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BOAZ ADHENGU

# EMPOWERED



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Adhengo Boaz  
*&* ASSOCIATES

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[www.adhengoboaz.com](http://www.adhengoboaz.com)



@adhengobeuze



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## PREFACE

Understanding the role of women in ministry and the total organisation of the Church has always been controversial to the global Jewish and Christian movements; yet, evidentially, the important position held by a woman in God's creativity is not to be disputed, that indeed, they too are image bearers of God.

Hitherto, in making this book, the intent was to even empower a united progress where women are affirmed as key players within the Church as a Body of Christ; and being a book that is written with passion to not only relate the political world as a Christian, am contented that the continuous transformations and impact made by the several publications God has enabled me release to the world is an act of ministry in itself. This is my thirtieth book (30) which comes timely when the whole world is with better plans to address local *socio-economic* issues that have become associated with the global COVID pandemic. Yet, as this book sets a pace for even a deeper review on how best to make-know the fundamentals of Christianity by relating with its origins in struggle and victory; the title geared to connect with this book as already in manuscript, is **VICTORIUS**, into which the whole notion of crusaders, jihad and totality of Christian politics will be visited only to be unleashed in a more comprehensible understanding as you, my esteem audience will digest in capability.

To God be all the glory, and may you find a purpose to pronounce blessings even from knowledge of having enjoyed this book. Our garden still grows and we will endeavour to cultivate it for the Glory of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

# CHAPTER ONE

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**scripted**

Adherents to the Christian faith throughout the world today number at least one billion persons; this total includes Christians from all sections of the church, in all areas of the earth, and from a multitude of racial backgrounds. Not all these are actively practicing their faith, but all are recognized as adherents. As such, they constitute one of the largest and most significant elements in the world's population. Virtually all these Christians recognize the Bible as the authoritative basis of their faith and practice. The Bible also plays a significant role in two other major world religions: Judaism and Islam. By all objective standards it is the most widely read and influential book in the history of the human race. Year after year it consistently heads the list of the bestselling books of the world. It is obvious, therefore, that any person who desires a good general education cannot afford to omit the study of the Bible.

Since spiritual revelation is in the eternal, spiritual realm, it is not limited by material or physical factors, such as the passage of time or the change of language, customs, clothing, or circumstances. This personal experience of Jesus Christ the Son of God - *by the Holy Spirit revealed, acknowledged, and confessed* - remains the one unchanging rock, the one immovable foundation, upon which all true Christian faith must be based. Creeds and opinions, churches and denominations - all these may change, but this one true rock of God's salvation by personal faith in Christ remains eternal and unchanging. Upon it a person may build his faith for time and for eternity with a confidence that nothing can ever overthrow.

This is not merely to know God in a general way through nature or conscience as Creator or Judge. This is to know Him revealed

personally in Jesus Christ. Neither is it to know about Jesus Christ merely as a historical character or a great teacher. It is to know Christ Himself, directly and personally, and God in Him. The apostle John writes:

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. - 1 John 5:13*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. - John 1:1*

This identity of name reveals an identity of nature. The Bible is the Word of God, and Christ is the Word of God. Each alike is a divine, authoritative, perfect revelation of God. Each agrees perfectly with the other. The Bible perfectly reveals Christ; Christ perfectly fulfils the Bible. The Bible is the written Word of God; Christ is the personal Word of God. Before His incarnation Christ was the eternal Word with the Father. In His incarnation Christ is the Word made flesh. The same Holy Spirit that reveals God through His written Word also reveals God in the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, if Christ is in this sense perfectly one with the Bible, then it follows that the relationship of the believer to the Bible must be the same as his relationship to Christ.

*To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. - Isaiah 8:20*

Thus the Scripture - *the Word of God* - is the supreme standard by which all else must be judged and tested. No doctrine, no

practice, no prophecy, no revelation is to be accepted if it is not in full accord with the Word of God. No person, no group, no organization, no church has authority to change, override, or depart from the Word of God. In whatever respect or whatever degree any person, group, organization, or church departs from the Word of God, in that respect and in that degree they are in darkness. There is no light in them.

Then God said, *“Let there be light.”* - **Genesis 1:3**

That is, God’s Word went forth; God pronounced the word light. And as the Word and the Spirit of God were thus united, creation took place, light came into being, and God’s purpose was fulfilled.

What was true of that great act of creation is true also of the life of each individual. God’s Word and God’s Spirit united in our lives contain all the creative authority and power of God Himself. Through them God will supply every need and will work out His perfect will and plan for us. But if we divorce these two from one another - *seeking the Spirit without the Word, or studying the Word apart from the Spirit* - we go astray and missing on God’s plan.

To seek the manifestations of the Spirit apart from the Word will always end in foolishness, fanaticism, and error. To profess the Word without the quickening of the Spirit results only in dead, powerless orthodoxy and religious formalism.

The Bible indicates plainly that there is one supreme, invisible influence by which God did in fact control, direct, and

communicate with the spirits and minds of the men by whom the Bible was written, this invisible influence is the Holy Spirit - God's own Spirit. For example, the apostle Paul says:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* - **2 Timothy 3:16**

Christ and His apostles, like all believing Jews of their time, accepted the absolute truth and authority of all the Old Testament Scriptures, including the five books of the Pentateuch.

In the account of Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness, we read that Christ answered each temptation of Satan by direct quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures. (*See Matthew 4:1-10.*) Three times He commenced His answer with the phrase "*It is written....*" Each time He was quoting directly from the fifth book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy. It is a remarkable fact that not only Christ, but also Satan, accepted the absolute authority of this book.

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ said:

*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.* [This phrase 'the Law or the Prophets' was generally used to designate the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole.] *I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.* - **Matthew 5:17-18**

The word jot is the English form of the name of the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, roughly corresponding in size and shape to an inverted comma in modern English script. The word tittle indicates a little curl or horn, smaller in size than a comma, added at the corner of certain letters in the Hebrew alphabet to distinguish them from other letters very similar in shape.

Thus, what Christ is saying, in effect, is that the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures is so accurate and authoritative that not even one portion of the script smaller in size than a comma can be altered or removed.

The entire earthly life of Jesus was directed in every aspect by the absolute authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. When we set this fact side by side with His own unquestioning acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures in all His teaching, we are left with only one logical conclusion: if the Old Testament Scriptures are not an absolutely accurate and authoritative revelation from God, then Jesus Christ Himself was either deceived or He was a deceiver.

Many people make a profession of faith in Christ and the Bible, but their faith is only in the realm of the mind. It is an intellectual acceptance of certain facts and doctrines. This is not true, scriptural faith, and it does not produce any vital change in the lives of those who profess it.

The supreme crisis of every human life comes at the moment of the Spirit's drawing to repentance. Accepted, this drawing leads us to saving faith and eternal life; rejected, it leaves the sinner to continue on his way to the grave and the unending darkness of

an eternity apart from God. The Scripture makes it plain that even in this life it is possible for a man to pass “*the place of repentance*” - to come to a point where the Spirit of God will never again draw him to repentance, and where all hope is lost even before he enters the portals of eternity. Faith is one of comparatively few words actually defined in the Bible. This definition is found in **Hebrews 11:1**.

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

God’s Word does not immediately produce faith on its own, but through our act of hearing. Hearing may be described as an attitude of aroused interest and attention, a sincere desire to receive and to understand the message presented. Then out of hearing there develops faith.

It is important to see that the hearing of God’s Word initiates a process in the soul out of which faith develops and that this process requires a minimum period of time. This explains why there is so little faith to be found among so many professing Christians today. They never devote enough time to the hearing of God’s Word to allow it to produce in them any substantial proportion of faith. If they ever devote any time at all to private devotions and the study of God’s Word, the whole thing is conducted in such a hurried and haphazard way that it is all over before faith has had time to develop.

If we receive God’s words with careful attention - if we admit them regularly through both the ear and the eye so that they occupy and control our hearts - then we find them to be exactly

what God has promised: both life to our souls and health to our flesh. Without a thorough knowledge of God's Word and how to apply it, a Christian has no weapon of attack, no weapon with which he can assault Satan and the powers of darkness and put them to flight. In view of this, it is not surprising that Satan has throughout the history of the Christian church used every means and device within his power to keep Christians ignorant of the true nature, authority, and power of God's Word.

God's Word is also our judge. Throughout the entire Bible it is emphasized that by sovereign eternal right, the office of judge belongs to God alone. This theme runs through the entire Old Testament. For instance, Abraham says to the Lord, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (**Genesis 18:25**). Jephthah said, "*May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day*" (**Judges 11:27**). The psalmist wrote, "*Surely He is God who judges in the earth*" (**Psalms 58:11**). And Isaiah said, "*For the Lord is our Judge*" (**Isaiah 33:22**).

*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. - Hebrews 11:6*

God has told us that without faith it is impossible to please Him, but He has also told us how to obtain faith. He has told us how faith comes.

*"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." - Romans 10:17*

In **Hebrews 11:1** God tells us what Bible faith is: “*Now faith means that we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see.*” Another translation says, “*Faith is giving substance to things hoped for*”. Still another translation reads, “*Faith is the warranty deed, the thing for which we have finally hoped is at last ours.*”

There are a number of kinds of faith. Everyone, saved or unsaved, has a natural, human faith. But here God is talking about a scriptural faith. He is talking about a Bible faith. He is talking about believing with your heart. And there is a vast difference between believing with your heart and just believing what your physical senses tell you!

Real faith is built on the Word. Meditate on the Word. Dig deeply into it. Feed upon it; then the Word will become part of you, just as natural food becomes a part of your physical body when you eat. What natural food is to the physical man, the Word of God is to the spiritual man. The Word will build into you - the real you, the inward man - confidence and assurance. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (**John 4:24**). We cannot contact God with our body or with our mind. We can contact God only with our spirit.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. - **Romans 10:10**

The terms "*spirit of man*" and "*heart of man*" are used interchangeably throughout the Bible. We know that man is a spirit because he is made in the image and likeness of God, and Jesus said, "*God is a Spirit*" (**John 4:24**). It is not in our physical bodies that we are like God, for the Bible says that God is not a man.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### **manhood - womanhood**

That we are male and female in the image of God says much about God's purposes with us, His human creatures. We are created to reflect His own nature so that we may represent Him in our dealings with others and over the world He has made. Our goal is to fulfil His will and obey His word. Yet, to accomplish this He has established a framework of relationship. Male and female, while fully equal as the image of God, are nonetheless distinct in the manner of their possession of the image of God. The female's becoming the image of God through the male indicates a *God-intended* sense of her reliance upon him, as particularly manifest in the home and community of faith. And yet all of us should seek through our relationships to work together in accomplishing the purposes God gives us to do. We face in this doctrine the dual truths that we are called to be both individually and in relationship what God intends us to be, so that we may do what honours Him and fulfils His will. Divine representations who, in relationship with God and others, represent God and carry out their God-appointed responsibilities - this, in the end, is the vision that must be sought by male and female in the image of God if they are to fulfil their created purpose.

Very early in the Bible we read that both men and women are "*in the image of God.*" In fact, the very first verse that tells us that God created human beings also tells us that both "*male and female*" are in the image of God:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. - Genesis 1:27, emphasis added*

To be in the image of God is an incredible privilege. It means to be like God and to represent God. No other creatures in all of creation, not even the powerful angels, are said to be in the image of God. It is a privilege given only to us as men and women. We are more like God than any other creatures in the universe, for we alone are in the image of God.

Any discussion of manhood and womanhood in the Bible must start here. Every time we look at each other or talk to each other as men and women, we should remember that the person we are talking to is a creature of God who is more like God than anything else in the universe, and men and women share that status equally. Therefore we should treat men and women with equal dignity, and we should think of men and women as having equal value. We are both in the image of God, and we have been so since the very first day that God created us. *“In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”* (**Genesis 1:27**). Nowhere does the Bible say that men are more in God’s image than women. Men and women share equally in the tremendous privilege of being in the image of God.

The Bible thus almost immediately corrects the errors of male dominance and male superiority that have come as the result of sin and that have been seen in nearly all cultures in the history of the world. Wherever men are thought to be better than women, wherever husbands act as selfish dictators, wherever wives are forbidden to have their own jobs outside the home or to vote or to own property or to be educated, wherever women are treated as inferior, wherever there is abuse or violence against women or rape or female infanticide or polygamy or harems, the biblical truth of equality in the image of God is being denied. To all

societies and cultures where these things occur, we must proclaim that the very beginning of God’s Word bears a fundamental and irrefutable witness against these evils.

Yet we can say even more. If men and women are equally in the image of God, then we are equally important to God and equally valuable to Him. We have equal worth before Him for all eternity, for this is how we were created. This truth should exclude all our feelings of pride or inferiority and should exclude any idea that one sex is “*better*” or “*worse*” than the other. In contrast to many non-Christian cultures and religions, no one should feel proud or superior because he is a man, and no one should feel disappointed or inferior because she is a woman. If God thinks us to be equal in value, then that settles forever the question of personal worth, for God’s evaluation is the true standard of personal value for all eternity.

The original readers of Genesis and of the rest of the Old Testament would have been familiar with this pattern, a pattern whereby people who have authority over another person or thing have the ability to assign a name to that person or thing, a name that often indicates something of the character or quality of the person. Thus parents give names to their children (see **Genesis 4:25-26; 5:3, 29; 16:15; 19:37-38; 21:3**). And God is able to change the names of people when He wishes to indicate a change in their character or role (see **Genesis 17:5, 15**, where *God changes Abram’s name to Abraham and where He changes Sarai’s name to Sarah*). In each of these passages we have the same verb as is used in **Genesis 2:23** (the verb *qara’*), and in each case the person who gives the name is one in authority over the person who receives the name. Therefore when Adam gives

to his wife the name “*Woman*,” in terms of biblical patterns of thought this indicates a kind of authority that God gave to Adam, a leadership function that Eve did not have with respect to her husband.

Just as the Father and Son are equal in deity and are equal in all their attributes, but different in role, so husband and wife are equal in personhood and value, but are different in the roles that God has given them. Just as God the Son is eternally subject to the authority of God the Father, so God has planned that wives would be subject to the authority of their own husbands.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God’s image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to his people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the *God-given* responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

There are other differences in roles in addition to headship and submission. Two other aspects of male headship in marriage are the husband’s responsibility to provide for his wife and family and to protect them.

Biblical support for the husband having the primary responsibility to provide for his family and the wife having

primary responsibility to care for the household and children is found in **Genesis 2:15** with **2:18-23; 3:16-17** (*Eve is assumed to have the primary responsibility for childbearing, but Adam for tilling the ground to raise food, and pain is introduced into both of their areas of responsibility*); **Proverbs 31:10-31**, especially vv. **13, 15, 21, 27**; **Isaiah 4:1** (*shame at the tragic undoing of the normal order*); **1 Timothy 5:8** (*the Greek text does not specify “any man,” but in the historical context that would have been the assumed referent except for unusual situations like a household with no father*); **1 Timothy 5:10**; **1 Timothy 5:3-16** (*widows, not widowers, are to be supported by the church*); **Titus 2:5**.

I believe that a wife’s created role as a “*helper fit for him*” (**Genesis 2:18**) also supports this distinction of roles.

Biblical support for the idea that the man has the primary responsibility to protect his family is found in **Deuteronomy 20:7-8** (*men go forth to war, not women, here and in many Old Testament passages*); **24:5**; **Joshua 1:14**; **Judges 4:8-10** (*Barak does not get the glory because he insisted that a woman accompany him into battle*); **Nehemiah 4:13-14** (*the people are to fight for their brothers, homes, wives, and children, but it does not say they are to fight for their husbands*); **Jeremiah 50:37** (*it is the disgrace of a nation when its warriors become women*); **Nahum 3:13** (*Behold, your troops are women in your midst*) is a taunt of derision); **Matthew 2:13-14** (*Joseph is told to protect Mary and baby Jesus by taking them to Egypt*); **Ephesians 5:25** (*a husband’s love should extend even to a willingness to lay down his life for his wife, something many soldiers in battle have done throughout history, to protect their*

*families and homelands*); **1 Peter 3:7** (a wife is a “weaker vessel,” and therefore the husband, as generally stronger, has a greater responsibility to use his strength to protect his wife).

The beauty of God’s created order for marriage finds expression in our sexuality within marriage. “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*” (**Genesis 2:24**). From the beginning God designed our sexuality so that it reflects unity and differences and beauty all at the same time. As husband and wife, we are most attracted to the parts of each other that are the most different. Our deepest unity - *physical and emotional and spiritual unity* - comes at the point where we are most different. In our physical union as God intended it, there is no dehumanization of women and no emasculation of men, but there is equality and honour for both the husband and the wife. And there is one of our deepest human joys and our deepest expression of unity.

This means that sexuality within marriage is precious to God. It is designed by Him to show equality and difference and unity all at the same time. It is a great mystery how this can be so, and it is also a great blessing and joy. Moreover, God has ordained that from that sexual union comes the most amazing, the most astounding event - the creation of a new human being in the image of God. Within this most intimate of human relationships, we show equality and difference and unity, and much Godlikeness all at once. Glory be to God.

God is unimaginably great and infinitely valuable and unsurpassed in beauty. “*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be*

*praised, and his greatness is unsearchable” (Psalms 145:3).* Everything that exists is meant to magnify that Reality. God cries out through the prophet Isaiah (43:6-7) *“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”* We have been created to display the glory of God. Paul concludes the first eleven chapters of his great letter to the Romans with the exaltation of God as the source and end of all things: *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (11:36).* He makes it even clearer in **Colossians 1:16**, where he says, *“By [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth....all things were created through him and for him.”*

And woe to us if we think that *“for him”* means *“for His need,”* or *for His benefit,* or *“for His improvement.”* Paul made it crystal clear in **Acts 17:25** that God is not *“served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”* No, the term *“for His glory”* and *“for Him”* means, *“for the display of His glory,”* or *“for the showing of His glory,”* or *“for the magnifying of His glory.”*

The universe is of secondary importance, not primary. The human race is not the ultimate reality, nor the ultimate value, nor the ultimate measuring rod of what is good or what is true or what is beautiful. God is. God is the one ultimate absolute in existence. Everything else is from Him and through Him and for Him. There are two levels at which the glory of God may shine forth from a Christian marriage:

One is at the structural level when both spouses fulfil the roles God intended for them - the man as leader like Christ, the wife as advocate and follower of that leadership. When those roles are lived out, the glory of God's love and wisdom in Christ is displayed to the world.

But there is another deeper, more foundational level where the glory of God must shine if these roles are to be sustained as God designed. The power and impulse to carry through the *self-denial* and daily, monthly, yearly rebirth that will be required in loving an imperfect wife and loving an imperfect husband must come from a *hope-giving, soul-sustaining*, superior satisfaction in God. I don't think that our love for our wives or theirs for us will glorify God until it flows from a heart that delights in God more than marriage. Marriage will be preserved for the glory of God and shaped for the glory of God when the glory of God is more precious to us than marriage.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### **deborah's daughters**

The story of Deborah in **Judges 4-5** has disruptive potential. This scriptural account of a female judge, prophet, and *war-leader* frequently disturbed traditional cultural assumptions and expectations about women's roles through the centuries, both in the Bible and in the world of the interpreter, by exhibiting Deborah as assertive, outspoken, and playing a public role among her people.

In fact, Deborah would be a problem in many capacities, including wife, mother, prophetess, civil leader, and judge. Through the centuries, numerous women (*and men who supported women's aspirations to leadership*) used Deborah's story to justify their own claims to political and religious authority and to offer reflections about female identity. Those opposed to women's public leadership usually worked to define Deborah's role as private or argued that she was a divinely authorized exception, not to be emulated.

The text of **Judges 4 - 5** omitted many of the details that readers wished to know: What is the significance of Deborah's name ("bee" in Hebrew)? What does it mean that she "judged" Israel? Was her authority official or unofficial? Should she be included in lists of the judges? Who was her husband *Lappidoth*? Why don't we hear more about him? Were Barak and *Lappidoth* the same man? Why did God speak through a prophetess rather than through a male prophet? Why did Barak insist that Deborah accompany him to the battle? Why did Deborah approve of Jael's apparent treachery when she slaughtered *Sisera*? As interpreters filled in the gaps, they used their own cultural assumptions and imagination. Christian readers frequently turned to Jewish sources for their explanations.

The early communities esteemed prophets and their prophecies highly, believing them to be the continuing voice of God or of their exalted Lord to guide them in their struggles. In many communities open to prophetic authority, women could exercise this role. In a tradition that taught that “*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*” (**Acts 2:17**), women shared in this form of charismatic leadership. In fact, during the earliest decades of the Christian movement, prophecy may have been the most significant way for women to exercise leadership. A host of sources, including many that were anxious and hostile toward women’s prophecy, reveal that there was a varied and complex tradition of women’s prophetic leadership during the first five centuries of Christianity. The New Testament specifically refers to the widow Anna (**Luke 2:36**) and the daughters of Philip (**Acts 21:9**) as prophets. Elizabeth and Mary offer prophetic utterances (**Luke 1:39 - 55**). The apostle Paul is critical of women who prophesy with unveiled heads (**1 Corinthians 11:5**). His other instructions about prophecy are probably addressed to both men and women.

Several early Christian authors from the eastern Greek-speaking church used the story of Deborah to argue for the spiritual equality of male and female. For instance, Bishop Theodoret of *Cyrrhus* (c. 393 - c. 458) read Deborah’s prophetic role in light of **Galatians 3:28**, asserting intellectual partnership between men and women. Commenting on Judges 4, he asks: “*Why does a woman prophesy? Because the nature of men and women is the same. She was made a partner in intellect, for ‘In Christ there is neither male nor female’*”. The famous exegete Origen of Alexandria (c. 185 - c. 253), preaching to a congregation in Palestine, pointed out that the story of Deborah offered

significant psychological comfort to women of his own day. Though Origen is best known for his allegorical or “*spiritual*” expositions on scripture, he begins his homily on Judges 4 with the implications of the literal meaning of the text:

*First, when many male judges were reported to have lived in Israel, none of them were called “prophet” except the woman Deborah. Even the literal meaning of this furnishes no small consolation to the sex of women and challenges them not to despair fruitlessly on account of the weakness of their sex, since they are able to receive the gift of prophecy. Rather, they should understand and believe that purity of mind, not difference of sex, merits this gift.*

This statement would regularly be repeated in commentaries throughout the centuries. We do not know whether Origen was actually aware of women who were disheartened by their female status or inspired by Deborah, but we do know that he had ongoing interactions with women catechetical students, patronesses, and even female calligraphers commissioned to make copies of his writings. Origen frequently asserted that it was possible for a woman to advance spiritually beyond the mental and physical limitations he believed were intrinsic to her gender. He said women could become “*manly*.” Deborah’s example offers biblical proof of women’s capacity to receive God’s blessings.

In the early church, particularly in the east, one of the offices open to women was that of deacon. Writing at a time when church roles were just emerging and not yet fixed, Paul commends the deacon Phoebe of *Cenchreae* to the church at Rome (**Romans 16:1**). The duties and status of office holders would remain in flux for several centuries, with local and

regional variation, but, in general, the role of “*deacon*” became increasingly institutionalized. The responsibilities of male deacons included teaching, administration, oversight of charity, and liturgical functions in the assembly, such as reading the Gospel and preparing the altar at the Eucharist. Early Christian sources reveal that issues surrounding the role of the female deacon were more complicated, and her office was more controversial than the male deacon.

The Christians of antiquity did not have a single, fixed idea of what deaconesses were supposed to be. In certain settings, her role may have been parallel to male deacons, with deaconesses performing baptisms of women, pouring wine and water into the chalice at the Eucharist, and reading the Gospel in women’s worship assemblies. In some communities, deaconesses were teachers, catechists, and administrators. In many cases, their primary role was to minister to women, teaching them and offering spiritual care; as females, deaconesses had the opportunity to visit women in their own homes without creating the scandal that a male visitor would cause, especially in households where the husband was not Christian. The deaconess was considered to be in the ranks of the clergy, listed with bishops, presbyters, and male deacons in liturgical prayers and instructions.

Ancient sources reveal that she was ordained at the hands of the bishop in a manner parallel to the male deacon. However, by the latter part of the fourth century, her role was contested and her duties were increasingly restricted.

For just as God used male prophets, so too did he employ holy women to open up the secrets of His divinity, as Joel witnesses: “*I will,*” He said, “*pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....Moreover upon my servants and handmaids I will pour forth my spirit*” [Joel 2:28 - 29]. Indeed, we read that Deborah [cf. Judges 4:4 - 5:32], Huldah (sic) [cf. 2 Kings 22:14 - 20], Hannah, the mother of Samuel [cf. 1 Samuel 2:1-10], Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist [cf. Luke 1:41-45], and other women devoted to God, had the spirit of prophecy - and this despite the fact that they were married women. Therefore, let no one wonder or, lacking trust, fall into disbelief if God in the time of grace renews his marvels. He, who in the time of the *Law of Moses* mercifully saw fit to perform similar works, now reveals his mysteries to the fragile sex. Because the people of Israel believed Deborah’s prophecy, they won freedom from oppression and victory over their enemies. Also, a king, a religious man, was found worthy to gain solace and mercy through the prayer and advice of the prophetess Huldah.

The life of the catholic nun - *asceticism, virtue, and learning* - is compared with Deborah’s battle. And because this name Deborah, as our erudition is aware, means “*bee*” in the Hebrew language, in this way, also, will a woman minister be a “*Deborah*” - that is, a bee. For she will produce honey, not only for herself. From all the good things she has been able to gather in different ways, she will pour out everything not only to the sisters of her own house [*domesticis sororibus*], but to all sorts of others [*quibuslibet aliis*], through her example, words, and various other means. In this brief time of mortal life, she will satisfy with the hidden sweetness of holy scriptures not only

herself, but also her blessed sisters, with her open preaching [*praedicatione*], until, in the voice of the prophet [*Joel 3:18*], on the day it is promised, the mountains will drip with eternal sweetness, and the hills will flow with milk and honey.

One of the most extraordinary individuals of the Middle Ages was the twelfth century nun *Hildegard of Bingen* (c. 1098 - 1179). This Rhineland visionary was a scientist, philosopher, theologian, playwright, composer, and prolific writer. Though Hildegard frequently referred to herself as “*a poor little feminine form*” (*paupercula feminea forma*), she was quite willing to denounce boldly the corruption and dissolute morals that she perceived in the church. In her letters, preaching, and theological writings, Hildegard exhorted popes, bishops, and other church leaders to undertake reform. She was concerned with clergymen’s spiritual indolence, their failure to preach boldly against heresy, and the buying and selling of church offices. During her lifetime, Hildegard undertook four extensive preaching tours, addressing crowds of monks, clerics, and laity.

It must be said that prophecy is given to women not for public but private instruction, and if she teaches men through it, this is through a special grace that does not have regard for the distinction between sexes, as it says in **Colossians 3**: “*Put on the new human which is renewed according the image of the one who created [the human],*” where there is neither male nor female. However, the role of public instruction is given to men....When by a special grace it is granted to a woman that she may preach publicly; this is then permitted to her because grace, as is said, does not regard the distinction between sexes. For such grace was conceded to women in the Old Testament, to

prophesy publicly to the shame of men, because they had become effeminate, so that the public reign of women over men was allowed to be endured. Similarly in the primitive church, because of the multitude of the harvest and scarcity of labourers, it was permitted for Martha and Mary to preach publicly and for the four daughters of Philip to prophesy publicly, as is found in **Acts 21**.

Biblical commentators looked for layers of meaning in Deborah's story. They sought literal-historical, moral, and allegorical lessons imbedded within the words of the text. At the symbolic level she usually represented something worthy: the Law, Scripture, the Church, or the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the historical level, she is praised as a holy woman, delivering counsel to Israel through the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Deborah is lifted up as proof that God wishes to honour the female sex, whose crowning glory is the Virgin Mary. In fact, Deborah's presence is conventional - *even expected* - in lists of worthy biblical women recited to encourage women to be virtuous (*usually according to the terms and expectations of the male authors*). Some interpreters used heroic language for the warrior, calling her a *virago* (a *manly* heroine), *bellatrix* (warrioress), or *defensatrix* (defender) of her people. Artists suggested a military presence for her. Others resisted Deborah's unconventional judicial and military role, even suppressing her title "*judge*" and transferring it to Barak. Her summons to Barak to embark into battle was occasionally portrayed as a sort of wifely request for a husbandly errand. In certain cases, the "*potency*" of Deborah was safely directed into the cloistered female religious vocation. Nuns could valiantly undertake

spiritual warfare through their ascetic practices. Women should not preach, teach, or publicly address the church, but nuns could sing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### **biblical interpretation**

At first glance, it may seem an anomaly that after more than two thousand years of biblical interpretation, there are still major disagreements today among biblical scholars about what the Jewish and Christian Scriptures say, and about how one is to interpret and understand their content. Indeed, the late twentieth century has been witnessing the dissolution of what had been for well over a hundred years at least a substantial consensus among scholars about how to interpret the Bible, and how to understand and explain what it says. To the outsider this may seem amazing, since both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures are a limited corpus of writings, and have been exhaustively studied by Jews and Christians for centuries - indeed, millennia.

There is a multi-layered richness and open-endedness of the biblical text itself; and the interplay of this diverse richness with the enormous variety in the worldviews of the various communities and individuals, living in many different ages, who have had to interpret the Scriptures in order to provide a direct and vital message for each of these communities and individuals. Thus, one could say that the interpretive possibilities are infinite, a product of the cross-fertilization of the fecundity of the biblical texts themselves with the varying needs and interests of the many interpreters who have wrestled with these texts. Due to modern discovery of long-concealed ancient texts, an interest in the utilization of multiple languages in the interpretation of Scripture has re-emerged, aided by many newly-developed linguistic tools including, most recently, the computer.

Yet, even though this interpretive process has been multifaceted and infinitely varied throughout the ages, it is clear that many of

the same questions have periodically appeared throughout the history of biblical interpretation, nuanced somewhat differently to address the specific concerns of different ages. Along these lines, one thinks of parallels between the more flexible and open-ended forms of the allegorical approach as practiced, for example, by Alexandrine scholars and their heirs, who delved deeply into the diversified intellectual world of their day, and some forms of reader-response criticism and deconstructive criticism as practiced by some scholars today.

Many modern higher-critical scholars have seen their scholarly goal to be the recovery of the “*true*,” often defined as the earliest, meaning of particular units of biblical material. Unfortunately, they have long been mired in relentless quibbling among themselves as to how to uncover and identify that “*true*” meaning, and they have essentially ignored the key issue of whether this is the most useful or meaningful form of the biblical text for contemporary Jewish and Christian communities. Approaches which recognize the considerable variety and open-endedness within the Scriptures themselves, and/or the variety of perspectives brought by different readers to the text, have firmly rejected the notion that it is possible to identify the meaning of Scripture so clearly and unambiguously.

The history of biblical interpretation begins at that unknown point in time when the first biblical traditions were created (*“biblical traditions” is used here to mean any materials, such as laws, stories, sayings, pieces of poetry, hymns, oracles, etc. that subsequently found their way, after incorporation into larger bodies of material, into the biblical text as we now have it*). Such creation of necessity involves a deliberate focusing on

particular elements chosen from the broader experience of life, such as major events, significant laws, important customs and practices, special clan and tribal affiliations, etc. Furthermore, no tradition can embrace and embody all elements and vantage points of the subject it treats. What is selected in this creative process will be a direct result of the perspectives, social mores, religious beliefs, hopes and fears, and political and economic needs of the person or community that does the creating. Thus, interpretation is already under way.

The next step in the interpretive process comes when these created units are passed on from one generation or group to another. Admittedly, the mere passing on of traditions may not appear to be an act of interpretation, since transmission does not necessarily imply intent to modify or reformulate.

Nevertheless, even in clearly neutral contexts for transmission, where there is no conscious desire to alter or emend the tradition(s) received, the transmitters will nevertheless place their own, or their group's, particular perspective onto the material being transmitted, often without being aware that such a shift in perspective is occurring. That is interpretation, and it can occur either early in the long process of transmission, when the form is more likely to be oral, or later in the process, when the transmission is more likely to be written. Furthermore, those transmitting the traditions were, in many cases, quite intentionally altering the material they had received to make it suit their own purposes. They would not have seen anything questionable or improper in their doing so.

It is only human nature for any person receiving and conveying important traditions to view them from a perspective that most clearly makes sense in the context of that person's particular religious, cultural, social, economic, and intellectual milieu, which often will not be the same as the milieu presumed earlier by the person or group that created or previously transmitted the tradition(s). The new person or group's own milieu quite understandably becomes, in this context, the only important perspective at that point in time for understanding the materials received. For example, the motif of the exodus experience, including the various traditions and reflections associated with it, would of necessity have been viewed quite differently by a returnee to Palestine after 538 BCE than by a citizen of Solomon's kingdom. Both would have possessed the same essential core to the tradition, namely, the deliverance from Egypt, but each would have seen the shape, significance, and implications of the traditions in quite different ways.

Clearly, there normally will have been numerous generations of interpretation/modification of particular biblical traditions before they ever appeared in the form in which we now find them in our biblical text. The earlier, normally oral, stages were followed by a long history of conscious utilization and revision of earlier written texts, continuing to the time of the Jewish community's eventual establishment of its canon and standard biblical text. Many examples could be given of the growing importance of written texts within the Israelite/Jewish community, such as the book of the law found in the temple during Josiah's reign (621 BCE, **2 Kings 22:8-23:25**), Ezra's reading of the book of the law (**Nehemiah 8:1-8**), Jeremiah's

recording of his prophetic words (**Jeremiah 36**), and Zechariah's vision of the flying scroll (**Zechariah 5:1-4**).

Hence, at these earlier, *precanonical* stages, interpretation contributes, often in a major way, to the eventual shaping of the written, canonical text itself. In fact, it would be very difficult to find either oral or written transmissions of traditions that were indeed neutral, that did not grow and adapt, especially before a standard text was generally accepted within the Jewish or Christian communities. If the existence of a set, standard text of both the *Tanak* (the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament, with few major deviations or significant disagreements, has not in recent centuries inhibited the creativity of interpreters who are consciously dealing with a specific religious community's clearly defined sacred (*and therefore authoritative*) texts, it is quite clear that in the earlier, *precanonical* days, there would have been far fewer inhibitions working against an open-ended reconfiguration of the shape and meaning of a unit of biblical tradition.

Canonization and the setting of a standard biblical text thus are carefully preserved moments embedded in the midst of a continually modulating history of interpretation.

After the establishment of the canons within Judaism and Christianity, it came to be assumed that the creators and early transmitters of the biblical materials knew that they were creating "Scripture," and therefore were strongly conscious of the need to interweave their teachings carefully with those of other biblical writers in order to provide an integrated whole. However, even though the rabbis and Christian interpreters came

fairly early to see the need for an emphasis on the unity of Scripture, especially when confronted by what could at times be a considerable diversity within their own community, there is little to suggest that the biblical writers themselves had a clear concept of the comprehensive authority of Scripture or of the need for careful integration of its components. Indeed, in the earlier, *precanonical* periods, one does not sense, in the literature as it has come down to us, a concept of long-term, overarching canonical authority intended to stretch far into the future. Rather, such authority as there was appears to have been for and within the context of the immediate time and community, building upon a new understanding of respected traditions from the past. Even when reference was made to a previous authority figure such as Moses and the law he gave to Israel, the "*Law of Moses*" was the law as perceived at that particular moment for that particular community.

If these early individuals addressed their contemporaries rather than unseen future generations, it is also true that they were not focused strongly on carefully coordinating their words with those of others whose works would also eventually find their way into Scripture. Indeed, there is no indication that they would have even understood the concept of Scripture, certainly not in the sense in which the Jewish and Christian communities defined it in the late ancient, medieval, and modern eras. Nor could they have known which books would eventually be placed in the canon. Biblical writers alluded to and quoted other documents (*or traditions*) as having some sense of authority, which could at times be strong. But that appeal to authority (*exemplified where the New Testament quotes or alludes to material from the Tanak*) was driven not by an overall,

encompassing desire for articulating the comprehensive unity of all Scripture, but rather by the desire to support the point currently being made (*for a rather extreme example, see 1 Corinthians 9:8-10*). It would fall to later teachers within Judaism and Christianity, once the concept of a unified corpus of authoritative religious documents had become an imperative, to try to forge a broad consensus of scriptural teachings that could somehow embrace within it the divergence of perspective that was the inevitable result of hundreds of years of very different religious, cultural, sociological, historical, and economic factors playing on the lives and writings of the many different individuals and communities that produced these numerous documents.

The matter of the diversity within Scripture comes to focus especially when one looks at the shape of the canon in the various Jewish Christian communities. For example, the scope of the *Tanak* in the Jewish and Protestant Christian heritages, when compared to the significantly different Roman Catholic and Orthodox heritages, clearly demonstrates this diversity, since the various groups each found it necessary to define and articulate their concept of scriptural unity by including or excluding documents which were seen to aid or inhibit specific ideas defining their own concept of unity. This also constitutes interpretation, at the most foundational level.

On the other hand, many Christian interpreters in the ancient period, who often focused on the need for extensive interaction with the rich intellectual environment in which they found themselves, tended to put more emphasis on the ability of

Scripture to appeal to a broad spectrum of the population of the ancient Mediterranean world.

By the *Middle Ages*, when the church had come to dominate western civilization in Europe, the church's authority dictated how Scripture was to be interpreted, so the greater diversity in the longer canon of *Jerome's Vulgate* was not seen as a potential threat to the concept of Scriptural unity. The church could simply declare by fiat what the correct interpretation was, thereby preserving the unity of meaning.

Much modern and contemporary interpretation, however, in its attempts to learn about the early church or the early period of Israel's history, has tended to push the canonical text aside in an effort to get behind it, to recover these earlier (*and when possible, earliest*) forms of the traditions. The expectation is that such recovery provides us with knowledge which is, in the long run, much more useful than the knowledge gained through the study of the canonical texts themselves. To put it simply, recovery of knowledge about "*how it really was*" in early Israel, during the career of Jesus, or in the earliest church has been seen as the best avenue to useful and satisfying religious knowledge.

The following are some of the significant events and circumstances that shaped the interpretation and development of the earlier traditions that eventually found their way into the Tanak/Old Testament, and into the New Testament, and thus would have shaped the form of the different canons:

- the numerous petty conflicts in early Israel's history, which eventually led various clans and tribes to form alliances and share traditions with one another,
- the establishment of the centralized, unified monarchy under *David* and *Solomon*,
- the division of the Israelite state into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (922 BCE),
- the repeated invasion of both kingdoms by major states such as Assyria and Babylonia, which forced both kingdoms to see themselves and their God as actors on a large international stage,
- the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BCE by Assyria,
- the reform by King Josiah in 621 BCE,
- the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the Southern Kingdom in 587 BCE by Babylonia,
- the exile of many people from the Northern Kingdom (721 BCE) and from Judah (587 BCE), thus beginning the diaspora or spreading of Jews eventually throughout the known world,
- the edict of Cyrus the Persian, allowing various peoples, including Jews, to return to their homeland (538 BCE),
- the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (completed 515 BCE),
- Ezra's proclamation of the Torah and Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (prior to 400 BCE),
- Alexander the Great's conquest of the Near East (336-323 BCE) and the consequent Hellenization of most of the areas where Jews lived,
- the deadly attempt by Antiochus IV Epiphanes to eradicate Judaism (168-165 BCE),

- the takeover of Palestine by Rome (63 BCE), followed by frequent Jewish rebellions,
- the reign of Herod the Great (38-4 BCE) and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem,
- the career and death of Jesus of Nazareth (approximately 30 CE),
- the beginnings of the Jewish Christian community,
- the preaching of Christianity by Paul and others to Gentiles,
- the writing of Paul's epistles,
- the revolt of Jews in Palestine against Rome (beginning in 65 CE),
- Rome's crushing of the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (70 CE),
- Christianity's gradually becoming a predominantly Gentile religion,
- the beginning of Roman persecution of Christians (60s CE),
- the writing of the Gospels, and
- the Jewish revolt led by Bar Kochba (135 CE).

This is certainly not a complete list of all the significant events that influenced the shaping of the Jewish and Christian canons, but it is enough to give a broad picture.

It would be difficult to list all the significant social, economic, political, cultural, and religious developments which, interacting with the historical events mentioned above, would have had an impact on the development and interpretation of biblical traditions. However, among those to be mentioned from the

period prior to the exile are these (*in roughly chronological order*):

- the growing sense of community, of what it meant to be a part of Israel, among the *premonarchic* clans and tribes,
- concomitant with this, a growing sense of separation from peoples, regions, and cities not a part of Israel,
- despite this, the unavoidable cross-fertilization with cities, regions, countries, and religions with which Israel was in contact,
- the gradual development of wealthy urban classes in the cities of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (10th-6th centuries BCE),
- the persistent influence of Canaanite and other religions on the religion of the Israelites,
- the growing importance of the temple in Jerusalem and the priestly caste associated with it, in both *preexilic* Judah and *postexilic* Palestinian Judaism,
- the growth of the prophetic movement in the two *preexilic* kingdoms and its gradual disappearance during the *postexilic* period, and
- the growing exposure of *preexilic* Israelites to international culture and wisdom, beginning as early as Solomon, growing especially after approximately 850 BCE, and intensifying dramatically after 587 BCE.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **jerome and the vulgate**

*Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus*, better known as Jerome, Doctor of the Church, was one of the most important interpreters of the Bible in the early centuries of Christianity. He was probably born sometime in the early 340s of the Christian era in the town of *Stridon* in present-day *Croatia*. He died in 420, having acquired an international reputation for biblical scholarship, for extensive literary activity, and for living a holy and ascetic life.

The curriculum of Jerome's secondary education in Rome would have been principally concerned with the rules of grammar, particularly the correct analysis and use of language, and classical literature. Favourite authors were Virgil (*poet and founder of liberal Latin culture*), Terence (*the comic playwright*), the historian Sallust, and the stylist, orator and philosopher, Cicero. Jerome's works are full of quotations and allusions to classical literature. At 15 or 16, Jerome would have graduated to a Roman school of rhetoric, where he would have learned the art of public speaking with a view, perhaps, to entering a legal career or the civil service. His later writings show how well he learned the art of rhetoric, with its stylized procedures, stock emotional phrases, and tendency to exaggeration.

Before it was possible to interpret the text properly, it was necessary to have the best text available. This meant that Jerome had to learn the original languages of the Bible. As far as the New Testament was concerned, Jerome encountered no problems, for he had learned Greek at school and had attended the lectures of Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople.

Jerome took lessons in Hebrew from a Jewish convert to Christianity, and it is clear that he found it difficult to master. No grammars or concordances were available, so he had to learn the language orally, memorizing the sounds of the consonants and vocabulary. Presumably, he practiced writing the Hebrew characters by copying out manuscripts. Of his Hebrew studies, Jerome says: “What labour I spent on this task, what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired and how often I gave up and in my eagerness to learn, started again” (*Epistle 125.12*).

Jerome believed, with the rest of the ancient Jewish and Christian world, that Hebrew was the world's original language. Regardless of its antiquity, however, Jerome found it a barbarous language, which affected his Latin style. The very fact, for instance, that Jerome undertook the task of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew points toward his possessing a high degree of ability in Hebrew.

Jerome was, as he himself says, a *vir trilinguis*, knowing Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. One of the greatest achievements for which he is remembered is the “*Vulgate*,” his translation of the Bible into Latin. The term “*Vulgate*” comes from Latin *vulgata* meaning “*common*”. It is used of the Latin version of the Bible followed by the Roman Catholic Church, often attributed to Jerome. Jerome used the term himself to refer to his own translation of the Bible, because he wanted to make the scriptural texts available to everyone, not just to scholars who could understand Greek and Hebrew.

Jerome, more than any other single person, was responsible for fixing the literary form of the Bible for the entire western

church. The complicated history of the Vulgate translation and Jerome's involvement in it began in 383, when *Pope Damasus* came to the conclusion that, because of the proliferation of variant readings in the Latin Bible of the day, a thorough revision was imperative. For this task, he commissioned Jerome. Although we do not have the actual words of his commission, we get a very clear idea of the pope's wishes from Jerome's preface to the four Gospels:

*You urge me to compose a new work from the old, and, as it were, to sit in judgement on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the world; and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agrees with the Greek original. The labour is one of love, but at the same time dangerous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all; and how can I change the language of the world in its old age, and carry it back to its early childhood? Is there a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he takes the volume in his hands, and sees that what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, break out immediately into violent language and call me a forger and a profane person for having had the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections in them?*

Faced with a great array of variant readings and different text types, Jerome prepared to carry out *Pope Damasus's* wish to revise the Latin Bible and create (or re-create) a uniform text. Naturally enough, he began his revision with the four Gospels. *Pope Damasus* did not commission Jerome to make a fresh translation of the Bible, but Jerome found himself checking the accuracy of the Latin text by referring constantly to the Greek original. He was conscious, however, of his commission to revise the existing Old Latin version and changed this text only when it was necessary. He finished his revision of the four

Gospels and presented it to the pope, with prefaces to each of the Gospels, in 384.

Before he left Rome in 385, after having revised the text of the Gospels, Jerome revised the Latin text of the Psalter according to the Septuagint. He says that he revised this book very quickly, but made substantial changes. This revision used to be identified as the "*Roman Psalter*," but recent work has indicated that, while the Roman Psalter is not the version which Jerome made at Rome in 384, it may well represent the text **011** which he worked and which he corrected. A few years later (387-88), Jerome made another translation of the Psalms, this version is known as the "*Gallican Psalter*," as it was first accepted for use in the churches of Gaul. It also remained in greater use than his later translation of the Psalms from Hebrew.

In the same period, Jerome also translated Job, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. The Psalter, Job (*in two manuscripts*), and Song of Songs (*in only one manuscript*), are all that remain of this translation of parts of the Old Testament.

By 390, Jerome had become convinced of the necessity to make a fresh translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew text, and, encouraged by friends and his desire to demolish the arguments of the Jews, he began to translate each of the books of the Hebrew canon, a task that was not completed until the year 406. It is probable that Jerome began this new translation with the books of Samuel and Kings. After explaining that the Hebrew canon has three divisions - *Law*, *Prophets* and "*Hagiographa*" - Jerome goes on to say:

This preface to the Scriptures may serve as a "*helmeted*" introduction to all the books which I translate from Hebrew into Latin....Read first, then, my Samuel and Kings; mine, I say, mine. For whatever by careful translation and cautious correction I have learnt and comprehended, is my very own. And when you understand anything of which you were ignorant before, either (*if you are grateful*) consider me a translator, or (*if ungrateful*) a paraphraser, although I am not at all conscious of having deviated from the Hebrew original. (*Preface to Samuel and Kings; Epistle 49-4*)

It sounds as if Jerome is writing this preface as a general introduction to his whole translation of the Old Testament, discussing the contents and limits of the Old Testament canon. He refers to the preface as "*helmeted*" (*galeatus*) because he arms himself in advance to defend himself from the critics he knows will rise up against him.

Jerome inherited a long tradition of biblical interpretation, both Jewish and Christian. In Judaism, rabbinic scholars had developed a system of interpretative rules and techniques for studying biblical texts. These may be broadly classified under two headings: *haggadah* and *halakhah*. *Haggadah* ("information" or "anecdote") is seen largely in collections of and often takes the form of moralizing exegesis. Various techniques were used to achieve this, including juxtaposing originally discrete biblical texts, creative elaboration of the biblical narrative, and the use of parable. This *midrashic* method could provide profound theological insights. Jerome used a great deal of haggadic material in his works and was the main source through which echoes of the *haggadah* reached some of the western church Fathers. *Halakhah* ("procedure") was concerned with the implementation of the Torah into practical matters and with ensuring that the Torah could be successfully adapted to the

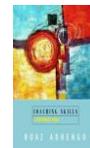
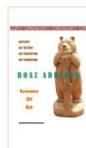
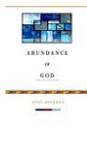
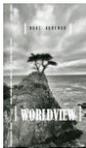
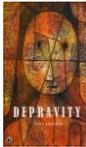
changing conditions in the life of Jews. Jerome also used this *halakhic* principle in his own exegesis of Scripture.

In the centuries following Jerome's death, he was universally acknowledged as the prince of Christian biblical scholars, and his translation of the Bible became accepted everywhere as the standard biblical text in the western church. His works became a fertile ground for the labours of subsequent exegetes who recognized that his immense and intimate knowledge and understanding of the Bible surpassed that of any other Christian scholar for centuries.

The writings of Jerome are of lasting value to Christians today because they offer us a splendid example of the state of biblical interpretation in the West in the fourth century, because they give us an interesting insight into relations between Christians and Jews in the generations after Christianity became the religion of the State, and also because they paint for us, in vivid colours, a picture of the “*irascible monk*” who devoted his life to the study of the sacred Scriptures - in his own words: “*What other life can there be without the knowledge of the Scriptures, for through these Christ himself, who is the life of the faithful, becomes known*” (Epistle 30.7).

# Also by Boaz Adhengo

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*Mr. Boaz Adhengo is President to Creative Arts Society of Kenya, a leadership coach, business for arts consultant and a cultural policy strategist. Having published thirty-five (35) books, he manages the Adhengo Boaz & Associates consulting group and is co-founder of the Buruburu Basketball Ministry, Inc.*

*He has been recently ordained as a Life Coach Minister by the Christian Leaders Ministries, Michigan, U.S.A.*



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