

MALE AND FEMALE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN LIGHT OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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Abstract: *In recent years, Western society, and America in particular, has seen an increase of high-profile accusations of sexual abuse leveled against men, especially those in positions of power. These cases have been litigated in both the court of public opinion and in actual court-rooms. This, in turn, has spawned an unprecedented rash of movements as well as a social-media storm that have indicted men and their putative toxic masculinity as the root of many of the ills of Western culture. Such positions have left many men reeling in the wake of these broad-stroke accusations. But are men the only ones to blame for the sexual oppression within Western society, and culture at large? Indeed, does the biblical evidence support such a position in light of the fall? This paper uses the foundational book of the Torah—Genesis—as a test case to assess this modern axiom. By examining the numerous cases of sexual abuse and abuse of power in Genesis, this paper will conclude that the fall affected both men and women in their sexuality in a more profound way than is often realized. In fact, a number of the cases of sexual abuse and exploitation recorded in Genesis are perpetrated by women. What is more, a number of the examples of sexual exploitation and abuse of power parallel sexual exploitation in today's Western culture.*

Key words: *sexuality, Genesis, Genesis 3, #MeToo movement, patriarchy, sexual exploitation*

Living both in the midst, and in the wake, of the #MeToo movement in the United States over the past couple of years has been liberating for some, and downright frightening for others, especially if they are male. No indiscretion from one's past, even if it transpired during one's youth, is beyond the scrutiny of sexual-justice warriors. While the breaking of the laws of a country is certainly grounds for the call for justice and appropriate retribution, one must be careful with always siding with a person—of either gender—against another without due process; the high-profile Supreme Court nomination hearings of the recent past certainly have proven to be a poignant reminder in this regard. The reality is that both males *and* females are flawed when it comes to sexual sin and the exploitation of others. Unfortunately, this is not always the way in which the mainstream media or social media “commentators” present these types of cases: men, especially powerful men, it is argued, are most often to blame and many times are guilty until proven innocent.

But is America's fixation on the oppressive acts of the male gender founded upon a sound understanding of the reality of people living in light of the fall of Genesis 3? This paper seeks to offer an assessment of the underlying philosophical

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assertion of modern Western society that masculinity, which is often accompanied by the pejorative adjective “toxic,” is at the heart of many of the ills of society and the workplace, especially for women. I will assess this axiom by using Genesis as a test case. From this foundational book I will examine how both men *and* women exploit either their own, or another person’s, sexuality for selfish motives. I will conclude that in light of the fallenness of humanity, both men *and* women are deeply flawed in this regard. In many cases, both are complicit in the exploitation of others, sexually or otherwise, and are equally guilty before God. At the same time, I want to be clear that this article is not an attempt to justify or downplay the sexual sins of guilty men or women of this or any other era; rather, in this work I am attempting to show that due to the fall, sexual brokenness has been part and parcel of the human condition, for both genders, from the beginning of the biblical record and recorded time.

I. THE PROBLEM STATED

Before beginning this discussion, it is important to clarify exactly what I mean when I speak of male and female sexual exploitation. First, I want to make it clear that this article is not meant to be an attack against those who have been oppressed or abused at the hands of another, whether male or female. Rather, this study seeks to demonstrate how the fall of Genesis 3 has corrupted hearts as a whole, especially when it comes to male-female interaction. Second, what I am attempting to do in this article is to evaluate the basic assertion that men, by their very nature, tend to be more predatorial than women and therefore must *ipso facto* bear the most blame for these types of “sins.” Today, this philosophical tenet is often presented as a truism without any real assessment from a biblical perspective. Many men simply find this particular conclusion to be problematic on its face. Indeed, men from all walks of life recently took offense with a razor-blade commercial from a well-known company that basically asserted the fact that uncontrolled masculinity is one of the major threats to the stability of our modern culture.¹ In this vein, Western society has been inundated with talks, seminars, university classes, and the like, which present topics centered around the basic premise that masculinity is “toxic” and in need of radical modification.² If only men were more like women, it is argued, then all the world’s problems would be on the path to being rectified.³ But is this true? Both Christians and non-believers have challenged the assertion that being a “man” is all bad, and have even questioned the degree to which patriarchy and masculinity are the root of Western society’s ills.⁴ Finally, and in light of these

¹ “We Believe: The Best Men Can Be,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPPF3sZIo-Q>.

² A simple Google search of the topic “classes on toxic masculinity” alone yields well over seven million hits.

³ On more than one occasion, I have watched television and online interviews where women assert that little boys need to be raised more like girls to suppress their masculine traits of “aggression.”

⁴ A prime example of this has been the rise of internet sensation Jordan B. Peterson with his New York Times best-selling book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House, 2018). According to Peterson, the majority of his audience/readers are male. Feminists and academics have

societal tensions, my goal is to assess the basic philosophical belief that men, and their putative toxic masculinity—whatever that is supposed to mean—are inherently responsible for the societal and sexual ills of Western society specifically, and the world in general.⁵ I will do this by placing this discussion in the context of Scripture and particularly what Genesis has to say about the effects of the fall on both men *and* women.

II. GENESIS AS A TEST CASE

One could certainly turn to a variety of biblical books to find instruction on the problem of sin; Romans and Galatians immediately come to mind. While these are good places to examine such a topic, I have opted to go back to the very beginning and examine the way in which the book of Genesis addresses the problem of the fall and its effects on both men *and* women. To be sure, as narrative, we can examine how the fall affected people in their day-to-day lives. Genesis also addresses the issue of the fall directly through the narratives of chapters 3 and 4. Not surprisingly, the fall brought about God's judgment on both Adam and Eve in the form of the curses related to childbearing and working the ground. These curses play out in the rest of the book of Genesis and the Bible as a whole.⁶ Interestingly, the author makes no direct connection to sexual sin *per se* in the curse on the man and woman, although the idea of oppression through marital dominance does appear in the last half of the curse in 3:16: "your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you" (author's translation). One could argue that patriarchy began at this point of the fall.

Despite the indirect connections between male dominance within relationships, sexual exploitation, and the curse of 3:16, there can be no question that the fall had a negative effect on both men and women in this regard. Indeed, practically every narrative of the book of Genesis presents some form of sexual oppression by

attacked his claims in a variety of interviews, which can be found online with a simple Google search. On the other hand, Christian voices such as John Piper have critiqued cultural shifts in male-female interaction by arguing that modernity is reaping the metaphorical harvest through movements like the #MeToo movement because of what he calls the "egalitarian myth." See <https://baptistnews.com/article/john-piper-blames-abuse-of-women-on-egalitarian-myth>.

Also, the Faith News Network, which is associated with the Church of God, Cleveland, TN, recently released an article by the CEO of Promise Keepers in which he states: "And what do all of these trends [related to modern society's de-masculinization of men] have in common? They reject biblical wisdom and replace it with a vision of masculinity which is soft, silent, and impotent at the exact moment when the world needs men who are *servant kings*—men who are proactive, courageous and humble, men who take decisive action to serve their neighbors, families, churches and communities, men who step out in bold obedience and trust in God's Word." See "Promise Keepers CEO Responds to Hollywood's Attack on Masculinity," <https://www.faithnews.cc/?p=28032>.

⁵ I recognize that there are degrees and nuances in these arguments and that not everyone would use the language cited here. While this may be the case for society as a whole, broadly speaking, the denigration of men and the male gender has been a central tenet of a number of more recent movements. See further Douglas Murray's assessment in *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 64–106, esp. 99–105.

⁶ For a detailed treatment of this topic, see Christine E. Curley and Brian Neil Peterson, "Eve's Curse Revisited: An Increase of 'Sorrowful Conceptions,'" *BBR* 26.2 (2016): 1–16.

someone in a position of power against a person in a lower or subservient position. What is surprising is the number of times this oppression comes at the hands of women. And, as we will see, this is not just oppression of women against women, it is also women against men!

To begin, it is important to remember that sexual ethics play a key role in Genesis. God cares about how we treat *the other* in the most intimate of interrelational encounters. While this is most readily displayed in sexual encounters, it is not always such. One can exploit others sexually without an actual act of intercourse. Moreover, while a number of oppressive acts appear throughout the book of Genesis (e.g., Cain against Abel in 4:1–8; Abimelech’s men over Isaac in chap. 26; Levi and Simeon’s attack on the men of Shechem in chap. 34; the treatment of Joseph by his brothers in chap. 37), here I will only address the events in Genesis that directly involve sexual exploitation in some form. I will begin with the dominant form of oppression as addressed by the #MeToo movement noted above: men’s abuse of women.

1. *Men against women.* Abuse and exploitation of women by men in the book of Genesis takes on five forms: (1) those cases of men exploiting women within a patriarchal marriage context (i.e. polygamy); (2) using one’s wife’s sexuality to save one’s own life; (3) sexual abuse or exploitation outside of marriage as exemplified by Shechem’s rape of Dinah; (4) incest as seen with Reuben’s sexual relations with Bilhah; and (5) fathers who use patriarchal privilege to exploit their daughters sexually.

To begin with, polygamy appears throughout the book of Genesis. This man-made marriage arrangement is consistently critiqued by the author of Genesis by showing that family dysfunction follows when men take more than one wife.⁷ This is true, for example, for Abraham, the Pharaoh, Esau, Jacob, and Abimelech. In every case, the author shows how polygamous marriages do not bring family harmony. Already by chapter 4 of Genesis, Cain’s descendant, Lamech, appears in the text as the first polygamist (4:18–24). The author says nothing about how the marriages are arranged or why Lamech felt it was appropriate to exploit women in this manner. However, based upon the author’s presentation of Lamech as an egotistical macho man, it is obvious that the ethic of “might makes right” dominates his worldview both in marriage and in retribution for wrongs done to him (4:23–24). Neither is approved by the author. In fact, modern readers must continually recognize the distinction between narratives that are prescriptive versus descriptive. God’s plan has always been for monogamous, heterosexual marriages; Genesis makes this clear from the outset (2:24; cf. Matt 19:3–5; Mark 10:6–12).⁸

The second appearance of arguable patriarchal exploitation of women in marriage is found in 6:1–4. Here the “sons of God” (בני האלהים) indiscriminately marry

⁷ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 249; and Brian Neil Peterson, *Genesis as Torah: Reading Narrative as Legal Instruction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 35, 37, 60, 64, 85–86.

⁸ Brian Neil Peterson, “Does Genesis 2 Support Same-Sex Marriage? An Evangelical Response,” *JETS* 60.4 (2017): 681–96.

whomever they want among the “daughters of men” (בנות האדם), paving the way for violence and continual evil inclinations (6:5). This, in turn, leads to the flood. Whether the phrase “sons of God” refers to angels (cf. 1 Enoch 6–11; Jub. 5:1; Tg. Ps.-J. 6:4; b. Yoma 67b) or humans is not clear and has been debated *ad nauseam*. Nevertheless, some have argued that this passage is a reference to polygamous rulers/kings forming harems.⁹ Interestingly, Jesus’s address concerning the last days speaks to the problems of carelessness in marriage in Noah’s day, which will be similar to the final days before his return (Matt 24:37–38; Luke 17:26–27).

Three more examples of polygamy appear in the accounts of the patriarchs. Abraham takes Hagar as a second wife (see more below), which in turn leads to family dysfunction and an unpleasant separation from his son Ishmael (21:11–14). Next, Esau takes three wives, the first two of which become a source of contention for his parents (26:34–35; 28:9). Finally, Jacob takes two wives and the two handmaidens of his wives, a course which proves to be chaotic (29:23–30). Of course, these examples do not take into account non-patriarchal individuals such as Pharaoh and Abimelech, who both practice polygamy.

The second example of men misusing women is when Abraham and Isaac use their wives’ sexual appeal in order to save their own lives. Abraham does this twice with Sarah: once when he goes to Egypt (12:10–20), and later when he moves to the region of Abimelech (20:1–14). Later, Isaac follows in the footsteps of his father when he uses Rebekah in this fashion when he goes to the land of the Philistines, which is controlled by Abimelech (26:6–11).

The third form of men taking sexual advantage of women appears in chapter 34 where Shechem rapes Dinah. While some have argued that no rape actually occurred,¹⁰ most scholars argue that Shechem’s treatment of Dinah, Leah’s daughter, was nothing less than rape.¹¹ As the son of the ruler of the city of Shechem, Shechem used his position to take sexual advantage of a foreigner’s daughter. The negotiations of Shechem’s father, Hamor, with Jacob never includes an acknowledgment of wrongdoing on the part of his son Shechem (34:8–13).

The fourth example of male exploitation of women is Reuben’s incestuous relationship with his father’s wife, Bilhah (35:22). As the eldest son of Jacob, Reuben is the first in line for the blessing and birthright. No textual evidence supports a rape *per se*, although Reuben apparently used his position to take sexual advantage

⁹ See Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 185–89; idem, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4,” *WTJ* 24.2 (1962): 187–204. Note also the position of Rothstein who suggests this text is meant to combat mixed marriages from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Johann W. Rothstein, “Die Bedeutung von Gen. 6,1–4 in der gegenwärtigen Genesis,” in *Festschrift Karl Budde* (BZAW 34; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1920), 150–57.

¹⁰ Lyn Bechtel, “What if Dinah is not Raped?,” *JSOT* 62 (1994): 19–36; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Virginity in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Victor Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky; JSOTSS 262; repr., London: T&T Clark, 2004), 86–88.

¹¹ Some rabbinic sources (e.g. Genesis Rabbah) question Dinah’s motives, suggesting she was acting inappropriately and provocatively by “going out” among the young women of the land; see Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 310.

of Bilhah. Reuben may have been closer to the age of Bilhah, no doubt due to the large age gap between Jacob and Bilhah. Whatever the case, Reuben was in the wrong. Later Jewish law actually prohibits Reuben's actions (Lev 18:8, 20:10–11, and Deut 22:30; cf. Jub. 33:10–20),¹² and Jacob removes him from inheriting as the firstborn due to his indiscretions (49:4).

The final example involves patriarchal exploitation of daughters. Laban exploits his oldest daughter, Leah, in order to gain seven years of wages as a bride price from Jacob (29:23–27). Laban puts his daughter into a no-win situation, which involved giving her body to a man who did not love her. A similar situation appears in the Sodom narrative of chapter 19 where Lot offers his two virgin daughters to the wicked men of the city for sexual gratification (19:8). The difference is that this is never actually fulfilled. In both cases, fathers used their position of power to the detriment of their daughters.¹³

2. *Men against men.* There are potentially three cases where men take sexual advantage of other men in Genesis by means of both successful and attempted homosexual acts. There are also three more cases where men oppress other men for sexual gain, which are not connected to homosexual acts. The first appearance of the sexual oppression of one man against another is in the account of Noah and his son Ham after the flood. While a number of theories have been proffered for what actually took place between the two of them in Noah's tent (e.g. castration [b. Sanh. 70a; Gen. Rab. 36.7; Tg. Ps.-J. 9:24–25]; voyeurism;¹⁴ or sex with Noah's wife¹⁵), a number of scholars have argued convincingly that Ham sexually assaulted his father while he was drunk (9:21–22).¹⁶ In this case, Ham, who was of lower status, took sexual advantage of his drunken father, who was of a higher social standing.

The second occurrence of this type of oppression appears in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. The author already establishes the fact that Sodom is sinful in a sexual manner in 13:13 when he declares that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked, "sinners against God." In Genesis, this phrase is only

¹² Calum M. Carmichael, *Women, Law, and the Genesis Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 49; and idem, *Law and Narrative in the Bible: The Evidence of Deuteronomic Laws and the Decalogue* (1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 221–23; Peterson, *Genesis as Torah*, 106.

¹³ For a detailed discussion on Lot's purposes for this action, see Brian Neil Peterson, *What was the Sin of Sodom: Inhospitality, Homosexuality, or Something Else?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 28, 41–42.

¹⁴ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 418–20; and Allen P. Ross, "The Curse of Canaan," *BSac* 137.547 (1980): 230–31. H. Hirsch Cohen (*The Drunkenness of Noah* [Judaic Studies 4; Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974], 14–17) suggests that by merely looking on the nakedness of Noah, Ham had gained the "potency" of his father.

¹⁵ John Bergsma and Scott Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan," *JBL* 124.1 (2005): 25–40; and Frederick W. Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?," *VT* 21.2 (1971): 232–37.

¹⁶ Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 63–71; Martti Nissinen, *Homosexuality in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (trans. Kirsi Stjerina; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 53; Donald Wold, *Out of Order* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 65–76; Devoran Steinmetz, "Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History," *JBL* 113.2 (1994): 198; O. Palmer Robertson, "Current Critical Questions Concerning the 'Curse of Ham' (Gen 9:20–27)," *JETS* 41.2 (1998): 179–80; and Peterson, *What was the Sin of Sodom?*, 45–47.

used for sexual sin (cf. 20:6; 39:9; cf. b. Sanh. 109a). Therefore, the common assertion that homosexual sex is in view in chapter 19 seems conclusive.¹⁷ In this case, the men of the city wanted to abuse men of lesser social status—they thought the angels were foreigners.

The final case of possible male-on-male sexual abuse is found in the account of Isaac's weaning in chapter 21. The account records that Ishmael "mocked" (מִצְחָק; 21:9) his little brother, thus raising the ire of Sarah. Certainly, something more than a simple game of jesting seems to have taken place. For this reason, some have argued that this was a sexual act where an older brother takes advantage of a younger brother.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, several times the root צחק is used in Genesis in the context of sexual acts. Isaac's "fondling"/"caressing" (26:8; cf. NAS, TNK) of his wife under the watchful eye of Abimelech is benign, but Potiphar's wife's accusation of Joseph's attempted "mocking" (39:14, 17) of her certainly falls within sexual abuse, even if it is a false charge.

3. *Women against women.* Perhaps the most surprising aspect of abuse in the book of Genesis is the oppression, sexual or otherwise, which women direct against other women. The first occurrence of this is Sarah's mistreatment of Hagar. It seems likely that Sarah acquired Hagar as a maidservant when Sarah was in Egypt in the house of Pharaoh (12:15–19).¹⁹ Once back in Canaan, Sarah used Hagar as nothing more than a womb to have a child by Abraham (16:1–4). Nowhere is the reader told that Hagar had any say in this arrangement. Sarah also abuses Hagar beyond this sexual exploitation. Sarah makes Hagar's life miserable and ultimately is the one responsible for forcing her out of the house of Abraham (16:6; 21:10). Sarah, as a woman in a position of power, uses that power to abuse and exploit another woman who is younger and in a vulnerable position.²⁰ Indeed, Sarah's treatment of this foreign woman may lie behind later laws prohibiting such actions (Exod 22:20–22; see Gen. Rab. 45.6; cf. Deut 21:14). Some scholars have proposed that due to Sarah's exploitation of Hagar, God allowed Sarah's great-grandson, Joseph, to be exploited by Potiphar's wife as well as the nation of Israel to be exploited by Egypt.²¹

¹⁷ Peterson, *What was the Sin of Sodom?*, 33–36; and E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 142.

¹⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 78; Peterson, *What was the Sin of Sodom?*, 21. Rabbinic interpreters suggested that Ishmael was practicing idolatry (I. Ps.-J. 21:9, 11).

¹⁹ When Hagar runs from Sarah in chap. 16 she actually appears to be heading back to Egypt when the angel tells her to return to Sarah.

²⁰ Gershon Hepner, *Legal Friction: Law, Narrative, and Identity Politics in Biblical Israel* (StBibLit 78; New York: Lang, 2010), 215.

²¹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT 13; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13, 21, 28; Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *JBL* 117.1 (1998): 28–29; A. Shinan and Y. Zakovitch, "Midrash on Scripture and Midrash within Scripture," in *Studies in Bible* (ed. Sara Japhet; ScrHier 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 270; Hepner, *Legal Friction*, 215; Matitiahu Tsevat, *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies: Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1980), 60–70; Peterson, *Genesis as Torah*, 90–91; F.V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity* (JSOTSup 361;

A similar scenario plays itself out in the lives of Rachel and Leah. Throughout the account of Jacob's time in Haran, the reader is made aware of the power struggle between the two sisters who are wives to the same man. When Rachel sees she cannot bear children she takes her young maid, Bilhah, and gives her to Jacob as a womb to bear children for her (30:3–4). When Leah sees that she can no longer bear children, she, too, gives her handmaid, Zilpah, to Jacob as a womb (30:9). Again, as with Sarah's treatment of Hagar, no word is given as to whether Bilhah and Zilpah were in agreement with this arrangement. Rachel and Leah, who had themselves been on the receiving end of sexual exploitation in marriage for money by their own father, now exploit their handmaidens for their own advancement. All three matriarchs held positions of power in their families and used it to exploit sexually the women under them for familial gain. In fact, they all advance and promote the problem of polygamy within the patriarchal system by giving their handmaidens to their husbands.

4. *Women against men.* Women exert power over men many times in the Ancestral Narratives, in both sexual and non-sexual ways. For example, Sarah has a lot of sway over Abraham, as do most of the matriarchs over their husbands. Rebekah's misuse of her power over her blind husband, Isaac, is a particularly troubling event (27:6–10). And Rachel and Leah's bartering for the sexual attention of Jacob certainly lowers their relationship with their husband to one of perfunctory sexual service as opposed to love (30:14–16).

In light of these already troubling accounts in Genesis, another surprising case of sexual abuse in this opening book is the abuse of men at the hands of women. Three accounts stand out in this regard. The first appears at the end of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (19:30–38). Here, the reader is alerted to a plan concocted by Lot's two daughters. They desire to have children, but feel it is impossible because there are no men in the vicinity, or so they think (19:31). In order to remedy this problem, they come up with a solution, which involves taking sexual advantage of their father against his will (19:32–36). They know that what they are doing is wrong because they get their father drunk in order to carry out their plan (19:33, 25). In this patriarchal setting, younger women take sexual advantage of their own father for their own gain.²²

The second occurrence of female-on-male aggression, while culturally specific, is still important to this discussion. In chapter 38, Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, dresses as a cult prostitute and entraps her father-in-law in order to get pregnant. While it is true that Judah had refused to give his youngest son, Shelah,

Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 2002), 32 nn 23–24; David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1963), 26–27; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 9, 13.

²² Brad Embry ("The 'Naked Narrative' from Noah to Leviticus: Reassessing Voyeurism in the Account of Noah's Nakedness in Genesis 9:22–24," *JOT* 35 [2011]: 429–31) sees 19:30–38 as instruction against incest, which helped inform the incest laws of Leviticus 18 and 20.

to her as a means of raising up seed for his oldest son Er, a younger Tamar uses her sexuality to lure an older Judah into a sexual encounter for her gain (38:14–19).²³

The third account is that of Potiphar's wife's abuse of Joseph. This particular narrative is one of the closest parallels to today's sexual abuse in the workplace. Joseph, who is identified as a handsome young man (39:6), is harassed sexually by Potiphar's wife, who no doubt is much older. Her advances toward Joseph are not a one-time event but rather represent a pattern of sexual harassment in the workplace (39:10). Even though Joseph rebuffs her advances and appeals to her moral compass (39:9), Potiphar's wife refuses to relent. Instead, she corners him in her home when no one else is around (39:11–12). When Joseph again rebuffs her sexual advances and runs from the house without his garment, she brings a false accusation against him (39:14–18). This leads to Joseph's imprisonment²⁴ for a number of years.²⁵

III. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DATA

If one is to set aside the patriarchal marriage scenarios noted above where women are subjected to polygamy, sometimes, though not always, against their will, it is surprising to realize that women's treatment of men and other women is roughly equal to the sexual oppression of women by men and men by men! The following list summarizes the above discussion regarding sexual aggression.

Men against women

1. Abraham uses Sarah's sexuality twice to save himself (chaps. 12, 20)
2. Lot offers his virgin daughters to the crowd of men for sexual gratification (chap. 19)*
3. Isaac uses Rebekah's sexuality once to save himself (chap. 26)
4. Laban exploits Leah for financial gain (chap. 29)
5. Shechem rapes Dinah (chap. 34)
6. Reuben takes sexual advantage of Bilhah (chap. 35)

Men against men

7. Ham takes sexual advantage of his father, Noah (chap. 9)**
8. The men of Sodom seek a sexual encounter with the visitors/angels (chap. 19)*
9. Ishmael may have committed a sexual act on his younger brother, Isaac (chap. 21)**

²³ Even though Judah propositions Tamar for sex, Tamar knew exactly what she was doing and what the likely outcome was going to be when she played the role of the cult prostitute.

²⁴ Today, similar events happen regularly when women bring false accusations against men. The Duke Lacrosse Case is just one such case that almost cost a number of young men their freedom.

²⁵ We are not sure how long Joseph spent in prison because of Potiphar's wife's false accusations. Joseph was about seventeen when he was sold into slavery into Egypt (37:2) and he got out of prison at thirty years of age (41:46). If Joseph was in the house of Potiphar for a couple of years before being sexually assaulted, then he would have been in prison for about eleven years.

Women against women

1. Sarah uses Hagar as a womb and abuses her (chap. 16)
2. Leah uses Zilpah as a womb (chap. 30)
3. Rachel uses Bilhah as a womb (chap. 30)

Women against men

4. Lot's older daughter takes sexual advantage of her drunken father (chap. 19)
5. Lot's younger daughter takes sexual advantage of her drunken father (chap. 19)
6. Rachel and Leah barter for Jacob's sexual services (chap. 30)
7. Tamar seduces her father-in-law to get pregnant (chap. 38)
8. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph and then falsely accuses him (chap. 39)*

*Unfulfilled or partially fulfilled act

**Interpretation is debated

Of interest is the fact that all eight of the transgressions of women against men or other women are in no way disputed when it comes to what actually happened. Only Potiphar's wife's seduction of Joseph does not actually come to fruition even though her false accusation puts an innocent man in prison. On the other hand, of the nine possible acts of sexual exploitation of women or men by men, two actually did not come to fruition and two are questioned interpretively. From these data it is evident that in the book of Genesis women are just as culpable, or even more so, than men when it comes to exploitation of others in sexual matters.

What is more, in a patriarchal setting one would least expect female against male sexual abuse; yet, here in the opening book to the Bible, the author presents this scenario on more than one occasion. What makes these accounts even more troubling is the means by which they were undertaken. Whereas the accounts where men abuse women sexually are most readily connected to the patriarchal marriage system, with the exception of Shechem's rape of Dinah, the two accounts dealing with female abuse of men are heinous in their implementation and outcomes. One involves the use of alcohol to take sexual advantage of an older man and the other involves a woman in a position of power taking sexual advantage of a younger man because of his good looks. While the former account ends without fanfare or retribution, the latter ends with the false imprisonment of an innocent man. In today's setting, while women are not immune to these accusations,²⁶ these types of abusive actions are normally ascribed to men.

²⁶ In recent years, the news cycle has regularly carried the stories of female teachers abusing their positions of power in order to seduce younger boys under their care.

IV. CONCLUSION

The above overview presents a very disturbing picture of the state of humanity after the fall. Because many of the narratives of Genesis focus on sexual sins, it seems evident that the book was instructional as Torah for the people of Israel in this regard. As a key part of that instruction, Genesis teaches that the fall did not affect only men when it comes to the sexual abuse of others for gain. In fact, as noted above, some of the most troubling acts of sexual oppression come at the hands of women against both men and other women. Even though readers today may be separated culturally, and by millennia, from the text of Scripture, the accounts in Genesis noted above point to a transcultural and timeless reality; human nature does not change in light of the fallenness of humanity. Sexual exploitation, personal agendas, power, greed, and the like, drive both men and women.

What this teaches us is that today's somewhat myopic focus on men's oppression of women, as exemplified by various social movements in Western society, needs to be placed within a larger instructive framework. While men are certainly to blame for many acts of aggression and sexual assault on women throughout history, women are in no way exempted from scrutiny in this regard. If anything, Genesis teaches that both sexes have been affected by the fall. Indeed, every iteration of human relationships has been marred in some way by the fall. In this vein, one can readily understand why Paul teaches in Romans that *all* have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). And John's assessment that the one who says he/she does not have sin is a liar (1 John 1:10) certainly points to humanity's greater sin problem. Moreover, it is wise to keep in mind the words of Jesus when accusations are leveled against any person, male or female: "he who is without sin let him (or her) cast the first stone" (John 8:7). Yet this is not the end of the story; there is hope and healing for all people. It is truly a blessing to know that Jesus's work on the cross covers a multitude of sins and can heal the sexual brokenness of both men and women, oppressor as well as victim.