

Feminine Depictions of God in the Bible

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I. Pesukim

1. Bereishit 1:1
2. Shemot 15:3
3. Tehilim 24:10
4. Malachi 1:6
5. Bereishit 1:27
6. Bamidbar 11:12
7. Tehilim 103:13
8. Devarim 32:18
9. Iyov 38:28-9
10. Yeshaya 42:13-16
11. Yeshaya 45:4-10
12. Yeshaya 49:15
13. Yeshaya 66:9-13

II. Scholarship

1. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, pg. 13

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.

2. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Women's Bible*, 1895

If language has any meaning, we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of a feminine element in the Godhead, equal with the masculine. The heavenly Mother and Father!

3. David Biale, *History of Religions*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Feb., 1982), pp. 240-256

Albright argued in 1935 that the "primitive" meaning of the Akkadian *shadu* is "breast." The root then came to mean mountain. Now, there is no apparent reason for assuming that one meaning of *shadu* is primitive and the other "secondary." They could certainly have coexisted. In fact, it appears that the biblical author may well have associated breasts with mountains, for the "blessings of breasts and womb" of Genesis 49 are immediately followed by "blessings of ancient mountains; bounty of everlasting hills" (verse 26). It is, however, unimportant whether

or not this refers to some unidentified cosmic mountain, as Cross thinks, for the association with breasts is the critical one here since it fits into the fertility context. In any event, if the name has an Akkadian provenance, breasts would not contradict its original context. But perhaps a better place to search for a cognate would not be in Akkadian, but in Egyptian, where *shdi* is a verb meaning "to suckle."

4. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*

The... forms for God are masculine and the representations of God are mostly masculine. Although God does use a comparison to a woman in childbirth, nonetheless there is a strong scholarly consensus that God is regarded as nonsexual. If sex must be applied to Israel's deity, it would be monosex, and this is either an incompleteness or a contradiction in terms.

5. *Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation*, Phyllis Trible, 1973

To summarize: Although the Old Testament often pictures Yahweh as a man, it also uses gynomorphic language for the Deity.²³ At the same time, Israel repudiated the idea of sexuality in God. Unlike fertility gods, Yahweh is neither male nor female; neither he nor she. Consequently, modern assertions that God is masculine, even when they are qualified,²⁴ are misleading and detrimental, if not altogether inaccurate. Cultural and grammatical limitations (the use of masculine pronouns for God) need not limit theological understanding. As Creator and Lord, Yahweh embraces and transcends both sexes. To translate for our immediate concern: the nature of the God of Israel defies sexism.

6. Trible, *Ibid.*

Feminine imagery for God is more prevalent in the Old Testament than we usually acknowledge.¹² It occurs repeatedly in traditions of the Exodus and Wanderings. The murmuring themes focus often on hunger and thirst.¹³ Providing food and drink is woman's work, and Yahweh assumes this role. Even as women fetch water for their families,¹⁴ so the Lord supplies water in the desert for the people.¹⁵ As mothers feed their household,¹⁶ so Yahweh prepares manna and quail for the children of Israel.¹⁷ But the children continue to complain, and an angry Moses reproaches God in a series of rhetorical questions:

Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers"? (Num. 11:12)

This extraordinary language indicates that Yahweh was indeed mother and nurse of the wandering children.¹⁸ Further, the recital of *Heilsgeschichte* in Nehemiah 9 introduces Yahweh as seamstress:

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