that are hardly part of contemporary English. Such wording adds a touch of strangeness to the translation that is not part of the original text. For example, NJPS four times describes a pregnant woman as being "with child."

In a number of other instances, the NJPS translators appear to have based their rendering on an inaccurate understanding of social gender in the biblical setting. For example, where God referred to Abram's eventual death as going "to your *'avot*" (Gen. 15:15; cf. 47:30), NJPS seems to have relied on a modern scholarly opinion that the Israelites counted only their male forebears ("fathers") as kin. Yet that view appears to be based on an etymological fallacy, meanwhile ignoring ample circumstantial evidence that suggests ancient Israelites also viewed their deceased mother and even her forebears as kin.⁵ The weight of the evidence argues for rendering *'avot* inclusively here as "ancestors" or the like.

Last but not least, the NJPS translators employed the standard English style of using male nouns and pronouns where a neutral sense was meant, which closely correlates with Hebrew grammatical structure. Unfortunately, this has proven ambiguous with regard to social gender: it can be difficult to tell whether "man," "kinsmen," "he," "his," and "him" connotes only male social gender or an inclusive meaning. In a sense-for-sense translation like NJPS, the standard style can confuse readers. The very nature of NJPS as contextually precise argues against readers' taking its male language as neutral; we would reasonably expect male terms to carry a male gender sense.

Contemporary readers make their way through a translation at a vast remove from the biblical setting. Many of us misconstrue that setting, perceiving the translated Bible as more male-oriented than the original audience probably perceived the Hebrew text to be. We imagine the Israelite past as having been so "patriarchal" that, for example, in the context of ritual animal sacrifices and male-only priests, some of us infer that women were not part of the scene. Thus when NJPS relates that if someone eats sacrificial meat while ritually impure, "that *person* shall be cut off from *his* kin" (Lev. 7:20b), we may take the word "his" not as gender neu-

tral but as referring to a male—discounting “person” as if it were a falsely generic term. That is, we may well understand NJPS to mean “that *man* shall be cut off from *his* kin.” In such ways the standard English style has put a stumbling block before readers.

REFERENCES TO DIVINE BEINGS

To refer to God, the Torah had used grammatically masculine language; as was typical of English translations, NJPS employed corresponding masculine terms in its rendering. Given that a Jewish translation would have reflected the standard belief that God *transcends* human gender categories, the translators presumably meant their masculine wording in a gender-neutral sense.⁶

The present adaptation remains a Jewish translation; that is, the publisher presumes that most of this book’s readers will be seeking to reckon with the non-gendered God of (present-day) Judaism, which places the Torah at its center. And such readers have grounds for discontent with the NJPS God-language. Many are well aware that “lord” is a male title by common usage; for them, rendering God’s personal name as “the LORD” can function like wearing male sunglasses to view the invisible deity: “I’m not sure what I’m seeing—but it appears to be masculine.” Furthermore, the translation’s masculine pronouns may conjure for them an image of a male deity, even though as a matter of logic or belief they would insist that God has no gender. In short, the NJPS style hinders their appreciation of the Torah text.

At the same time, many scholars of Israelite history now believe that our ancient text’s masculine inflections and occasional male imagery refer to what everyone at the time understood to be a *male* god—which would have gone without saying. If so, then the most *historically accurate* way to render the Torah’s God-language today would be in masculine terms. Such a view favors retaining the NJPS wording but construing it as truly male language.

Yet it can be argued that the Torah promoted to its original audience a deity “beyond gender.” Its text never ascribes to God anatomical sex features or sexual activity, in contrast to some ancient Near Eastern literature about high gods. Only in poetry and other clearly figurative passages does the text depict God in male social status terms. It meanwhile cautions against taking

such images too literally—stating that a male or female form misrepresents God (Deut. 4:16)—as if to say: the reality of God is beyond such terms. Further, grammatically masculine language would have been the only way to refer to a *non*-gendered deity.⁷ And contrary to conventional wisdom, the text seems to be written as if the audience was expecting definite signals before ascribing gender. In short, the Torah’s silence about God’s gender may well be a meaningful one, even when viewed in its original setting.

Finally, although I suspect that few readers have considered the matter, the same question regarding the depiction of God’s gender also applies to that of the Torah’s other divine beings, namely angels. The NJPS translators appear to have presumed that in the ancient world all of God’s divine agents were understood to be male, but there is reason to doubt that presumption.⁸

To mention shortcomings of NJPS is not to censure what remains as the Jewish translation of choice for those who value contextual precision and modern idiom. Rather, my point is that gender is such a complex and far-reaching cultural category that NJPS could not do it justice without a comprehensive and focused review of gender ascriptions both in the ancient text and in its translation.

I undertook such a review as the core of the present project. It showed me where to redress some NJPS oversights, how to take advantage of more recent scholarship, and where to reduce imprecision in NJPS’s English style. I then proceeded to test (and hopefully prove) Orlinsky’s 1991 assertion that “the English language has resources that allow a translator faithfully to translate . . . biblical texts and be inclusive where the text is inclusive, and exclusive where the original is exclusive.”

ADAPTATION METHODOLOGY

General Considerations

According to Professor Orlinsky, the charge presented to the original NJPS translators was “to render the Hebrew text as they believed the original author of that text meant it to be understood”

by the original audience. The present project took up the same challenge. (Of course, readers can never be sure about authorial intent, but we can make high-probability educated guesses in many cases—and narrow the range of possibilities in other instances.) The revising editor's task was also basically unchanged: to go back to the original Hebrew text and then stick to it as closely as possible while conveying its plain sense in idiomatic English.

I designed the adaptation effort to meet Orlinsky's twin goals of accuracy and clarity in the portrayal of social gender. I began with a comprehensive and scholarly analysis of the Torah's ascriptions of gender, taking nothing for granted. Often I and the consulting editors spent many hours (and sometimes days) in order to fully grasp the gender implications of a single Hebrew word—even a term that appeared only once or applied to the most minor of characters. Next came a review of how well NJPS conveyed the Torah's gender ascription in each passage. Where I found warrant to modify NJPS, I tried to employ the same rendering techniques as those that the NJPS translators had used as a matter of course.⁹ Not for nothing have I quipped that this adaptation is “just like NJPS, only more so.”

By now it should be clear that this adaptation is *not* a “gender-neutral” translation. On the contrary, it pays close attention to the nuances of social gender in the Torah. It reflects the depictions of an ancient text composed for an audience in which gender mattered a great deal. As revising editor I did not pass judgment on how Israelite society and the Torah constructed gender. My renderings neither commend nor condemn the ancient perception of the text. They take the text on its own terms, and they merely attempt to convey it accurately. (Where I know the social-gender sense to be disputed, I did sometimes note my interpretation.)

WHICH TEXT AND WHICH AUDIENCE?

This project has taken as the “text in question” the complete Torah that we have today, as preserved by the Tiberian Masoretes. With regard to establishing the text, I set aside the reconstructions of earlier source documents and of the text's historical development that have often preoccupied modern critical scholarship.¹⁰ For at some point, the Torah's composer(s) promulgated the set of full

five books as we know them, such that the audience would be inclined to make sense of a given passage by relating it to preceding passages and looking for coherence among them. The readers or listeners who were in the mind of the composer(s) at that point of “publication” are what I refer to as the “original audience.”

My working definition of the text presumes that changes to the text have been inconsequential since the original audience encountered it. (Rarely does the range of disagreement among the Torah’s Masoretic textual witnesses affect the meaning of a given verse.)

CONSTRUING AUTHORIAL INTENT

To this editor’s eye, the Torah is a carefully crafted text. Presumably it was consciously formulated the way it is, rather than other conceivable ways. On that basis, I have assumed that what the text says *is* the intention of its composer(s). Careful examination of the text can then highlight the implicit word choices and thus point toward the intended message. This is what the scholar of exegesis Paul R. Noble has called “interpreting a text in relation to the milieu of its production.”

At the same time, such weighing of the Torah’s language is not enough by itself. Every communiqué also takes for granted a certain awareness among its audience: what “goes without saying” is at least as important as what is stated. Persuasive writing involves making judgments about how the target audience will construe a text (given what they will predictably bring to the act of reading) and then fashioning the text accordingly. Therefore, the composer(s) of the Torah surely had a mental image of the target audience that conditioned what and how much to say.

The very nature of texts thus prompted me to construct a mental model of the Torah’s original audience—its worldview, assumptions, and concerns. What would they predictably *take as given*, especially with regard to gender? The closer that my mental model could match the one that the Torah’s composer(s) had in mind while composing the text, the more accurate my perception of the original message would be.¹¹

I reconstructed that long-ago mental model of the original audience by looking first of all to the Torah itself as a work of literature. Like all texts, the Torah includes many clues as to how it is

intended to be read, and as to the social world that it presumes.¹² In addition, I drew upon the findings of scholarship in various fields: philology; archeology; Egyptology, Assyriology, and the study of other nearby ancient Near Eastern literatures, documents, and inscriptions; semantics and cognitive linguistics; social history; and social science—particularly the ethnography of present-day cultures with ecological and economic bases and kinship-oriented structures similar to those of ancient Israel. Comprehending the construction of gender in the mind of an ancient audience often required lengthy investigation into a wide variety of specific topics. Much of the information I found useful is of recent vintage—it had not been available to the NJPS translators.

With my model of the original audience in hand, I employed it to grasp why the text was written the way it was. Again, my aim was to think like the text's composer(s). I situated myself the way that an editor looks over an author's shoulder, critically assessing from a marketing-communications perspective a draft text's effect on its target audience.¹³ In this way I determined what the finished text had meant to say.

Let me emphasize that the goal was *not* to establish how the Torah's actual audience historically construed the text. Whether anyone ever actually took the Torah as intended was the function of a broad range of factors beyond editorial control.

GENDER ASCRIPTION AND READING STRATEGY

All texts are ambiguous in many respects—including in their social-gender ascriptions.¹⁴ Readers must necessarily employ some strategy for resolving that ambiguity as they strive to make sense of a text.

The Bible provides seven factors that its audience can take into account in order to construe social gender. Those factors are: inflection, status, role, anatomy, name, reflection, and outright designation. *Inflection* refers to distinctions in grammatical gender that correlate somewhat with social gender. *Status* means the referent's position in the social structure. *Role* refers to the expectations, rights, duties, and artifacts attached to a particular status. *Anatomy* refers to the physical characteristics associated with gender. *Name* is the character's name, including the "son of" or

“daughter of” portion of a patronymic (or occasionally a matronymic). *Reflection* refers to how other characters treat the referent in question. And *outright designation* is when the narrator labels the referent in question as male or female.

Rarely, if ever, are all of those seven factors present in a single passage. The most definite ones are also the least common. The rest are not conclusive on their own. Given only incomplete data, the reader must usually infer the social gender via a kind of triangulation, combining the information from more than one factor. (A Hebrew-speaking audience usually reaches such a conclusion without conscious reflection.)

In determining the plain sense of the Torah, I presumed a first reading that proceeded from the start of the book—as opposed to re-reading in light of further information revealed only later in the text. However, I presumed that the audience would reliably withhold judgment about how to construe a noun at least until the end of the sentence in which it appeared, particularly if it was followed by a qualifying phrase. I also presumed that the audience would read for coherence, expecting a consistency of characterization as is typical of literature both ancient and modern.

LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITIES AND IMPERATIVES

The denizens of the ancient Near East characterized nearly all types of interpersonal relationships in terms of kinship. They regularly referred to someone unrelated by blood as “father” or “mother” or “brother” or “sister” or “son.” They did not always use such terms with gender concord. For example, a king might describe himself as a “father and mother” to his subjects, or a hymn might refer to a god as a “mother,” just as a goddess might be described with a male term. The book of Deuteronomy refers to a female Israelite slave explicitly as a “brother” (15:12). Such usages do not indicate that those kinship terms are common-gender nouns, but rather that they are being employed figuratively. Kinship terms had meaning aside from describing a blood relationship. In the Torah, the very high frequency of figurative usage of those terms leaves open the possibility that *any* biblical reference to a gendered kinship term (especially the “male” ones) might include those of the other gender.

One such instance of gender-inclusive usage of the kinship term *'ahim*—literally “brothers”—occurs just after divine fire has consumed Aaron’s two eldest sons. Moses speaks to Aaron and to the latter’s surviving sons, instructing them not to mourn, because their priestly tasks takes priority. “But,” says Moses, “your *'ahim*, all the house of Israel, shall bewail the burning” (Lev. 10:6).¹⁵ Now, the ancient Israelite audience would have reliably imagined that their ancestors, while camped all together in the wilderness, “bewailed” the priests’ deaths via the involvement of women.¹⁶ Thus in plain-sense terms, the text’s composer(s) very likely intended *'ahim* as gender inclusive.

In the text, not only kinship terms but also other “male” nouns often warrant scrutiny. In Hebrew, masculine grammatical gender is considered normative and thus takes priority when referring either to a definite mixed-gender group or to an indefinite person of unspecified gender (see, e.g., Exod. 21:21; Lev. 13:29–33; Num. 5:7–8; Deut. 13:7–11). A masculine-inflected verb can even refer to a feminine noun, which occurs most often if that verb precedes the noun. Similarly, status or role nouns, even when nominally male, are often used in such a way as to incorporate their female counterparts: the so-called male noun is also a generic term. Indeed, some grammarians prefer to describe it as *unmarked* for gender.

Because of the ambiguity of male nouns and masculine inflections, the original audience did not take them at face value. Therefore, we must now examine such language closely in order to determine precisely what it indicates with regard to social gender.

Ancient “inclusive” language cannot be dismissed as, say, a figment of a post-modern feminist imagination. Rather, it was part of the biblical ethos. This can be seen even in mundane conversation, as when the Bible’s characters matter-of-factly refer to females using the grammatically masculine interrogative pronoun *mi* (Gen. 19:12; Job 38:29; Songs 3:6, 6:10, 8:5; Ruth 3:9, 16).

The same consideration applied when faced with wording that had morally binding force. In the book of Judges, the chieftain Jephthah makes an infamous vow to God that refers to its object in grammatically masculine terms. Even so, he and his daughter understand that his vow applies to *her* after she otherwise fulfills its conditions (Judg. 11:30–31, 34–40). It could hardly be true that

the text's audience was expected to react by saying, "What a fool Jephthah was! He could have spared his daughter simply by claiming that he had only a *male* in mind when he made his vow." Rather, we can safely infer that the audience shared not only the biblical characters' sense of tragedy but also their understanding of the gender-inclusive sense of indefinite masculine language.

The Bible also expected Israelites to allow for "inclusive" language in the realm of civil law. The book of Jeremiah recounts how the king and Jerusalem's elite covenanted to free their male and female slaves (Jer. 34:8–16). Yet when the narrator quotes God's restatement of the relevant directive to Jeremiah, it reads: "each of you shall let his *brother* Hebrew go free who has been sold to you and has served you for six years—you must set *him* free" (Jer. 34:14, my translation; cf. Deut. 15:12). Grammatically speaking, the divine language is again decidedly masculine (even more so than my rendering reflects). But obviously Jeremiah is supposed to construe that language as gender-inclusive, as is the reader.

GENDER AND THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

In the ancient Near East, much of the course of a person's life was determined by facts of birth. One of those salient facts was biological sex characteristics, which prompted an assignment of gender. Gender distinctions helped to keep society running efficiently—predetermining who did what, and who answered to whom. Thus women possessed vital expertise that men seldom (if ever) grasped, while men held vital skills and knowledge that women seldom (if ever) learned. (In frontier rural areas where mere subsistence was the goal, such gender arrangements were probably seen as necessary for survival; in relatively more affluent areas, gender roles may have been more flexible.) Gender mattered in another way as well: as a factor in the definition of personal integrity and reputation. Prestige and influence—the regard of others—depended on social norms that differed by gender. So women and men each learned how to show themselves to be exemplars of their respective genders in somewhat distinct ways. Little wonder that when a baby was born, the first detail disclosed (as is the norm in America today) was whether it was a boy or a girl.¹⁷

The composer(s) of the Torah could rely upon the fact that as part of the act of reading—of making sense of the text—the original audience would apply their society’s familiar gender categories to textual interpretation. That audience was practiced (already from childhood) in sorting out the social-gender sense of language as a matter of course, putting together various clues to the intended gender of a referent. Consider the tale in which a “messenger of יְהוָה” takes a position in the way of the seer Balaam as he traveled on his she-ass (Num. 22:22b). If the original audience read only that far and took the text on its own terms, then given certain conventions—of syntax, grammar, messenger protocol, and the nature of a divine being—they would have to say that this was not yet a definitively established character with a clear social gender. But by the next verse, when that messenger is further described as standing planted with a “drawn sword” in hand,” the audience would reliably perceive the character as definitely male: a sword was an artifact that clearly signaled maleness, as a matter of social and literary convention.

Scholars dispute the date by which the Torah appears to have come together, although the range of disagreement is not great—a mere nine hundred years or so! Yet it turns out that one can draw robust conclusions about the text’s gender ascriptions without having to fix a particular date within this period for the first promulgation of the Torah as a completed book. That’s because the factors that would have most affected the original audience’s gender perceptions of the biblical text remained quite stable over the period in question. Those factors include: more than three-quarters of the population lived in rural villages and engaged in agriculture; the basic social and economic unit was the corporate household, typically headed by a man; people conceived of their society in terms of extended patrilineages traced to a common ancestor; persons situated themselves in their community largely on the basis of kinship and gender roles; individuals derived their sense of identity from their ancestry, and they viewed the well-being of their corporate household as paramount; social order was maintained mainly by a balanced opposition between groups; the threat of war or marauders was always on the horizon, if not at hand, and “real men” knew how to handle a bow and a sword;

men featured not only in military endeavors but also in formal communal leadership; women made major contributions to the economy and to its management; women were highly visible in public communal settings of celebration or mourning; and women could acquire property (including slaves and land) via inheritance, dowry, or purchase.¹⁸ The continuity and uniformity of that social world in these respects also makes it fairly safe to combine extant evidence from different centuries in order to draw conclusions about the construction of gender by the text's original audience.

GENDER AND THE PLAIN SENSE OF THE TEXT

The Bible speaks with many voices. Like great literature in general, it generates meaning not only through its straightforward statements but also via structural devices, motifs, word plays, and other allusive formulations that for attentive readers conjure up connections to many disparate things, such as other passages of the Bible. A plain-sense reading of the text focuses on the meaning of its words in their immediate context. Yet a given term can easily mean more than one thing in context. In a plain-sense translation, as a rule, only one meaning can appear at a time. So what happens in those cases if one meaning is gender neutral while the other is not—which gender sense prevails?

At such points, I defined my charge as deciding which sense the text's original audience would have perceived in the *foreground* of their mental image, as they encountered the word in that particular context. Then I sought to convey the foreground sense of the term. (Background meanings were then literally lost in translation.)

To the ancients, the foreground sense in some social situations would have been more *male* than in today's society. The Torah's original audience experienced as real and concrete their society's gendered social institutions: the male head of the corporate household; the patrilineal inheritance of land; male hegemony in the militia; men as clan elders and kings; etc. In the minds of the audience, textual allusions to such institutions probably conjured up an image of men carrying out their responsibilities as men.

For example, in one account of a communal ritual, God tells Moses to assemble the "whole Israelite *'edah*" and have them "lay

their hands” upon the Levites, who are to be dedicated thereby to divine service (Num. 8:9–10). Although ‘*edah*’ often means “community,” here practical logistical considerations confirm that the plain sense of ‘*edah*’ refers (as in some other passages) to a smaller body: the council of elders who customarily acts on behalf of the entire community. (The Hebrew word rendered as “whole” is often not used literally in the Torah.)

The text refers to that council by the broader term because its members are the community’s acknowledged embodiment. Yet surely the text’s composer(s) knew that the original audience was oriented by their everyday experience to the concrete reality of such an institution, which existed in their own villages and towns. If so, then the text’s expansive wording was relying on the audience to place a leadership body in their mental foreground. Thus what appears at first glance to be a gender-inclusive phrase (“whole Israelite community”) would probably have been perceived in terms of a body of men.

As translator, I wish to convey to the contemporary audience the implicit male image in the text, out of my commitment to give as precise a picture as possible of the social-gender sense. Therefore in that passage I replaced the NJPS rendering as “whole Israelite community” with “Israelite community leadership.”

SOURCES CONSULTED

I enriched my direct encounter with the text by various means, looking most often to the following: the JPS publications *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* and the *JPS Torah Commentary* series; rabbinic commentators who tended toward plain-sense readings of the text (Saadia, Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak, Sforno, Benno Jacob); standard grammars and lexicons; feminist interpretations; other contemporary academic scholarship that sought a plain-sense reading of the text as it stands; and—particularly in the latter stages of the project—the products of translators who preceded me (for Genesis, for example: E. A. Speiser, Robert Alter, Stephen Mitchell, and the late Chaim Stern; the New Revised Standard Version; and others). Although these sources seldom addressed precisely the same questions that drove the present project, they often opened up possible readings that

I had not considered, or added to the arguments for or against a particular reading.

My interactions with the consulting editors were also happily fruitful. Carol L. Meyers (the Mary Grace Wilson Professor of Religion at Duke University in North Carolina) served as consulting editor for Genesis and Exodus; Adele Berlin (the Robert H. Smith Professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Maryland in College Park) did so for Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They advocated the closest possible literal rendering. The third consulting editor was Ellen Frankel (editor-in-chief of The Jewish Publication Society), who meanwhile favored the most felicitous literary rendering. Both approaches complemented and balanced my own strong pull toward contextual precision.

References to Human Beings

PROCEDURE AND EXAMPLES

With regard to the Bible's human characters—the main focus of this project—my goal was to enable a contemporary audience to sit in on an ancient conversation between the Torah's composer(s) and its original audience.¹⁹ The methodology that I used can be boiled down to two steps:

1. *Analyze the Torah's gender ascriptions.* Identify where social gender is at issue or otherwise in the foreground.
2. *Render into idiomatic English.* Map the text's ascriptions of gender onto a contemporary American view of gender.
 - a. Where gender is at issue in the Hebrew text, make sure that it is rendered in gendered English; conversely, where gender is not at issue, make sure that the text is rendered in gender-neutral English.²⁰
 - b. Make sure that the gender ascription will not be misconstrued by the contemporary audience (which brings different gender assumptions to the reading than the ancient audience did).

A relatively simple example will serve to illustrate the procedure. In Gen. 13:7–8, both the narrator and Abram mention quarrels among *ro'im* (NJPS: “herdsmen”). Is social gender at issue—that is, in the foreground?

1. *Analysis.* Based on the following considerations, the text gives no indication that gender is germane.

Grammar: A masculine plural noun nominally refers to boys or men but can include girls or women as well. The noun's referent is definite (designating specific groups).

Semantics: The usage of this professional noun is literal rather than figurative.

Gender roles: The text's ancient audience had no reason to view herding or quarreling as gender-restricted activities. In their society, women did some of both.

Context: Gender is not at issue in this episode.

Genre: For narrative, the audience is inclined to construe a noun as concretely as possible.

2. *Rendering.* This noun should be rendered in gender-inclusive terms. Although the NJPS "herdsmen" could have been meant as gender neutral, many readers today would not take it as such, or would at least pause to wonder. For clarity, I substitute a more clearly gender-neutral term. Hence, "herders."²¹

Other sample changes to NJPS as a result of the application of this procedure are shown in the table on page xxxi.

THE ROLE OF LITERARY GENRE

In the preceding narrative example, the genre did not affect the social-gender sense of the term in question. However, genre often does make a difference, as in *legal material*, which by its nature deals in generalizations. Students of law logically expect its rules to apply broadly and consistently unless the particulars of a situation make that case exceptional. Thus whenever men and women act in the same capacity doing something that the society does not mark as uniquely male or female, the rules should apply equally to both.

The Torah couches most of its laws in grammatically masculine indefinite terms. We saw earlier how the book of Jeremiah expected that prophet and the book's audience to construe such language as gender inclusive (Jer. 34:8–16). Further evidence comes from Mesopotamia, because many scholars have concluded that biblical law collections were part of a larger ancient Near Eastern legal tradition. In Mesopotamia, certain activities in which women occasionally participated in real life (such as creditor or slave

owner) were treated in the laws only in male terms. Practically speaking, however, the masculine language regulated the situations of women as well as men. It thus appears that the Mesopotamians understood at least some of the masculine language of their laws in a gender-inclusive sense.

Some scholars hold that the male-oriented legal language indicates that the text's composer(s) had only men in view. It would be more accurate to say that the male language reflects the social hierarchy of the ancient Near East, in which the truly autonomous decision makers—those most capable of being held responsible for their actions—were heads of corporate households, who were typically men. Further, those householders would have been held responsible for many of the deeds of their household's members. To that extent, the applicable law is directed not to all men but only to *certain* men, those who have the requisite authority.

The real question, however, is how far the language can be extended given the nature of the case. In a society where women sometimes functioned in the capacities to which the laws refer, the audience would reliably tend to take the legal texts *juridically*. That is, they would construe those laws as if they must apply more broadly than merely to the typical case that a narrow reading might perceive. They would think about the women they knew—their newly married niece whose dowry included a slave, or their widowed sister who had begun to manage her late husband's estate on behalf of their minor son, or the prostitute in the next village who owned a troublesome ox—and expect that the text's civil and criminal laws applied equally to those situations. For that reason, I concluded that in a legal text, for a case in which gender was not at stake, the Torah's ancient audience was inclined to take male language in a neutral sense.

Another genre that affects how the original audience would have construed social gender is *genealogy*. The impact is best illustrated by example. In Gen. 22:24, the narrator states that Abraham is told that his brother Nahor has fathered offspring (a total of twelve), including four by a secondary wife: "And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore [children]: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah." In the Hebrew text of this verse, is social gender at issue or otherwise in the foreground?

1. *Analysis.* Based on the following factors, the text does indicate that gender is germane: the original audience most likely would have concluded that the first three children listed are male, whereas the last one is female.

Grammar: In Hebrew, the form of a name does not always correlate with social gender.²² On the basis of these names' form alone, the first three children mentioned in our verse are probably (but not certainly) male; the fourth child is probably (but not certainly) female.

Context: These four children are not otherwise referred to by any noun, pronoun, inflection, or patronymic (*ben* or *bat*) that would indicate social gender.

Familiarity and Convention: In the Bible, the name Maacah is given to five or six other persons—all of whom are women.²³ The reported societal prominence of some of those women strongly suggests that the text's original audience was familiar with this name (apart from the Bible); it also argues against Maacah's meanwhile having been in Israelite practice a man's name as well.

Placement: Genesis discloses Nahor's progeny only after Abraham has (by his own hand) nearly lost his only heir, Isaac. Such literary placement does not in itself require that all of Nahor's children be sons. If Abraham previously had a daughter he could have solved his heirship problem through her;²⁴ but he has none, so the news of his brother's twelve children (connoting a full complement) highlights the tenuousness of Abraham's situation equally well regardless of their gender.

Genre: In a genealogy, the audience is inclined to construe gender as germane, because lineages are normally stated in terms of men. Thus names that appear to be male are presumptively taken as such. However, biblical genealogies of Israelites do occasionally identify a lineage by a woman's name—especially at the end of a list of segments.²⁵ This suggests that a female would come to mind as a possibility at the end of the list in question.

Nahor's total of twelve offspring might well have evoked for the original audience certain well-known tribal

confederations that were represented as descended from twelve *brothers*. If so, however, that audience most likely would have perceived as conspicuously *absent* the explicit mention here of “twelve sons” or the like, as well as a national designation such as *bene Nahor* (“sons of Nahor” or “Nahorites”; corresponding to “Ishmaelites” and “Israelites”).²⁶ Confederation is not the foreground sense here.

Names in biblical genealogies often represent ethnic groups or settled locales, and these names are no exception. In particular, the Bible twice mentions that the “Maacathites” lived in a territory that bordered that of the Israelite tribe of Manasseh (Deut. 3:14; Josh. 12:5). The Israelites did consider women to be the founders of towns in Manasseh’s own territory;²⁶ thus it would not be surprising if they understood Maacah, that neighboring people’s eponymous ancestor, also to be a woman. Indeed, one of the many biblical women named Maacah was Manasseh’s daughter or daughter-in-law. That high-level Israelite genealogical position seems to allude to the neighboring people—and to our Maacah (in Gen. 22).²⁸

2. *Rendering.* Each child’s gender in Gen. 22:24 as perceived by a contemporary reader of NJPS does not match the likely perception of an ancient reader of the Hebrew text. Rather, most contemporary readers would assume that all of the names are male. (In other words, like many other translations, NJPS obscured the presence of a woman here.) To give our readers an experience closer to that of the ancient audience, I have inserted some clarifying words and punctuation.²⁹ Hence: “. . . also bore [sons]—Tebah, Gaham, and Tahash—and [a daughter,] Maacah.”

THE ROLE OF PHILOLOGY

Often we found that a common noun’s lexical domains significantly affected the social-gender sense in ways not recognized by NJPS or other English translations that we consulted. Of such words, the term *’ish* deserves special mention, because (together with its effective plural, *’anashim*) it is one of the most common nouns in biblical Hebrew—occurring about 570 times in the

Torah and 2200 times throughout the Bible. Lexicographers and grammarians customarily gloss *’ish* as “man,” but the import of this assigned equivalence is often misunderstood: the word “man” in English has more than a dozen senses that correspond to the usage of *’ish* in the Bible, and only *one* of those senses is emphatically male. For most instances of *’ish* in the Torah, social gender is not at issue; while its use may correspond to that of “man” in English, the foreground sense is something other than “adult male.”

NJPS recognized that *’ish* has a wide semantic range by rendering it variously according to context. In Genesis, for example, I count fourteen different renderings of the singular form alone. Still, in the majority of instances in that book, NJPS renders *’ish* as “man” (and *’anashim* as “men”). A gender-sensitive translation, however, warrants even more precision as to the contextual sense of *’ish*, because the audience for such a translation tends to expect clarity as to which gender is in view. To avoid giving the wrong impression, my adaptation restricts the use of “man” to mean “adult male,” employing other words to cover the additional senses of *’ish* that traditionally are also rendered as “man.”³⁰ This policy has turned out to be far-reaching: the present adaptation employs the words “man” or “men” only about a third as often as *The Torah* of NJPS. (See also the last section of the table on p. xxxi.)

That difference is not only dramatic but also revealing. It demonstrates that the Torah did not constantly emphasize social gender and maleness—as readers of NJPS (not to mention a more literal translation) might imagine. What the biblical text is attending to most often are matters of social roles, social station, and the like. While the Torah frequently refers to men, their social gender is supposed to be apparent from the topic or other wording; it usually goes without saying explicitly. The precise treatment of *’ish* is one way that the present translation reflects more accurately the degree of the text’s attention (or inattention) to social gender, relative to other factors. It takes the text on its own terms. It serves to put gender in perspective.³¹

ACCOUNTING FOR UNCERTAINTY

I attempted to decide the social-gender sense based on the “preponderance of the evidence.” Even so, a number of gray areas

remained—usually because of contemporary ignorance about conditions in ancient Israel. In those cases I sometimes gave an alternative rendering in an endnote, similar to NJPS practice. Or, after making my best guess, I resorted to an endnote that is roughly equivalent to the phrase employed so forthrightly by the NJPS translators: “Meaning of Hebrew uncertain.” One example is the divine instruction to *bene yisra’el* (NJPS “the Israelite people”) to wear tassels on the “corners” of their garment (Num. 15:37–41). Given the text’s vague wording, the lack of contextual gender-marked clues, and the lack of clear references to such practices among women either in the Bible or in extrabiblical literature or iconography, I remained at a loss to “predict” how the original audience would have ascribed a social-gender sense to this directive. So I retained the NJPS rendering and added an endnote: “Social-gender force here of Heb. *bene yisra’el* uncertain.”

References to Divine Beings

THE TETRAGRAMMATON

To represent the Name (the four-letter “personal” name of God that is traditionally not pronounced as it is spelled), NJPS adopted a practice that has long been widespread: rendering the Name impersonally as “the LORD.” That custom dates back more than two thousand years to the first translation of the Hebrew Bible—the ancient Jewish version in Greek called the Septuagint. (The audience for that translation lived in the polytheistic milieu of Hellenistic Egypt. The translation’s producers apparently wanted to make an ideological point, emphasizing that their Deity was not merely one more named god among many. As a substitute name, *kyrios* [“Lord”] put this particular deity in the spotlight.) At the same time, however, some ancient Septuagint copyists employed another approach as well: they consistently inscribed the Name using Hebrew letters—in what was otherwise a Greek translation.

Meanwhile, in the land of Israel, some copyists of Hebrew manuscripts were employing a similar approach by writing the Name in a special way.³² For the latter, they took to using the archaic Hebrew script that Jewish scribes had abandoned several hundred years earlier in favor of an alphabet used by Aramaic speakers.³³

In the view of those scribes, not only could the Name not be translated into *another* language, it could not even be properly presented in the standard script in the *same* language!

In short, the Name has long been treated not like any ordinary Hebrew word but like something totally other. Such distinctive treatment appears to be a reflex of the monotheistic concept of God as unique and transcendent.

Ellen Frankel and I asked certain scholars, rabbis, and leaders for suggestions on how best to represent the Name in this translation. We received thoughtful input from two dozen respondents. Although we began by seeking an English rendering, we came to see that no rendering could do justice to the Name, neither as presented in the Bible nor as treated thereafter in Jewish lore. The Torah employs the Name primarily *as a name* (not an attribute, not as a declaration, and not in terms of etymology), which surely is how the original audience experienced it. All things considered, we decided to represent the Name untranslated, in (unvocalized) Hebrew letters.³⁴ This styling enables the word to function as a name, without limiting the conception of God to a single quality.

We invite those who read this translation aloud to pronounce the Name via whatever term that they customarily use for it.

GENDER IN REFERENCES TO GOD OR TO ANGELS

In the absence of contextual indications that gender was germane, I rendered the Torah's references to divine beings in gender-neutral terms. This policy is not meant to foreclose discussion about the force of the Hebrew wording. Rather, it provides better grounds for such a debate: a consistent experience of the text as noncommittal with regard to God's gender. And those who prefer to think that the deity of the Torah's composer(s) was "male" are still free to construe the neutral language in that way.

In practice, such a rendering meant recasting NJPS to avoid gendered pronouns for God. Usually I employed the kind of approaches illustrated by the examples in the table on the next page. Occasionally, a passive construction seemed a justifiable reflection of the Hebrew syntax, in which case I was careful to ensure that even without explicit mention the referent would still be clear from the context.

NJPS	THIS ADAPTATION
He said	[God] said
His people	God’s people
His covenant	the Covenant
His laws that He enjoined upon you	the laws that were enjoined upon you
His voice	the divine voice ³⁵
the fear of Him	the fear of God
doing what displeased the LORD and vexing Him	doing what displeased and vexed יהוה

To remain true to the text’s nuances, I did not employ neutral language throughout. Where God is called “lord,” “father,” and “king,” the gendered nature of such status in the ancient Near East is germane. Rendering generically would alter the gist of the metaphor. Similarly, I recognized poetic license in passages of epic poetry that describe God as “warrior.” There, too, masculine language is germane, for throughout the ancient Near East, warriors were understood to be male. In those cases, my rendering conveys the ancient perception via male language.³⁶

SIGNIFICANCE

The present adaptation of *The Torah* is one of many useful translations. Other translation approaches—whether literary, midrashic, mystical, or historical—can be of value without having to agree.³⁷ The renderings herein will differ from some traditional rabbinic understandings, or from some contemporary feminist interpretations, or both. Such differences are to be expected especially if those approaches are not seeking the text’s plain sense. Each way of reading the text can potentially serve as a jeweler’s loupe for viewing one of the many facets of the brilliant-cut diamond that is the Torah.³⁸

Those people who have been involved in this translation project, or with whom I—as an occasional teacher of Torah—have shared its approach, have come to it already in possession of a favored way of reading the text. Most if not all of us have been pleasantly surprised by how fascinating this particular approach has proven to be. It has opened up possibilities not previously

imagined. And it has brought us closer to the text, to our ancestors, and to God. Speaking as a rabbi, I could hardly ask for more than that. Whether readers will be as captivated by the *results* of this approach remains to be seen. However, if those results stimulate in them even a few of the same bright-eyed questions, and even a bit of the open-ended encounter with the magic of Torah that I have experienced, I will consider this work to be a success.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Happily, I am in the position to thank many people for their generous help in the production of this book. The present translation includes, extends, and substantially revises work performed on behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism and published in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, Revised Edition (URJ Press, 2005). I include here those who took part in that earlier effort.

I am grateful to the following persons:

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Hara Person, the editor-in-chief of URJ Press, launched the earlier version of this adapted translation (together with then-publisher Kenneth Gesser) and served as a critical reader of its drafts.

My father, Peter K. Stein, while I was his student thirty years ago in measurement systems engineering, rigorously mapped out the pitfalls in any transmission of information—insights that continue to serve me in good stead as an editor.

The staff at JPS who nurtured this project include Janet Liss, Carol Huppig, Robin Norman, and Shannon MacDonald. Finally, the JPS Editor-in-Chief Ellen Frankel has remained a consistent champion of this project throughout the nearly three years that it has been underway.

This book is the beneficiary of the assiduousness and generosity of the aforementioned persons—and of still others. Even so, surely errors are to be found within, and the responsibility for those remains with me.

Finally, a word about the name of this book. We call this adapted translation *The Contemporary Torah* because it reflects contemporary interests about gendered language. Indeed, modern readers are keenly interested in how ancient audiences viewed social gender and how they verbally represented God. Meanwhile, scholars often refer to Bible translations via abbreviations—NJPS, OJPS, NRSV, KJV, etc. In keeping with this convention, we propose referring to this version of the JPS translation as CJPS, that is, the “Contemporary” JPS translation.

David E. S. Stein

Revising Editor

ראש חדש סיון ה'תשס"ו

May 28, 2006

Sample Social-Gender Changes to NJPS, by Problem Category

Gender not at issue—NJPS rendered in masculine terms

LOCALE	NJPS (EMPHASIS ADDED)	THE CONTEMPORARY TORAH
Gen. 42:11	we are honest <i>men</i>	we are honest people
Exod. 6:12	a <i>man</i> of impeded speech	who gets tongue-tied
Num. 14:35	they shall die to the last <i>man</i>	and so be finished off

Gender at issue—NJPS rendered in neutral terms

LOCALE	NJPS (EMPHASIS ADDED)	THE CONTEMPORARY TORAH
Gen. 22:20	has borne <i>children</i>	has borne sons
Exod. 30:12	the Israelite <i>people</i>	the Israelite men
Num. 1:2	Israelite <i>community</i>	Israelite company [of fighters]
Num. 26:7	the <i>persons</i> enrolled	the men enrolled

Gender not at issue—NJPS unduly restricted gender roles

LOCALE	NJPS (EMPHASIS ADDED)	THE CONTEMPORARY TORAH
Exod. 21:7	a <i>man</i> sells <i>his</i> daughter	a parent sells a daughter
Deut. 23:16	turn over to <i>his</i> master	turn over to the master
Deut. 23:25	another <i>man’s</i> vineyard	a fellow [Israelite]’s vineyard

NJPS English style that conveyed a neutral sense ambiguously

LOCALE	NJPS (EMPHASIS ADDED)	THE CONTEMPORARY TORAH
Exod. 8:13	<i>man</i> and beast	human and beast
Lev. 14:4	<i>him</i> who is to be cleansed	the one who is to be purified
Deut. 27:18	a blind person on <i>his</i> way	a blind person underway

NJPS imprecision in rendering ‘ish as “man”

LOCALE	NJPS (EMPHASIS ADDED)	THE CONTEMPORARY TORAH
Gen. 24:30	thus the <i>man</i> spoke to me	thus the emissary spoke to me
Exod. 4:10	a <i>man</i> of words	good with words
Num. 1:4	a <i>man</i> from each tribe	a <u>representative</u> from each tribe
Num. 13:3	all the <i>men</i>	all of them being <u>notables</u>
Num. 27:18	an inspired <i>man</i>	an inspired deputy
Deut. 1:17	fear no <i>man</i>	fear neither party
Deut. 21:15	a <i>man</i> has two wives	a householder has two wives

NOTES

1. Begun in 1955, the NJPS translation of the Torah (that is, the Pentateuch) first appeared in 1962. The original translation committee then revised its work in 1967 (“second edition”), and again in 1985 when *The Torah* was incorporated into *Tanakh* (the full Hebrew Bible). Later, JPS issued a “third edition” in 1992 and a further revision as part of the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* in 1999.

The present translation also incorporates a few minor punctuation and spelling corrections to NJPS.

For my working definition of *social gender*, see the Dictionary of Gender in the Torah (in the back of this book) under “gender.”

2. For a list of the type of situations that warranted a note of either sort, see p. xxxviii. Some newly added notes respond not only to a prior *translation* but also (implicitly) to *interpretations* by contemporary scholars who have addressed gender issues.

3. Orlinsky was at the time a professor of Bible at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. In addition to his leading role for *The Torah*, he served on the translation committee for other portions of NJPS, as well as for two Christian-sponsored translations, the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version. For his quotations in this preface, see “A Jewish Scholar Looks at the Revised Standard Version and Its New Edition,” *Religious Education* 85/2 (Spring 1990), pp. 211–221; “Introduction,” *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (JPS, 1969), pp. 3–40; and “Male Oriented Language Originated by Bible Translators,” in Harry M. Orlinsky and Robert G. Bratcher, *A History of Bible Translation and the North American Contribution* (Scholars Press, 1991) [for the Society of Biblical Literature], pp. 267–277.

4. The reason to distinguish between the two types of references is partly a matter of contemporary religious politics but even more a matter of differences in the applicable language itself. God-language is deployed to describe holistic aspects of reality and perceptions that elude the consciousness out of which “normal” language arises, the latter being a mode of thinking that is scarcity-based, reductionist, and causally oriented. Thus, for example, God-language does not operate with the same literalness as regular language; it is more metaphoric and paradoxical. I believe that the ancients understood the difference between the two types of language and had distinct ways of construing each type.

5. See the Dictionary under “predecessors.”

6. A note on the copyright page of the 1999 *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* advises readers to understand the God-language as neutral.

7. The Bible employs the grammatical masculine whenever the referent is *indefinite*—that is, a generic individual—and social gender is not germane. God’s unique nature provides an incentive to construe the

Torah's God-language as if God were indefinite. The Torah's deity can be seen as the ultimate "generic individual," a definite persona but with undefined gender. If so, this would justify construing grammatical gender differently for God than for human beings.

8. See the Dictionary under "messenger."

9. Typical gender-neutral rendering strategies included: casting a singular collective noun in the plural; using an equivalent English idiom that is not gendered; supplying nouns for clarity; and employing a demonstrative pronoun to convey the specificity of a possessive pronoun.

To avoid giving grammatical purists reason to complain, we refrained from using "they" as a common-gender singular pronoun, even though NJPS occasionally did so—like the KJV and the old (1917) JPS translation.

10. I did consider source-critical findings as indications of *literary* unities. From a literary perspective, the composer(s) of the text provided the original audience with a long and meandering document that expressed its messages in various registers (voices) and vocabularies. An audience attentive to literary nuance would be expected to read passages of *similar* register against each other first, before taking into account passages of *different* style.

11. A contemporary analogy may prove helpful: A DVD player, in order to show a movie from a digital video disc, needs to employ the same type of laser beam as was used to record the disc. In much the same way, I needed to employ an accurate picture of the ancient intended audience, to shine it on the text as an interrogating light so that its original meaning could again play before our eyes.

12. Textual clues are themselves somewhat ambiguous; compiling all the clues still leaves room for interpretation. But if text's features are like rocks in a watercourse and the meaning it contains is like the water flowing downstream, then the clues provide a topography that makes honest interpretation more likely to run in one direction than another.

Meanwhile, like any work of literature, the Bible was written partly to change the world around it. Like any recounting of past events, its portrayal was selective and intended to justify certain present or desired future conditions. Therefore, as many scholars have pointed out, we would be unwise today to accept its depictions uncritically as a mirror of ancient Israelite society. I have tried to be cautious in this regard by drawing where possible upon incidental details that do not seem to have ideological import in the passages where they appear, and by looking for corroborating nonbiblical evidence.

13. Such a working stance comes easily; most of my career has consisted of doing this as an editor for modern and contemporary authors.

14. To some extent a text's ambiguity is inherent in the nature of language. At the same time, multivalent wording, indirection, allusion, and withholding information are all vital parts of a writer's craft.

15. Here *'ahim* is used figuratively—but poignantly so, because two of the addressees have just lost their literal brothers; and the bereft Aaron is being addressed by his own actual brother, Moses.

16. Women were the public face of mourning in ancient Israel, as reflected in the Bible (Exod. 33:4; Jer. 9:16–17, 19; 2 Chron. 35:25).

17. Gen. 35:17; 1 Sam. 4:20; Jer. 20:15; Job 3:3. I take the consistent biblical portrayal as an accurate depiction of its audience's attitude.

18. See the Dictionary for discussion of many of these factors.

19. The stated goal accords with the approach not only of the NJPS translators but also of the feminist scholar Phyllis Bird; see her “Translating Sexist Language as a Theological and Cultural Problem,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42/1–2 (1988), p. 91.

20. For clarity, the present adaptation avoids using “he, his, him, himself” as gender-neutral (i.e., “generic”) pronouns.

21. It's possible that a contemporary reader will presume that all ancient herders were men and still construe “herders” as if it were “herds-men.” Practically speaking, however, the translation cannot make the point any clearer without calling undue attention to the issue.

22. See the Dictionary under “names.”

23. They are: *Maacah* daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, whose husband is King David and whose son is Absalom (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:2); *Maacah* daughter of Abishalom, whose husband is King Rehoboam and whose sons include King Abijam (1 Kings 15:2; 2 Chron. 11:20–22); *Maacah* daughter of Abishalom, whose son is King Asa son of Abijam (1 Kings 15:10); *Maacah*, a concubine and mother of four whose husband is Caleb (1 Chron. 2:48–49); and *Maacah*, the mother of ten whose husband was Jeiel of Gibeon (1 Chron. 9:35–37). For one additional *Maacah*, see note 28.

24. See the Dictionary under “inheritance.”

25. See also the Dictionary under “genealogy.”

26. Contrast the Torah's mention of “twelve chieftains” and “twelve sons” of Ishmael (17:20; 25:13–16) and of the “twelve sons” of Jacob (35:22b–36). Two of those passages come later in Genesis, so the original audience could not have made a direct comparison upon first encountering 22:24. I cite them, however, as evidence of a presumed conventional idiom for noting a tribal confederation where such exists.

27. Pre-exilic inscriptions (the “Samaria ostraca”) several times mention two towns, Hoglah and Noah, whose names match two women who figure prominently in the biblical concern for lineages within Manasseh (see Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–12; Josh. 17:4–6; cf. 1 Chron. 7:14–18).

28. 1 Chron. 7:15–16; this Maacah was one of only two granddaughters of Jacob mentioned in the Bible, given that Manasseh was Joseph's son whom Jacob adopted as his own son (Gen. 48:5). Identifying this Maacah in 1 Chronicles 7 (Manasseh's daughter or daughter-in-law) with the one in Genesis 22 (Abraham's niece) is my own specula-

tion, based on geographic proximity and Occam's razor. One way to interpret both accounts historically is that the Manassites and the (Aramean) Maacathites intermarried and eventually assimilated.

29. What I am doing here as translator is tactically similar to what NJPS had done, presumably for good English idiom, by supplying the direct object "children" in this verse.

30. This tactic would not be suitable for all translation types; however, it accords well with the goal of contextual precision that characterizes NJPS. See further the Dictionary under *'ish*.

31. Some of this translation's various precise renderings of *'ish* (such as representative, delegate, candidate, commissioner, householder, authority, notable, leader, agent, emissary, envoy, deputy, laborer, subordinate, councillor, and more) may surprise readers who had not been fully aware of the wide semantic range of "man" in English. For that reason I have noted instances where *'ish* is represented by a noun other than the well-accepted renderings as "person" or "man" or "husband." The endnotes contain more than a hundred such entries.

32. The manuscripts that I am referring to are among the collection commonly known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

33. In the newer script—basically the same as is used today—the Name looked like **יהוה**, whereas in the old script it looked like **יהוה**.

34. Our chosen styling of the Name happens to accord with the one selected earlier by the editorial board of *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, sponsored by the Women of Reform Judaism and forthcoming in 2007 (URJ Press), which will incorporate a version of the present translation for four of the Torah's five books.

35. Except for one instance within poetry in Genesis, only in Deuteronomy did I render the possessive inflection as an adjective. For Deuteronomy it is a reflex of that book's distinctive style. With the adjective "divine" my intended meaning is that its noun's referent derives *from* the Divine, not that the referent is considered to *be* divine.

36. See the Dictionary under "male metaphors for God."

37. The idiomatic and the literary approaches to translation are particularly complementary. To get a feel for the register and the artistry of the Hebrew text, which the present translation is not designed to convey, readers would do well to consult alongside this one the renderings of Everett Fox (1995) or of Robert Alter (2004).

38. Cf. Midrash Numbers Rabbah § 13.15 (Land of Israel, ca. 400 C.E.): "There are seventy facets to the Torah."

Michael V. Fox, one of the JPS Bible commentators, makes a similar point via a more pragmatic metaphor, that of navigation: "Translation is a form of mapping. . . . There are different maps for different purposes, and recognizing this allows for a pluralistic approach to translation." Equally incisive, on the other hand, is religious studies professor Edwin M. Good's quip: "Only one translation always agrees with me: my own."