

THE MOTHERHOOD OF YHWH IN DEUTERO-ISAIAH 42:14 AND 49:15

Pauline Yee
Faculty of Religious Studies McGill University, Montreal
April 2016

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts with option in Gender and Feminists Studies.

© Pauline Yee 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	i
Résumé.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Deutero-Isaiah: Overview of Literature and Influences.....	6
Context of Deutero-Isaiah.....	6
Deutero-Isaiah and its Influences.....	8
Review of Commentaries.....	15
Review of Previous Studies.....	19
Isaiah 42:14: Figures of Speech and Interpretation for a Travailing Woman.....	26
Metaphor Theory.....	26
Simile and Metaphor.....	31
Interpretation of פִּילֹדֶה.....	34
Associated Commonplaces in Isaiah 42:14.....	40
Associated Commonplace Theory.....	40
Childbirth as an Associated Commonplace.....	43
War as an Associated Commonplace.....	44
Cognate Deities and the Motherhood of YHWH.....	50
Overview of Fertility Goddesses.....	50
Social Status of Women and Goddess Worship.....	53
Conflation of Asherah and YHWH Worship.....	58
Associated Commonplaces in Isaiah 49:15.....	61
Marriage Metaphor in Isaiah 49:14.....	61
Breastfeeding as an Associated Commonplace.....	63
Breastfeeding within the Female Body.....	69
Interpretative Issues in Isaiah 49:15a.....	71
Issues in Translation.....	71
Compassion and Womb.....	74
The Female Body.....	76
Conclusion.....	80
Bibliography.....	84

ABSTRACT

This research looks at Deutero-Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15 to demonstrate that both these passages refer to a maternal metaphor. Most secondary sources have neglected the maternal aspect of YHWH in these verses. This research reconsiders the interpretive and exegetical issues that have been used to argue against YHWH's maternal aspects in the past, such as what constitutes as a metaphor and how the associated commonplaces may affect the language of motherhood. Through showing that maternal imagery is attributed to YHWH, this research highlights the importance of considering YHWH as being imaged in both as male and female gender roles, and therefore might be thought of as transcending gender divisions of the created order.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette recherche examine Deutéro-Isaïe 42:14 et 49:15 pour démontrer que ces deux passages se réfèrent à une métaphore maternelle. La plupart des sources secondaires ont négligé l'aspect maternel de YHWH dans ces versets. Cette recherche réexamine les problèmes interprétifs et exégétiques qui ont été utilisés autrefois comme des arguments contre les aspects maternels de YHWH, tel que ce qui constitue comme une métaphore et comment les lieux communs associés peuvent affecter la langue de la maternité. En montrant que l'imagerie maternelle est attribué à YHWH, cette recherche met en évidence l'importance de considérer YHWH comme étant imagé dans les deux rôles masculins et féminins entre les sexes, et donc peut-être considéré comme transcendant les divisions entre les sexes de l'ordre créé.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Professor Patricia Kirkpatrick for being my thesis supervisor and for allowing me to pursue my own questions and interests. Her guidance anchored my research and pointed me in the right direction to successfully complete this thesis. Without her encouragement and counsel, this thesis would not have been possible, and I am indebted to her kindness.

I am also grateful for my family and friends, whose patience and unwavering support has not gone unnoticed and was the constant motivation behind my work.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphors are necessary because they provide a way of understanding what is unknown, such as the divine. Religious language is deeply metaphorical and descriptions of YHWH are often figurative. Often, those interested in YHWH's character forget that what is mentioned of him is figurative and not literal. Metaphorical language is significant for the understanding of YHWH because they are already in accordance with the way we perceive concepts already. People are frequently not aware of the figurative nature of their thoughts.¹ It should be no surprise, then, that metaphorical language is often used in personal terms.

Personal metaphors are used in religious language to speak of who YHWH is. These personal metaphors are understood in models of the people using it—ourselves. Sallie McFague suggests that this is done because people are the most complex creatures that they know.² A personal model for YHWH is used because people tend to represent YHWH after themselves. The implication of personal models suggest both credibility and familiarity, and serves as a reminder of how appropriate it is for the divine, since people often relate the most to these personal models.

The classic way of understanding YHWH is that he is masculine.³ This is due to his many attributes. Within the Hebrew Bible, a plethora of terms is used to explain who YHWH is. He is called Shepherd, Creator, King, Father, and many more. All these understandings of YHWH derive from figurative language, which is used to describe YHWH. These metaphors become emphasized to a point where they are interchangeable with YHWH's being. The more the metaphor is used in literal language, the more likely it is equated to the subject. To many, YHWH becomes these characteristics. The descriptive language is no longer just a metaphor, but

¹ Sally McFague, *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 71.

² Ibid., 36.

³ The pronoun "he" is used here for grammatical purposes.

turns into a model. In this sense, the model is still a metaphor, but the concept of the subject, YHWH, has changed. For instance, YHWH does not only resemble a Father, but YHWH is Father. Models are metaphors that have become dominant. Unlike metaphors, which could be temporary and used by the individual, models are employed by the masses that will affect the structure and experience of the subject.⁴ When metaphors become models, they are permanent, inanimate, and the nuances of the metaphor are no longer there.⁵ As a model, it affects the audience's experience with the subject. In this instance, they view YHWH as a Father. Like all other models, this allows for a tradition to emerge and is understood to exclude other models under the assumption that this model has become doctrine. This causes friction when applying characteristics that differ from the models to YHWH. Models can be helpful tools that offer insight to discussing the subject. They provide a new way of discussing nebulous concepts. However, when they become literalized, they become identified as the only way of understanding the subject. This model of Father has received much attention, except that there are traces of other metaphors or models that have been neglected and repressed. Perhaps the reason why they have never been models is because they were never allowed to be. This is what needs to be prevented when studying divine metaphors. YHWH should not be contained to specific metaphors. Many have believed that YHWH is known to be Father, yet cannot be Mother because those are two images that contradict.

It is not the inaccuracy of models that threaten the understanding of YHWH, but the resistance of allowing other attributes into the way that YHWH is conceptualized. Sallie McFague writes that the patriarchal model of YHWH is “idolatrous” and “a perversion in its

⁴ McFague. *Collected Readings*, 77

⁵ Ibid., 78.

hegemony of the field of religious models.”⁶ The dominance of masculine models prevents the possibility of other metaphors from participating in the discourse of who YHWH is. There should be no one model for describing YHWH, and it is detrimental to institutionalize YHWH because of models. Interpreters have been hesitant in applying Mother as a model for YHWH because the understanding of YHWH as a Father has persisted in traditional interpretation. It should be noted that this investigation is not to supplant the existing paternal model of YHWH. There is enough evidence to suppose that YHWH is a Father; however, the issue is that there have been instances where YHWH is also referred to as Mother, and those have been ignored in favour of conceptualizing YHWH as Father. The Hebrew Bible describes YHWH using a plethora of images and metaphors. YHWH is known to be a rock, helper, judge, ruler, lover, etc. The danger is when models become so static that religious language and attributes are rejected because they do not seem to correspond with what is previously understood. The masculine label of YHWH ignores the feminine aspects.

The impact of male dominated metaphors is alienating and exclusive to women. It perpetuates the idolatry of masculinist theology, which is that since YHWH is male, all men must be closer to the divine somehow.⁷ This creates a distance between women and YHWH because it implies that men and YHWH both have a commonality that women do not. This easily causes a cycle of patriarchal representation, where male images are used as models for YHWH because they refer to status, power, and the divine. This validates the masculinity but completely obscures the female from the equation. Women, then, have no share of the imagery and are left from experiencing the divine in the same way men do.

⁶ McFague, *Collected Readings*, 77.

⁷ Tivka Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Feminist Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 394.

Whether realized or not, all scholars and interpreters have their bias. My goal for this study is to point out that the biblical passages have been interpreted by an androcentric point of view and to show suppressed interpretative aspects of the text. Since biblical texts are rooted in a patriarchal culture, a feminist perspective may help uncover what has been marginalized. Not only this, but biblical texts are recorded and transmitted with an androcentric perspective, and traditionally, are not aware of a feminist perspective. This reading is not to modernize or change the text, but acts like a corrective reading and is concerned with the liberation of the other sex within the tradition of patriarchal culture within the text. My intention is to unearth the motherhood of YHWH in Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15, two texts that I believe contain the maternal metaphors and have a history of being ignored.

This study will examine YHWH as a mother within two passages in Deutero-Isaiah. These texts, Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15, have been chosen because they are often debated upon as to whether they really show YHWH as mother. Although the greater focus of this study is to show that there are theological implications in interpreting divine metaphors, the discussion of the passages is not the application of the motherhood metaphor. In short, the issue in these interpretations is not theological, but exegetical. Feminist hermeneutics cannot exist without feminist theological implications because feminist hermeneutics is in the context of theological hermeneutics and liberation theology. Theological critique is not explicit, although it is implied. An evaluation and transformation of biblical interpretations is necessary within feminist biblical criticism.⁸ The methodology used is a feminist hermeneutic of proclamation, which assesses oppressive traditions in order to expose patriarchal interests.⁹ The function of this study is to prevent the understanding of YHWH from “freez[ing] in a patriarchal box of [human]

⁸ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press), 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

construction.”¹⁰ Although this study does have theological implications, the actual ramifications of what YHWH as Mother would not be discussed in depth. My concern is with the interpretation of the divine imagery in 42:14 and 49:15 and whether they contain maternal imagery.

Some have mentioned that YHWH, as Mother, can be problematic because even though the Hebrew Bible is full of images of YHWH’s role in creation, birthing of children, formation, and care, it can be argued that these metaphors also accompany maternal imagery with masculine overtones.¹¹ However, that does not negate that maternal imagery exists in the text. To ignore the maternal metaphor is committing the same error of patriarchal interpretation—it continues to silence the metaphor and female imagery. As I will prove in my discussion of the texts, even if there are other images that overlap, this does not negate that these passages refer to a maternal metaphor.

My study will be focused on the metaphoric theory of Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15. The associated commonplaces of these two passages will be discussed to give full insight to the metaphor itself. Cognate deities are also mentioned to provide a fuller understanding of the language that is used to describe YHWH. Without questioning the way YHWH is conceptualized, it can be easily forgotten the complexity of religious language and YHWH.

¹⁰Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (41:1973), 48.

¹¹ Tivka Simone Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Feminist Biblical Criticism*, 394.

DEUTERO-ISAIAH: OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE AND INFLUENCES

Deutero-Isaiah was chosen for this study because it has the most passages alluding to the motherhood of YHWH than any other group of texts.¹² Since feminist biblical criticism emerged and gained popularity in the 1970's, there was interest to highlight metaphors used to describe YHWH as mother. Although enthusiasm in this study began several decades ago, there is still debate whether these texts do refer to divine maternal imagery. Some scholars, like Claus Westermann, tend to overlook the imagery and are concerned with the overlapping metaphors instead, such as the divine warrior or Zion as mother. Other scholars that do advocate for divine maternal imagery have done work that is viewed as incomprehensive, and does not fully describe all the nuances of the metaphor.

The Context of Deutero-Isaiah

Deutero-Isaiah is normally dated to the exilic period (587 BCE) after the destruction of the Temple. The Masoretic text of Isaiah contained in the Hebrew Bible is normally thought of as emerging in three distinct periods. The first section (Chapters 1-39) is thought to reflect the pre-exilic period and the ministry of the prophet Isaiah. The second half (chapters 40-55) were added by an anonymous individual following the work of the original prophet. Later, the rest of Isaiah (Trito-Isaiah) was written as the exiles returned to Jerusalem. The joining of the texts together has been done since antiquity, as seen in Sirach 48:24, which was composed in 190 BCE. Sirach reads: "With inspired power he prophesied the future and consoled the mourners in Zion," which refers to both Isaiah 2:1 and 61:2-3.¹³ Although this evidence contains Trito-Isaiah, it demonstrates that the full manuscript of Isaiah was present in Sirach. Not only that, but the

¹² It should be noted that within Deutero-Isaiah, 42:14 and 49:15 are not the only verses that contain divine maternal imagery. See also 45:9-10 and 46:3.

¹³ Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary in Eerdmans's Critical Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 1.

large Isaiah scroll found in Cave 1 of Khirbet Qumran contains no separation between the two sections of the book. This scroll is dated to the mid-second century BCE.¹⁴

Proto-Isaiah has a dating of late eighth century BCE, before the destruction of the southern kingdom. Deutero-Isaiah prophesized during the second half of sixth century BCE, which was during the final years of the Babylonian exile and the beginning of the return to Jerusalem.¹⁵ The question that Deutero-Isaiah has to deal with is why the Babylonian exile occurred, and whether there was a reason for the people's exile if there is an almighty deity. An overarching theme in Deutero-Isaiah is that YHWH is still undefeated and victorious, despite the desolation of the people. Part of Deutero-Isaiah's polemic is that the nation will be redeemed and will be done under YHWH's salvific plans. He does this by employing judicial and social connotations to the idea of redemption.¹⁶ Shalom M. Paul writes that "between the Redeemer (God) and the redeemed (the nation) there exists a familial link...Just as a redeemer is required to redeem his property or his kin if they are sold to someone outside the family, so the Lord redeemed his people...and shall redeem them from the present Babylonian captivity."¹⁷ This theme of familial redemption, as well as declaring that YHWH is still all-powerful, is revealed in Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15, where YHWH is shown to promise the people that action will be taken and that they will be redeemed. To mention briefly here, YHWH is seen to be a divine warrior and a woman giving birth, a comparison that promises victory and comfort to the audience. In 49:15, YHWH reassures the people that they are not forgotten or forsaken. Both of these passages are in accordance with Deutero-Isaiah's theme of YHWH's redemption for the people. Deutero-Isaiah's answer to the contextual question of how the exile came to be with an

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2

¹⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷ Ibid.

omnipotent God is clear through the maternal imagery; YHWH has not forsaken the people and will act on their behalf soon.¹⁸

Deutero-Isaiah and its Influences

One does not need to look far to see the Deuteronomic influence on Deutero-Isaiah. There are multiple expressions that are similar between Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah. It is impossible to list them all in this section, but it should be noted that the themes of redemption, worshipping one true God are both in Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah. The idea that the people are special or “chosen” is first seen in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic literature, but is not in prophetic works before Deutero-Isaiah.¹⁹ In 42:14 and 49:15, the passages leading up to these verses both refer to Israel as chosen, and the root word בָּחַר occurs.²⁰ All these motifs refer to the relationship between YHWH and his people.

Within the Hebrew Bible, Deutero-Isaiah also has its influences. Without a doubt, Deutero-Isaiah is impacted by Proto-Isaiah. Both sections refer to Israel returning from exile (11:12; 49:22).²¹ Even though the two sections were written separately, Deutero-Isaiah matches Proto-Isaiah with Isaianic expressions. The people compare themselves to a woman giving birth in Isaiah 26:17; later on, in 42:14, YHWH is the one that uses this conventional saying. Although this is an expression that is commonly used in ANE literature (see chapter on Associated Commonplaces in Isaiah 42:14), it is important to note that both sections of Isaiah contain this comparison.

Like Isaiah 49:15, Jeremiah 2:32 also mention the issue of forgetting. The difference is that Deutero-Isaiah reverses the notion of a female forgetting her prized possession, and applies

¹⁸ It should be noted that 49:15 uses a rhetorical question in part for this polemical context of whether YHWH has abandoned the people (or with the worse implication that YHWH is weak and unable to act).

¹⁹ Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 47.

²⁰ See Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-7; 10:15; 14:2.

²¹ For a comprehensive study, see page 50 of Shalom M. Paul's comparisons in *Isaiah 40-66*.

it to YHWH. Since Jeremiah was written during the exilic era, it is not unusual to think that the text would have influenced Deutero-Isaiah in some way. Although I only briefly mentioned certain influences of Deutero-Isaiah, it still does not answer the question as to why the prophet felt comfortable using divine maternal imagery.

Leila Bronner suggests that the prophet draws his inspiration from the familial realm. While the Israelites were in exile, the “the family was the only stable feature of life left to the exiles” and that “that family is the centre of all this prophet’s metaphors, similes, and personifications.”²² She argues that the family and cycle of life is frequently mentioned, since the name of the matriarch is evoked alongside the patriarch’s. Two examples that she uses are in Isaiah 51:2 and Jeremiah 31:15-17, where Sarah and Rachel are featured. Not only that, but the images of birth, marriage, bride, wife, barrenness, nursing children, all suggest to the life of an Israelite woman.²³ She points out the contrast between Deutero-Isaiah and Proto-Isaiah is that Proto-Isaiah has images that are centred on urban and agricultural life. The images of vineyards, gardens, and animal kingdoms are mentioned. Deutero-Isaiah, however, do not contain images of agricultural life because the people are not sedentary. The imagery of the shepherd depicts a nomadic lifestyle, where the people have been uprooted from their homes. The family becomes the last image of security for the exiles. Bronner concludes that the female divine imagery signifies that the prophet is drawing on the most important aspect of family life, which is the role of the woman.²⁴

Whether there was a societal shift between the Temple cult to the family as the primary social institution is inconclusive. In the passage that Bronner does draw upon to support her

²² Leila Leah Bronner, “Gynomorphic Imagery in Exilic Isaiah (40-66)” in *Jewish Bible Quarterly* (v. 12, n. 2, 1983), 82.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 83.

view, Deutero-Isaiah points out that there is a possibility that a mother can forget her own child (49:15). She suggests that Deutero-Isaiah is using this language to show YHWH's unfathomable love, that YHWH's bond is stronger than even the Israelite's most stable institution. However, there is a possibility that Deutero-Isaiah is invoking the idea that motherhood has been corrupted because of war and famine. There are records that even the familial sphere had become inconsistent during the time of exile and war. In 2 Kings 6:29, there is mention of women eating their own children because of the famine and siege. Even though this incident refers to the blockade of Samaria in the northern kingdom, it breaks with Bronner's reading that family life, especially the mother, was a source of social stability. Ezekiel, regarding the exiles of the southern kingdom, writes that "Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers. And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds" (ESV). It seems that there is some indication, at least, that the family may not be as strong of a social entity as Bronner imagines.

Gruber suggests that Deutero-Isaiah could employ this imagery to counteract the idolatry of female goddesses. Gruber claims that the Temple cult was androcentric and excluded women from participating. This caused women to be more susceptible and curious to other religious institutions that allowed them to fully participate instead. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both criticize women's participation in idolatry by personifying the nation as an idolatrous woman. Jeremiah is more explicit than Ezekiel in that he actually refers to the goddess and practices by calling her the "queen of heaven."²⁵ Gruber writes that "the fact that women were kept at a distance from the official Israelite cult" and the continual representation of YHWH as a husband and Israel as a woman perpetuated this distance.²⁶ Gruber notes that 42:14 and 49:15 both allude to

²⁵ Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17-19, 25.

²⁶ Mayer I. Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah" in *Revue Biblique* (v.90, no. 3, 1983), 358.

contradicting images of YHWH.²⁷ Isaiah 42:14 presents YHWH as a divine warrior and 49:15 shows YHWH as a husband. Since Deutero-Isaiah argues against idolatry more than any other prophetic work, Gruber suggests that the by combining these opposing images, Deutero-Isaiah is presenting YHWH as a deity that is both male and female. Males will no longer view their gender with superiority because the deity chooses to represent himself in this way, and females can be welcomed to worship YHWH because of these images. Thus, both sexes can enter the public sphere of worship and women will no longer have to worship a goddess in order to participate.

However, Gruber is not quite convincing in his argument. There is no basis for the claim that Deutero-Isaiah used female divine imagery in order to bring women into the religious sphere. Also, it is doubtful that Deutero-Isaiah was the first to come up with the concept of a male and female divine. Moreover, there are no indications that Deutero-Isaiah used this imagery as a critique of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's pornoprophetic imagery.²⁸ In fact, Deutero-Isaiah constantly personifies the people as a woman. This is even seen in Isaiah 49:15, where Zion is a wife and mother.

Because of this imagery, Schmitt argues that Deutero-Isaiah draws his inspiration from the existing feminine portrayal of the city. He argues that the tradition of Zion as a woman and mother causes the prophet to refer to YHWH as a mother as well. The motherhood of YHWH parallels the motherhood of Zion, and Deutero-Isaiah tries to demonstrate that YHWH, as a mother, is greater than Zion as a mother. Schmitt argues that apart from Deutero-Isaiah, the

²⁷ Ibid., 356.

²⁸ Pornoprophetic is a definition first used by Athayla Brenner (see *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible*) where the female body is denigrated and portrayed in negative light.

motherhood of Zion is not as prevalent and only implied.²⁹ He proposes that because the Canaanite scribes referred to the city as feminine, the prophetic writers adopted this metaphor and refers to their cities as women as well.³⁰ The female gender of the city would allow it to be viewed as a mother, which is what is seen in Isaiah 49:15. Schmitt suggests that the Israelites adopt this Canaanite way of viewing the city, but rejects Gruber's suggestion that Deutero-Isaiah was taking language and borrowing ideas from Canaanite goddesses.³¹

Although Schmitt is correct in saying that Deutero-Isaiah could not have been the first prophet to use divine maternal imagery, his argument that Deutero-Isaiah uses it because of inspiration from the conventional feminine personification of cities in ANE literature is unconvincing. Isaiah 49:15 is the only instance where Zion and YHWH are both portrayed as mothers, yet there are other passages that refer to YHWH as a mother and do not present Zion as one. Schmitt points out that Deutero-Isaiah would not borrow Canaanite goddess imagery because Deutero-Isaiah's polemic is extremely against those idols which he speaks about.³² However, Schmitt does not take into account the inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud that names YHWH and Asherah. This inscription is dated to the ninth or eighth century BCE, which would predate Deutero-Isaiah. In my chapter on cognate deities, I discuss that foreign goddesses may have an impact on how Deutero-Isaiah portrays YHWH. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the Israelite's religious practices would have influenced Deutero-Isaiah's conception of YHWH, nor would this imagery have been borrowed from the people's veneration of other deities.

²⁹ See Jeremiah 2:2, 4:31; Micah 4:9-10; Psalm 27.

³⁰ John J. Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother" in *Revue Biblique* (92, 1985), 568.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 558.

³² *Ibid.*

Perhaps a better question to ask is not where Deutero-Isaiah draws his imagery from, but why the prophet feels comfortable ascribing female traits to YHWH. Deutero-Isaiah is not the only prophetic work to contain divine maternal imagery. Hosea 11:3-4 and 13:8 both refer to YHWH as a mother.³³ In Hosea 13:8, YHWH is compared to a mother bear that is protective and will act in vengeance. This is thematically not that far from the divine warrior in Isaiah 42:14. Not only that, but Hosea 11:3-4 has the same themes of a mother and suckling infant.

The context for Hosea 11 is that YHWH has taken care of Israel since the Exodus, and the speech figuratively starts at the beginning of Israel's life, where YHWH nurses Ephraim. Traditionally, interpreters have opted to ignore the female imagery. The word יִתְרַגֵּל occurs in a rare form here and has the meaning of a reflexive hiphil, where the root word is רָגַל, which means foot. The meaning would then be translated to teaching to walk. In this instance, a child is being taught to walk by putting their foot in front of another. This verb only occurs in Hosea. In Arabic, the root word رָגَلَ means to suck or nurse. There is a logical sequence here in the verse, where the child is being taught to walk, and then picked up and nursed by the mother.³⁴

Schungel-Straumann argues that this passage should be translated “to nurse” instead of “to walk.” She suggests that teaching a child to walk is important, but is not vital to their survival, whereas being suckled would have been.³⁵ Because of this, it would have been much more appropriate to attribute this alternative translation to YHWH. Furthermore, the third verb in Hosea 11:3 (רָפָא) means to heal, but also have nurturing connotations. This should not go

³³ Hosea 11:3 רָפָאֲתִים כִּי יָדָעוּ וְלֹא עַל יִרְוּעֵתִיו קָחָם לְאַפְרַיִם תִּרְגַּלְתִּי וְאַנְכִּי:

Hosea 11:4 אוֹכִיל אֱלֹוֹ וְאָט לְחֵיָהֶם עַל עַל כְּמִרְיָמִי לְהִמְנָאֲהֶנָּה אֶהְבֵּהּ בַּעֲבַתּוֹת אֲמִשְׁכֶּם אָדָם בְּחִבְלֵי

Hosea 13:8 תִּבְקָעַם הַשִּׁזְהָתִית כְּלָבִיא שֶׁם וְאַדְלָם לִבָּם סִגּוֹר וְאַקְרַע שְׂכֹוֹל כְּדָב אֶפְגָּשֶׁם

³⁴Helen Schungel-Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11” in *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets*, ed. by Athayla Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 200.

³⁵ Ibid., 201.

unnoticed and would make more sense if paired with the alternative translation of a child being nursed.

The word לִחְיִהָם, often translated to “cheeks” is correct, but an alternative meaning to the word is “breasts.” This same word is used in Ruth 4:16, where Naomi takes the child and nurses him. The word describes the external, front side of the body where one puts animals and children. For women, this referred to their breasts.³⁶ This verse can be translated as YHWH bending down to nurse the child, and its meaning would flow with 11:4b, where Hosea describes the child as being fed.

Moreover, the verb sequences are all introduced by הִנֵּה, which could be a play on YHWH’s own name. Schungel-Straumann suggests that the Hebrew audience would have connected Hosea’s theology with the mother imagery.³⁷ This will contrast with the worship of Baal, who does not care for the people, while YHWH is portrayed as nurturing and caring. Later, in 11:8 (My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender), the translation of compassion could also refer to the womb.³⁸ Hosea 11:1-8 demonstrate Hebrew parallelism, where the heart and the womb refer to maternal emotions.³⁹ YHWH cannot destroy his people because of the maternal nature. This is thematically similar to Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15, where the image of a divine warrior overlaps with a mother, and that YHWH is referred to as a suckling mother.

Not only does Hosea likely refer to YHWH as a mother, but may also refer to goddess traditions. Although this discussion is quite broad and lengthy, it should be mentioned that Julius Wellhausen emends the traditional interpretation of Hosea 14:8 from “It is I who answer and

³⁶ Ibid., 202.

³⁷ Ibid., 203.

³⁸ Hosea 11:8 נַחֲמִי נִכְמְרוּנִי לִבִּי עָלַי נִהְפָּךְ כַּצְבֵּאִים אֲשִׁמָּךְ כְּאִמָּה אֶתְנֶנָּה אִידִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶמְנֶנָּה אֶפְרַיִם אֶתְנֶנָּה אִידִּי

³⁹ Schungel-Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” 209.

look after you” (וַאֲשֶׁרְךָנוּ עֲנִיתִי אָנִי) into “I am his Anath and his Asherah.”⁴⁰ If Wellhausen’s translation is correct, then not only are the names of Anath and Asherah mentioned by name in biblical literature, but YHWH incorporates these names and functions as these goddesses.⁴¹ Wellhausen bases his translation on the poetic sound, where Anath and Asherah can be audibly heard in the Hebrew.

As seen in Hosea, the divine maternal imagery in Deutero-Isaiah is not exclusive. Hosea had used it in his prophecy two centuries before Deutero-Isaiah. Although Hosea was written in the northern kingdom, his text was later transmitted to the south.⁴² Deutero-Isaiah, having been written later, could have drawn from Hosea. This would explain Deutero-Isaiah’s ease in comparing YHWH to a mother. Both Asherah and Anath were fertility goddesses, which meant that these goddesses were concerned with birth, but were also mothers and warriors in their own right. If Wellhausen’s assumption is correct, then it would not be difficult to understand why Deutero-Isaiah was also able to incorporate this imager with YHWH. In this regard, the divine maternal imagery in Deutero-Isaiah is not unique.

Review of Recent Commentaries

The feminist movement has some effect on biblical interpretation and must be explained. The first wave of feminism involved the suffragettes and abolition of slavery. Although this was not strictly a biblical movement, it did intersect with feminist biblical criticism in Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Women’s Bible*. After the 1900’s, the two world wars delayed the advocacy of women’s rights till the late fifties and early sixties, where the question of women’s liberation

⁴⁰ Julius Wellhausen, *Die kleine Propheten* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 134.

⁴¹ Schungel-Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” 225.

⁴² The influence that Hosea has on Deuteronomy is a lengthy discussion. See Moshe Weinfeld’s *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 366– 70.

became noteworthy again.⁴³ This movement became quite diverse and did affect biblical scholarship. It was at this time that feminist biblical scholars emerged, such as Phyllis Tribble and Phyllis Bird. These scholars began reading the biblical text with a feminist hermeneutic and wanted to expose androcentric biases. Although some may argue that our society is currently in a post-feminist world, where women's rights have been achieved, and to that extent, biblical texts have been properly exposed for its patriarchal tendencies, third wave feminism has taken course, where matters besides women's liberation are discussed. The interpretations that will be discussed land in the time frame between first to third wave feminism.

Christopher R. North's commentary was written prior to second wave feminism and the rise of feminist biblical criticism in the 1970's. In his commentary on Isaiah 42:14, he acknowledges that the subject changes from warrior to a woman. He does not mention the woman giving birth again, or what the metaphor may depict, but focuses on the divine warrior and what the action of victory represents. A question that should be raised is why North uses the divine warrior as a metaphorical model for YHWH but not the woman giving birth, since both metaphors originate from the same text. Regardless, besides recognizing that the subject of the text changes, North does not address the implications of the passage.⁴⁴

In his commentary on 49:15, North remarks that there is no other place in the Hebrew Bible that the love of YHWH is so well expressed. He points out that the love of YHWH is greater than a mother's love for a child.⁴⁵ Although North is correct in assuming Deutero-Isaiah is trying to express that YHWH's bond is quite strong, North supplants the divine maternal metaphor when he argues that YHWH is not a mother, but greater than mothers.

⁴³ Susan Osborne, "Feminism: A Short History," in *Feminism (Harpenden: Herts, Pocket Essentials, 2001)*, 22.

⁴⁴ Christopher North, *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 116.

⁴⁵ North, *The Second Isaiah*, 194.

Claus Westermann's commentary on Deutero-Isaiah is extremely influential for its time, and multiple secondary sources and commentaries refer back to his interpretive views because of his work in form criticism. Since many commentaries agree with Westermann's interpretation and views on the passages, this creates a tradition of interpretation that is passed on. In his commentary of Isaiah 42:14, he raises the focus to be on the communal lament from the previous verses. His interest is not on the imagery of the suffering woman or childbirth, but on the change from silence to groaning and panting. He does not mention verse 14 in relation to divine maternal imagery at all.⁴⁶ Unlike later interpreters, who at least acknowledge that there is a comparison between YHWH and a woman in labour, Westermann is more interested in YHWH's change in behaviour from passive to active. This puts the maternal metaphor into the background and overlooks the nuances of YHWH's intervention.

Regarding 49:15, Westermann interprets it as a response to another lament as well. The people are in need of reassurance, and Deutero-Isaiah gives them comfort in the form of a comparison between YHWH and mothers. Here, Westermann does address the maternal imagery, but indicates that the mother's love is limited.⁴⁷ He has the same interpretation as North, where YHWH is to be seen as one that is beyond motherhood and maternal faithfulness. This tradition of interpretation is picked up by later commentators, who agree that Isaiah 49:15 demonstrates YHWH's superiority to motherhood, and therefore is not a representation of divine maternal imagery.

In *The Book of Isaiah*, Edward Young suggests that the travailing woman is part of the simile to express God's love for his people. Although Young points out that YHWH gasps and pants, he does not say that this is maternal imagery but shows that it is merely a simile. There is

⁴⁶ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 106.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

an overarching notion that divine maternal imagery only occurs as similes and that similes are inferior comparisons, whereas metaphors can actually equate meaning from the tenor to vehicle.⁴⁸ Because of this prevailing interpretive understanding of simile, Young suggests that Isaiah 42:14 only compares YHWH to a woman and is not actual divine imagery. Although Young does acknowledge the travailing woman in the text, he does not say that 42:14 shows the motherhood of God.⁴⁹ His commentary on Isaiah 49:15 argues that although motherhood is mentioned in the text, it does not refer to YHWH because YHWH's love is greater than a mother. This is in agreement with Westermann's perspective.⁵⁰

In *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, John Barton does assert that 42:14 portrays YHWH as a travailing woman. He cites Kathryn Darr, who claims that the imagery of the divine warrior is entwined with the divine mother.⁵¹ Like Westermann, he shifts the focus of understanding to the lament genre in 49:15.⁵² He makes no mention of the maternal imagery at all and only mentions that Zion must be lamenting her losses and desolation. As explained earlier, this ignores the maternal imagery in the passage.

Conversely, Klaus Baltzer's commentary of Deutero-Isaiah in the *Hermeneia* series mentions that Isaiah 42:14 is to be compared with a woman giving birth. He shows that the crying out of the woman in labour is compared to YHWH through the particle *כִּי*, meaning "like."⁵³ My argument on Isaiah 42:14 differs from Baltzer in that I argue that the "like" (*כִּי*) should not be viewed as a simile, but that it functions as a metaphor. Otherwise, Baltzer's explanation of the divine maternal imagery is helpful. Later, in his commentary on 49:15, he

⁴⁸ This issue will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁴⁹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 129.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵¹ John Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary: Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 468.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 474

⁵³ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A commentary on Isaiah 40-55 in Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 144.

explains the interpretive difficulty. Is this a metaphor for YHWH as a husband, or as a mother? He opts for the husband imagery and reiterates the interpretive tradition that YHWH is not compared to a mother, but the relationship with Judah supersedes that of a mother and child.⁵⁴

Shalom M. Paul, in his commentary of Deutero-Isaiah, does mention that YHWH is compared to a woman in Isaiah 42:14. He attributes this to the often used simile that those who suffer are like women giving birth. In this, he refers to the Gilgamesh Epic (11:116) where Ishtar also cries like a woman giving birth after witnessing the destruction of her people.⁵⁵ However, he does not say that this is a reference to YHWH as a mother giving birth. In the case of Isaiah 49:15, he acknowledges that this is feminine imagery, but advocates that the love of YHWH displaces the maternal imagery here.⁵⁶

Childs' exposition of Isaiah 42:15 does not provide much analysis. He only points out that verse 14 is a simile that focuses on YHWH's response.⁵⁷ He does not address that it may be a maternal metaphor and also ignores the divine warrior imagery. Instead, he is more interested in YHWH's actions in the subsequent verses of laying waste to the mountain. For Childs, the key focus is the theme of the wilderness in this passage.⁵⁸ This is quite unhelpful and does not actually give much information as to what verse 14 actually refers to. Not only that, but in 49:15, Childs is more interested in Zion personified as a woman than YHWH as a mother.⁵⁹ His interest is on Zion as a daughter and later a bereaved mother, rather than on YHWH.

Review of Previous Studies

⁵⁴ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 322.

⁵⁵ Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*, 196.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 334.

⁵⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah in The Old Testament Library Series* (Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 333.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 333.

⁵⁹ Childs, *Isaiah*, 391.

Most influential is Phyllis Tribble's article "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," where she examines biblical interpretations within the feminist movement. In her article, she discusses feminine imagery of YHWH in order to show that YHWH "transcends both sexes" and "the nature of God defiles sexism."⁶⁰ She uses Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15 to show that there is gynomorphic imagery. Tribble's article is cited in almost every secondary source that argues for a maternal metaphor. However, she does not actually analyze the two passages, and only uses them to prove her overarching point, which is that there has been a history of interpretation that has ignored texts that broke with the traditional patriarchal view.⁶¹ This has laid a foundation for the interpretation of the two passages, but does not engage in much biblical criticism.

Her later work, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, does provide exegesis for these two passages. In it, she focuses on the womb imagery and the compassion of God.⁶² This interpretation of רַחוּם (meaning compassion) to have connotations of the womb has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, it should be noted that Tribble's exegesis here is highly influential, and many scholars are in agreement with Tribble when assessing רַחוּם in 49:15. Even if scholars do disagree, her work needs to be at least evaluated.

After Tribble, Leila L. Bronner's article "Gynomorphic Imagery in Exilic Isaiah" begins with the assumption that Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15 are both maternal metaphors of YHWH. She argues that 42:14 shows YHWH doing something new; as a mother, YHWH creates a new world and acts in parity with the redemptive theme of Deutero-Isaiah.⁶³ In 49:15, YHWH's love is revealed. Unlike many commentators, Bronner does not see distance between YHWH's affection for his people and motherhood in general. She cites Tribble's analysis that compassion refers to

⁶⁰ Phyllis Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (v.4, n.1, 1973), 34.

⁶¹ Ibid., 48.

⁶² Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 39, 50.

⁶³ Bronner, "Gynomorphic Imagery in Exilic Isaiah," 77.

the womb, and suggests that YHWH is comforting the people with compassion. That compassion is derivative of a maternal instinct, designated by the womb.⁶⁴ Instead of saying that YHWH's love is superior to motherhood, Bronner's article joins the two.

Katheryn Pfisterer Darr's article, "Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17" discusses whether the passage is a maternal metaphor. It acknowledges that there are two metaphors at work here; one is of a divine warrior, and the other is of a woman giving birth. She points out that by attributing to YHWH the imagery of a woman giving birth, this passage transforms the meaning of the commonly used simile in the Hebrew Bible. The imagery is commonly used to describe people in fear, but the prophet employs the metaphor to show YHWH's behaviour is beyond the stereotypical use.⁶⁵ Darr's article is quite helpful and although her discussion on the issues of simile and metaphor can be contested, as will be discussed in my chapter on simile and metaphor, she shows that YHWH can be a divine warrior and a travailing woman at the same time.

A few decades after Tribble's two writings, Mayer I. Gruber's article on "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah" argues that YHWH can be regarded as both masculine and feminine. He draws on Tribble's analysis of the womb-compassion imagery in 49:15. His work expands on what Tribble was alluding to in "Depatriarchalizing" and shows that YHWH's actions as a mother are active, rather than passive.⁶⁶ He also questions the reason Deutero-Isaiah contains so many maternal imagers, which will be discussed later.

Next, Gruber then wrote *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies*, which is equally influential in the discussion. This work is commonly cited in regards to the maternal metaphor,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁵ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17" in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (v. 49, 1987), 564.

⁶⁶ Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah," 355.

but actually, like Tribble, does very little analysis. In it, Gruber cites Tribble's work, "Depatriarchalizing" and argues that Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15 are both texts that demonstrate YHWH as a mother.⁶⁷ Gruber's work is significant in the discussion because he takes into account the associated commonplaces and cognate Akkadian and Babylonian goddesses that Deutero-Isaiah could have drawn upon. In his book, Gruber discusses breast feeding practices and the role of women in the Temple cult. These are all helpful in giving context to the two passages. However, the analyses that he does give of the passages are often contested by other scholars. This is seen in his translation of 49:15; although his work is conducive to feminist interests, his translation has been criticized of lacking solid biblical grounds.⁶⁸ *The Motherhood of God* works as a readable introductory piece to the issue, but does not actually contribute significance evidence to the topic.

After Gruber's work came out, John J. Schmitt's article on "The Motherhood of God and Zion as a Mother" drew heavily from Gruber's initial article on "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah." Schmitt is not as interested in whether or not Isaiah 42:14 or 49:15 contain maternal images, but assumes that they are. Instead, his focus is on why Deutero-Isaiah chooses to use feminine images in his polemic. He uses 49:15 and the overlapping metaphor of Zion as a mother to show that Deutero-Isaiah is comfortable using this language because of the motherhood of Zion language, and the common language of personifying cities as feminine inspired the feminine imagery of YHWH.⁶⁹ Deutero-Isaiah's reasons for using female divine imagery would be discussed in the next section of this chapter, but Schmitt's article, by heavily relying on Gruber, begins a shift in discussion from whether or not these passages are a maternal imagery to why Deutero-Isaiah chooses to use them in the first place.

⁶⁷ Mayer I. Gruber, *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 9 and 11.

⁶⁸ A critique of Gruber's view will be mentioned in the chapter on interpretive issues of Is. 49:15.

⁶⁹ Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," 569.

Marc Z. Brettler's article, "Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40-66" points out that all figurative language or metaphorical statements concerning YHWH is different than literal statements.⁷⁰ This is significant for the study of Deutero-Isaiah because he argues that all descriptions of YHWH are figures of speech. He argues that metaphors overlap because the author or poet needs two metaphors to describe one entity as a single metaphor is insufficient.⁷¹ He uses 42:14 and 49:15 as evidence; although both of these passages contain overlapping imagery that seem divergent, they continue to intersect. He implies that it is problematic that one metaphor should be favoured over the other when metaphors do overlap in religious language, and points out that YHWH as mother is an underutilized metaphor.⁷²

Sarah J. Dille's work on Deutero-Isaiah is quite extensive. In her book *Mixing Metaphors*, she demonstrates that the parental imagery is both maternal and paternal in Deutero-Isaiah. She agrees with Darr that Isaiah 42:14 contain imagery that is both masculine and feminine; the divine warrior is not only destructive, but saves, is creative and gives life.⁷³ She explains "the language of war is expanded into the language of motherhood"⁷⁴ and reiterates Darr's conclusion that the conventional phrase, "like a woman giving birth," evolves when applied to YHWH. Regarding 49:15, she agrees with Westermann that the lament imagery greatly affects the situation. However, instead of overlooking the divine imagery, she acknowledges that though Zion is portrayed as a mother, so is YHWH.⁷⁵

Hanne Loland's book, *Silent or Salient Gender* is also interested in divine maternal imagery, but instead, focuses the question on whether or not gender is significant in the

⁷⁰ Marc Zvi Brettler, "Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40-66" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (n. 78, 1998), 102.

⁷¹ Ibid., 103.

⁷² Ibid., 120.

⁷³ Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 72.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁵ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 150.

metaphors. She inquires whether or not the divine imagery is gendered and how gender is significant to the text. In order to do this, she first needs to prove whether or not the imagery does refer to some kind of gender. Loland's work points out that when scholars ignore the maternal metaphor in the text, they are erasing the gendered language.⁷⁶ Her investigation is closely connected with YHWH's gender, and in studying 42:14 and 49:15, she proves that these two passages are maternal metaphors. In her analyses of these two passages, she uses the female body as ways of indicating YHWH's gender. By using this approach, Loland does not argue that Deutero-Isaiah contains divine maternal imagery. Instead, she does the reverse and shows that this language refers to a woman, who either has a womb, breasts, and an ability to nurse a suckling child, and is therefore a mother. Loland's investigation is quite significant because not only does she demonstrate that YHWH has maternal attributes, but is firstly referred to as a woman.

The secondary sources I have cited are a reflection of the types of interpretations which have been given to this aspect of Deutero-Isaiah. As the scholars gradually began to write in their commentaries, 42:14 and 49:15 may refer to a mother, the discussion in the secondary sources has become much more nuanced since the emergence of feminist biblical criticism from the 1970's.

In this chapter, an overview of the commentaries and secondary literature pertaining to Deutero-Isaiah has been presented. There is not a clear shift in the discourse concerning 42:14 and 49:15; commentators do not readily acknowledge that it is the language of motherhood, yet many secondary literatures already move with the assumption that it is. However, this is not conclusive and the discourse continues to evolve. Although Deutero-Isaiah's influences are

⁷⁶ Hanne Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender? The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46, and 49* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 3.

manifold, and it is difficult to say what exactly inspired the prophet to use divine maternal imagery, it should be noted that this language is not distinct to Deutero-Isaiah, and Hosea uses it as well. Perhaps the factors that influence Deutero-Isaiah are the exilic context and also the deities that are ever present in the imagination of the author of these oracles.

ISAIAH 42:14 FIGURE OF SPEECH AND INTERPRETATION FOR A TRAVAILING WOMAN

Isaiah 42:14 is the first instance where YHWH is compared to a woman through the language of maternity in Deutero-Isaiah. The figure of speech that highlights YHWH as a woman in labour makes this a maternal metaphor. However, an issue arises because *כִּיּוֹלֶדָה* is technically not a metaphor, but a simile. A metaphor is an idea that is expressed between the unlikely connections between two concepts that seem vastly different.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the comparison between the two concepts in a simile is perceived as weaker than the comparison between a metaphor. The larger implication for this study is that if *כִּיּוֹלֶדָה* functions as a typical simile, Isaiah 42:14 could not be regarded as attributing maternal imagery to YHWH. This chapter will first review the semantics of metaphor and show that *כִּיּוֹלֶדָה* should be understood as a metaphor, as well as discussing that *כִּיּוֹלֶדָה* functions specifically as a maternal metaphor.

Metaphor Theory

The two concepts in a metaphor are tenor and vehicle. The tenor-vehicle model was first developed by I.A. Richards, and can be best understood as having “two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, who’s meaning is a resultant of their interaction.”⁷⁸ In these “modes of interaction,” there are different thoughts that exist at the same time.⁷⁹ The difficulty in interpreting metaphor is that there is a borrowing and interaction between different ideas, which causes a “transaction between contexts.”⁸⁰ The tenor-vehicle model is a method in an attempt to categorize what these contexts are, and how they interact with one another.

⁷⁷This is indisputable, although there has been a variation of understanding how the tenor and the vehicle function together.

⁷⁸I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 93.

⁷⁹Ibid., 94.

⁸⁰Ibid.

The tenor acts as the original idea, or the primary subject that the metaphor is supposed to be about. It is the “underlying idea or principal subject which the...figure means.”⁸¹ It should be viewed as the constant in the prose and seen as the direction of progress. Unfortunately, the name of the construct is confusing. Usually, tenor refers to meaning, while the vehicle is used for transportation. When used together, it can be assumed that the tenor is the actual meaning of the metaphor, and the vehicle only adds extra information about the tenor.⁸² This is the exact opposite of what Richards is trying to convey; instead, he is trying to show the coherency between the two constructs. Another way in which tenor can be understood is to see it as the frame of the metaphor. The frame is the remaining words that are being used literally.⁸³ If the frame, or the tenor, were to change, the metaphor itself would fail.⁸⁴

As such, it is impossible to speak of tenor without describing the vehicle. Vehicle is the other idea that is part of the metaphor that steers away from the tenor and serves as a medium for expressing thought. It gives the reader something unexpected and different for a new understanding, and is the figurative term of the two.⁸⁵ In many ways, the vehicle is the *focus* of the metaphor.⁸⁶ However, the vehicle, which is supposed to give meaning to the tenor, is often viewed as being on an embellishment or expanded definition of the tenor, where the tenor remains unchanged. Richards speaks against this and argues that the vehicle and tenor are actually cooperating to give new meaning.⁸⁷ In fact, it can even be argued that the vehicle is the one that actually contributes more to the metaphor because of how easily the vehicle can change

⁸¹ Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 97.

⁸² David Douglass, “Issues in the Use of I. A. Richards’ Tenor-Vehicle Model of Metaphor,” in *Western Journal of Communication* (vol. 64, no.4, 2000), 413.

⁸³ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Douglass, “Issues in the Use of I.A. Richards’ Tenor-Vehicle Model of Metaphor,” 413.

⁸⁶ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 28.

⁸⁷ Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 100.

understanding. There are two extremes that should be warned when applying the tenor-vehicle model: first, the vehicle can be perceived to become just a decoration for the tenor; secondly, the tenor is can be understood to introduce the vehicle, and actually no longer acts as a principal subject.⁸⁸ Instead, both of these should interact on an equal level in order to give profound meaning, and should not be viewed as opposite counterparts.⁸⁹

Metaphor theory has been discussed since Aristotle, but its most recent influence has been attributed to Max Black. In his influential work, *Models and Metaphors*, he points to the great flaw of understanding metaphor through two commonly held views, substitution and comparison, and proposes a third instead. In substitution theory, the metaphoric expression can be restated using the equivalent literal term. According to Black, the downfall of substitution theory lies in its literalization of the vehicle.⁹⁰ The vehicle contains attributes where other terms can be used to replace its usage. Using the stock example “Richard is a lion,” he shows that it can easily be rewritten as “Richard is brave.”⁹¹ The restating of the metaphor is not the only issue that Black points out, but also in the implied assertion that the tenor can be easily replaced by the vehicle. He writes that “metaphorical statement is not a substitute for a formal comparison or any other kind of literal statement, but has its own distinctive capacities and achievement.”⁹² He argues that it should be difficult for metaphorical statements to find a literal substitute between the vehicle of the metaphor and its associations; in other words, there should be sharper distinction between the metaphorical and literal expression.⁹³ In light of the substitution view and Isaiah 42:14, Black’s rejection of this theory is apt because there it is no literal equivalence to

⁸⁸ Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 100.

⁸⁹ Douglass, “Issues in the Use of I.A. Richards’ Tenor-Vehicle Model of Metaphor,” 410.

⁹⁰ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 40.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 36

⁹² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

forming a metaphorical statement about YHWH. Thus, he is correct in highlighting the inadequacy of this model.⁹⁴

Next, Black expands on the comparison view, which he explains as being a comparison that makes a statement about both the tenor and the vehicle.⁹⁵ There must be a point of similarity between the tenor and the vehicle that implies that the vehicle has attributes belonging to the tenor. The reason why this theory is flawed is because it is not necessarily the case for all metaphors, and is an especially salient point for the discussion of Isaiah 42:14. The metaphor *פִּילֶגֶה* is not referring to a travailing woman behaving like YHWH; this metaphor is referring to the reverse. Like the substitution view before it, the comparison view is not a model that is sufficient for metaphorical religious language.

Finally, Black advocates for an interactive view of metaphor. This proposes that the reader should be forced to connect the tenor and the vehicle in relation to associated commonplaces of the tenor and the vehicle.⁹⁶ These associated commonplaces are the implied implications, or commonly known characteristics of the idea. The interactive view forces the reader to use the vehicle's associated commonplaces as a way to give insight to the tenor. This requires some awareness of both tenor and vehicle, but refrains from comparing the two or substituting the vehicle with a literal translation, which takes away the cognitive element of the metaphor.⁹⁷ Janet Martin Soskice states that “metaphor is neither a simple substitution for literal speech nor as strictly emotive. Metaphor should be treated as fully cognitive and capable of saying that which may be said in no other way. It should explain how metaphor gives us ‘two ideas for one,’ yet do so without lapsing into a comparison theory. Ideally, a theory of metaphor

⁹⁴ Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 6.

⁹⁵ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 36.

⁹⁶ I will focus on the associated commonplaces of Isaiah 42:14 in a later chapter.

⁹⁷ Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 46.

should go further and discuss not only the speaker's intention but also the hearer's reception of it."⁹⁸ This cognitive ability for the reader to draw distinctions between tenor and vehicle is a necessary element in metaphor, as it is able to create a new understanding.⁹⁹ This cognitive element is important for the function of the metaphor because it requires the reader go an extra step, and also helps the reader determine the type of figurative speech by the level of interaction with the reader.

In a metaphor, the tenor and the vehicle are never equal. In Is. 42:14, YHWH is not ontologically identical to a travailing woman; he is not literally giving birth. YHWH is understood as a woman in labour, but is not reduced to simply being a woman in labour. David H. Aarons makes an interesting point on metaphor and the identity of God. Although Black's interactive view is helpful, Aarons proposes conceptual ascription as a new model of understanding metaphors attributed to YHWH.

Conceptual ascription has two categories: functional and structural. Functional ascription is where the vehicle is not ontologically identical to the tenor, but the tenor fulfills the proper functions of the vehicle. In structural ascription, the vehicle is also not ontologically identical to the tenor, but the tenor is thought to have the same structure as the vehicle. The difference between conceptual ascription and the interactive view is that it takes away the literal understanding of identity. Aaron's model takes away the "artificially limiting approaches to meaning," where YHWH is able to be distinguished away from ontological metaphorical expressions.¹⁰⁰ YHWH's identity is not simply as a warrior, or father, or a birthing woman, but

⁹⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 44.

⁹⁹ Doreen Innes, "Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style" in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, ed. by G. R. Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

¹⁰⁰ David H. Aarons, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 60.

has characteristics of these vehicles. This is extremely helpful in understanding Isaiah 42:14 because it releases the stress of solely placing YHWH's identity on these tropes, and allows room for metaphors to interact.

Simile and Metaphor

These metaphor theories are helpful, but it still begs the question as to whether or not Isaiah 42:14 can be read as a metaphor when it is technically a simile. Roland M. Frye has noted that "each of the associations of God with motherhood always come in similes, while the father associations typically operate through metaphor...Whereas similes compare, metaphors predicate or name."¹⁰¹ Hanne Loland points out that the discussion of whether a simile can function as a metaphor goes hand in hand with the discussion that feminine YHWH imagery in the Hebrew Bible are structured in similes, whereas masculine YHWH imagery are illustrated in metaphors.¹⁰² The implication of this is that there is a significant difference between masculine and feminine YHWH language, and is dependent upon metaphor theory and if a simile can function as a metaphor.

The traditional view of the simile is that because it contains "like" or "as," it creates a distance between the tenor and the vehicle that a metaphor does not. Lynne Tirrell argues that when interpreted literally, there is a difference between stating that the tenor *is* the vehicle, as opposed to the tenor is *like* the vehicle. She writes that "the former entails [the tenor's] inclusion in the set of [the vehicle's] things, while the latter does not. The 'like' weakens the semantic commitment of the original sentence."¹⁰³ She goes on to say that the "like" is what creates the

¹⁰¹ Roland M. Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles," (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 41, 1988), 460.

¹⁰² Hanne Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender?: the interpretation of gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46, and 49*, (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008). 47.

¹⁰³ Lynne Tirrell, "Reductive and Nonreductive Simile Theories of Metaphor," (*The Journal of Philosophy*, 88, 1991), 341.

distance to the claim that it is making.¹⁰⁴ Other concerns for appropriating the functions of metaphor to simile is that it is thought that the simile does not have the same impact of a metaphor, and the simile's comparative nature is inferior to the metaphor's interactive meaning.¹⁰⁵ This question has shifted from what becomes simply a linguistic term to a conceptual one.

Antoon Schoors has argued that “The particle *ke* means ‘like’ and...is not the condition of distress but the crying. We should not look for something concrete behind the image....In short, there is no metaphor, but a simile.”¹⁰⁶ This traditional view of simile is used to indicate that because כִּי־לָדָה is really just a simile, YHWH is not seen as a woman in labour. It is perceived that there must be an intrinsic distance between YHWH and the travelling woman. However, Sarah Dille has argued that “these similes of warrior and כִּי־לָדָה are developed in the language of ‘is’ rather than ‘is like,’” and postulates that כִּי־לָדָה functions as a metaphor and less as a traditional simile. Other scholars seem to agree. In Robert Fogelin’s *Figuratively Speaking*, he writes that “similes wear their comparative form on their grammatical sleeves, and metaphors, I shall argue differ from similes in only a trivial grammatical way: Metaphors are similes with the term of comparison suppressed; they are elliptical similes.”¹⁰⁷ This is in agreement with Janet Martin Soskice, who argues that the presence of the “like” is just superficial grammar and is no consequence to meaning.¹⁰⁸ The idea that the addition of “like” implies a distance between the tenor and vehicle is based on a false assumption that these two work differently. Both similes

¹⁰⁴ Tirrell, “Reductive and Nonreductive Simile Theories of Metaphor,” 341.

¹⁰⁵ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Antoon Schoors, *I am God Your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Isa. XL-LV* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 91.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Fogelin, *Figuratively Speaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 25.

¹⁰⁸ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 59.

and metaphors contain the heuristic tension of “is and “is not.”¹⁰⁹ The reader understands that the tenor and vehicle do not ontologically equate one another.

Instead, it should be considered that metaphors do not always come in the form of “A is B.” In fact, “A is B” can easily be transposed to read “A is like B” and the simile would be a counterpart to the metaphor.¹¹⁰ Although the traditional definition of a simile would seem that the “like” weakens the tenor and vehicle, Fogelin argues that “like” is not a semantic weakener, and ideas can be inferred from “A is B” but not “A is like B,” yet the reverse is also true. There is no clear way of ranking the impact or conceptual significance of statements.¹¹¹

The traditional notion that similes are only “similar” is misrepresentative, as similes and metaphors both contain the “is” and “is not,” with comparisons to concepts that are similar or dissimilar.¹¹² However, my claim is not that all similes have the same function of metaphor. The defining factor of whether a simile can have a metaphoric role is dependent on its content, not its lexical form. Janet Martin Soskice distinguishes two forms of simile, which are illustrative and modeling. Illustrative similes only give imagery and are used to emphasize the tenor. The implications of illustrative similes are restrictive. The illustrative simile compares two known concepts. Modeling similes provide a model that has room to develop. This can be used with a subject that may be well known in order to provide a point of understanding with a concept that is difficult to grasp. The absence of a “like” would make it a traditionally understood metaphor. This is why Isaiah 42:14 is the perfect example of a modeling simile and should be regarded as a metaphor with the functions of metaphor. All language attributed to YHWH is complicated, and therefore all similes that pertain to the question of YHWH’s characteristics must be modeling

¹⁰⁹ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 49.

¹¹⁰ Robert Fogelin, “Metaphors, Similes and Similarity” in *Aspects of Metaphor*, ed. by Jaakko Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 26.

¹¹¹ Fogelin, “Metaphors, Similes and Similarity,” 29.

¹¹² Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 59.

similes. If there are oppositions between the cognitive functions of a metaphor and simile, it should take into account illustrative similes, modeling similes, and metaphors.¹¹³

Interpretation of פִּי־לֵלָה

After understanding that פִּי־לֵלָה can indeed have the same functions as a metaphor, it can be argued that פִּי־לֵלָה functions specifically as a maternal metaphor. Some scholars, such as Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, has refrained from referring to פִּי־לֵלָה as a maternal metaphor; she simply calls it “female imagery” and “gynomorphic similes,” but never goes as far as to say that this is language about YHWH as mother.¹¹⁴ In fact, she rejects the reading that “treat the image as if it were simply a maternal metaphor” altogether.¹¹⁵ Although Darr is correct in assuming the complexity of Isaiah 42:14 as not being *just* a maternal metaphor, she interprets Isaiah 42:14 as a traditional simile, and not like one would treat it as a metaphor. She interprets this passage based on the “auditory character” and uses gasping and panting as clues to how this passage should be understood.¹¹⁶ The breathing of the travailing woman is what causes פִּי־לֵלָה to be read as a gynomorphic simile. Although I am in agreement with Darr that the breathing of YHWH does bear much significance, she completely rejects the maternal metaphor and connects the auditory nature of Isaiah 42:14 to a battle cry in war, and advocates that פִּי־לֵלָה speaks more of YHWH’s militaristic attributes and as a warrior than as a travailing woman. Even though she is correct in stating that פִּי־לֵלָה may contain different associated commonplaces, such as a warrior, I do not think Darr is correct in dismissing the maternal metaphor because she is reading Is. 42:14 as an illustrative simile, where she has imposed restrictions onto the text. She argues that “the poem emphasizes that which blasts forth from the throat of God, and not a new creation to which

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Kathryn Darr, “Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (49:1987), 570.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 567.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

YHWH will give birth in pain.”¹¹⁷ This indicates that whether כִּי־לָדָה can be understood as a maternal metaphor is dependent on whether YHWH actually gives birth. In this, she is treating the text as one would an illustrative simile, where understanding is restricted and the imagery surrounding the vehicle is only used to emphasize the tenor. Although this presumption of the differences between simile and metaphor are never explicitly stated, it clearly affects the reading.¹¹⁸

Similarly, Sarah Dille argues that this reading should not be read as a maternal metaphor too, and that the “language is not simply a derivation from a model of Mother God. Rather, the language arises from a distinctive rhetorical strategy, in which the language of war was expanded into the language of motherhood.”¹¹⁹ Again, war imagery cannot be denied in the context of this passage, but Dille is also incorrect in assuming that the language cannot be a maternal metaphor. I am not arguing against the warrior metaphor; rather, I am in favour of Aaron’s view that both warrior and mother can be conceptually ascripted, but it would be erroneous to only understand כִּי־לָדָה as militaristic language. Because כִּי־לָדָה is a modeling simile, it brings to mind different associations the way metaphors do, but which associations are brought about remains to be discussed. In fact, because these associations are so strong, they have the ability to overshadow the metaphor itself. It is unfortunate that many have overlooked the maternal metaphor in favour of the warrior metaphor because it ignores evidence that points to כִּי־לָדָה as a maternal metaphor.

The verb לָדָה is a non-gender specific verb that can be used with both male and female subjects, as mentioned previously. For women, they are to “give birth”; for men, they “beget.”¹²⁰ When this verb is used with YHWH as the subject, it can be regarded as gendered either male or

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 571.

¹¹⁸ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 101.

¹¹⁹ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 72-73.

¹²⁰ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 120.

female.¹²¹ In Isaiah 42:14, the verb is a qal participle feminine singular, which makes a woman in labour and not a man begetting. Female sex is syntactically part of the metaphor. This makes the God-language explicitly female and must be regarded as an example of a female God metaphor. Although כִּיּוֹלְדָה is never applied to women, it can be said with confidence that female behaviour is being attributed to YHWH.

Establishing the conventional understanding of כִּיּוֹלְדָה is necessary to making a sound reading of the text. The context of כִּיּוֹלְדָה is used many times figuratively in settings of war and anguish in the Hebrew Bible. It cannot be said that כִּיּוֹלְדָה is a term that is a metaphor in each instance it is used, but in Isaiah 42:14, it can be understood as a metaphor. This term is almost always applied to those losing a battle or fleeing. The term כִּיּוֹלְדָה and similar terminology are used to portray people, mostly men, to act as if they were a woman in labour during times of war. Conversely, this term is never applied to women. The simile is usually used in conjunction with other terms to describe how the men, or the people group, are behaving as a woman in labour, such as being terrified (Is. 13:8), or trembling (Mic. 4:10), or being taken hold of by anguish or pain (Jer. 6:24, 13:21), and many other characteristics. An enemy siege is similar to labour, which is a time of fear and loss of control.¹²² This figure of speech conventionally describes a war, whether a city, a nation, the people of a city, or soldiers.¹²³ The woman in labour is used for the experience of fear or overwhelming pain and helplessness.

The conventional uses of כִּיּוֹלְדָה establish easier ways of identifying other associations that accompany this term that is helpful for understanding the metaphor. From the numerous examples in the text, כִּיּוֹלְדָה uses the pain and anxiety of a woman's childbirth to indicate the

¹²¹ Ibid. She argues that the grammatical forms are never formulated in feminine grammatical gender when used for YHWH, but are either in the masculine or gender neutral first person.

¹²² The term occurs ten times in the same form in the Hebrew Bible, including Isaiah 42:14. Other instances include Is. 13:8; Jer. 6:24, 22:23, 30:6, 49:24, 50:43; Mic. 4:9-10; Ps. 48:7.

¹²³ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 67.

helplessness of those that are described as a travailing woman, and is used in the Hebrew Bible to mainly express distress. It seems that the term heavily contains a negative aspect rather than a positive one. When *פִּי־לָלָה* in Isaiah 42:14 is interpreted to reinforce that YHWH is a divine warrior, and that the auditory gasping and panting that follows should be viewed solely in conjunction to YHWH's war cries, it overlooks the pain and distress that has followed the common usage of this term.¹²⁴ Darr writes that, "It is, in my view, impossible to argue that the author of our passage employs the simile 'like a travailing woman' in what appears to have been its conventional sense, i.e. in order to suggest that YHWH will be anguish-filled and incapacitated by both pain or terror; and indeed, commentators have not so argued."¹²⁵ Like Darr has pointed out, there is much significance in the auditory nature of Is. 42:14b, and so the distress and panic that accompanies the conventional usage of *פִּי־לָלָה* should not be quickly dismissed in favour of a warrior metaphor simply because it is being applied to YHWH. This is a limitation put on the passage by those that contest the reading of a maternal metaphor.

I am also unconvinced by Dille's assertion that because *פִּי־לָלָה* is applied to YHWH, the conventional meanings of the term itself technically changes.¹²⁶ She writes that the metaphors of the warrior and the birthing woman interact, which I agree with, but then asserts that it is the vehicle (travailing woman) whose meaning changes, and not the tenor (YHWH). This view is unconvincing since it is in contention with how a metaphor functions. Although both the tenor and the vehicle are interacting, Dille dismisses the actual associations of a travailing woman when she states that "the description of power over creation undermines any implications of the *yoleadah* being a figure of powerlessness."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 114.

¹²⁵ Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman," 567.

¹²⁶ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 67.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Furthermore, a defining factor for some on whether Isaiah 42: 14 can be regarded as a maternal metaphor if something is actually born.¹²⁸ The inclusion or exclusion of birth seems to be decisive for understanding whether this text talks about motherhood. My claims are that this can be regarded as a maternal metaphor regardless of whether there is evidence that something has been born, simply because the process of labour is significant and emphasized in the passage. Whether the travailing woman is actually able to give birth to a child is irrelevant; even a stillborn child still makes the process of labour salient. Since the passage mentions YHWH having gone through this, it is without a doubt, in combination with the grammatical construction of the text, that *כִּי־לֵלֶךָ* is a female metaphor.

Although it is true that the product of new life should not designate whether *כִּי־לֵלֶךָ* is a maternal metaphor, it can also be said that this is a maternal metaphor because there is new life. As mentioned previously, Isaiah 42:14 is the only instance where the term is not applied to the nation or people in fear or distress, but it is used to describe YHWH. This exception should be noted because it appears to put YHWH in a position of sharing the pains of creation, and shows that YHWH is as vulnerable and as powerful as a woman about give birth.¹²⁹ The pains of labour are present in the metaphor, but what is more significant is that it conveys a sense that new hope and life will emerge. In this sense, scholars should not shy away from viewing Isaiah 42:14 as a maternal metaphor, because it contains attributes of YHWH that show life coming from the process of suffering and distress that can only be described as childbirth. Leila Bronner writes that verse stresses the aspect of “reviving quality; from the throes of these pains and pangs a new world would emerge. God’s creative power is considered through the image of a woman giving

¹²⁸ Darr, “Like Warrior, Like Woman,” 571.

¹²⁹ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 125.

birth.”¹³⁰ The metaphor does not portray a powerless deity, but one that has endured pains for childbirth.

Thus, this discussion of metaphor is necessary in terms of religious language because it enables the audience to speak with a greater intimacy between what can be plainly said and what is unknown. In this chapter, I have outlined how a metaphor functions and why Isaiah 42:14 is to be regarded as such. After establishing this claim, it is shown that a maternal metaphor can be applied to YHWH in this instance because of the grammatical function of כִּי־לֵדָה and by highlighting the process of labour. In Isaiah 42:14, it can be said with confidence that YHWH is the female subject in a maternal metaphor.

¹³⁰ Leila Leah Bronner, “Gynomorphic Imagery in Exilic Isaiah (40-66),” (*Dor le Dor* 84, 1983), 76.

ASSOCIATED COMMONPLACES IN ISAIAH 42:14

Since metaphors are complicated and nuanced, the different images evoked by metaphor must first be understood. There is no way to truly understand a metaphor without its associated commonplaces, because they affect meaning. Associated commonplaces are culturally specific ideas associated with vehicle, and affects how the audience experiences and thinks of the tenor. The ability to appreciate a metaphor depends on the understanding of the cultural associations with the vehicle. In Isaiah 42:14, the two associated commonplaces are the language of warrior and childbirth. These are connected and the language of war does not overcome the language of childbirth; in fact, these metaphors work together to for us to understand what the root metaphor is.

Associated Commonplace Theory

Black describes associated commonplaces as the standard definition of the vehicle.¹³¹ He assumes that each culture will have a different perception of the vehicle itself. As an example, a wolf may have different connotations from one culture to another.¹³² The vehicle evokes different responses from the audience, so it is necessary to go back to its original culture to understand what images it is bringing up. The metaphor's effectiveness is not in the associated commonplace's truthfulness, but through its affiliations. He writes that "literal uses of the word normally commit the speaker to acceptance of a set of standard beliefs about the [vehicle] that are common possession of the members of some speech community."¹³³ The associated commonplaces help the audience conceptually organize their view of the tenor, and the comprehension of the metaphor is determined by what is often freely assumed of the vehicle.

¹³¹ Max Black, *Models and Metaphor: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), 40.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

In order to fully understand the metaphor, the source domain and associations must be considered. This is done by examining the vehicle. In the instance of Isaiah 42:14, not only must we consider previous associations of this well-used simile in the Hebrew Bible, but also the cultural views on childbirth. As explained in the previous chapter, Isaiah 42:14 contains the well-used phrase, כִּי־לִלְדָה in the Hebrew Bible. This phrase is commonly used to describe YHWH's wrath on the nation, where the people are usually faced with a scenario of war and are overtaken with fear. This panic and anxiety is compared to a birthing woman. The associated commonplaces in this phrase are both of childbirth and of war.

Childbirth as an Associated Commonplace

Although childbirth is experienced in every culture, it is vital to look to the attitude of childbirth in the ancient Near East, which seems to be one of extreme anxiety. Many metaphors of pain and anguish are connected to childbirth in the Hebrew Bible; however, there are very few descriptions of actual childbirth itself. One reason for this is that childbirth could have been considered a very feminine experience, where men were not actually present. There is evidence to suggest that births were often attended by midwives and experienced women in the Hebrew Bible, and men were not included in this activity.¹³⁴ This is expressed in narrative form, where midwives would be the one to deliver the child and give the news to the father, who is waiting elsewhere.

In prophetic literature, the poet uses birth pangs to convey the greatest anguish and pain, where it seems that the biblical writers were more concerned with negative notions of childbirth than the medical procedure of the birth.¹³⁵ There is a common sense of danger, and infant

¹³⁴ Jennie R. Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 98-99.

¹³⁵ Pain in childbirth is highlighted in different areas of the Hebrew Bible: Is. 13:8, Is. 21:3, Is. 26:17, Jer. 4:31, Jer. 6:24, Jer. 13:21, Jer. 22:23, Jer. 49:24, Jer. 50:43, Hos. 13:13, Mic. 4:9, Ps. 48:6.

mortality was a true possibility. Not only that, but the pregnant woman's life was also threatened as well. In ancient Israel, women's lifespans were approximately ten years shorter than men, and an explanation is because women tend to die during childbirth.¹³⁶ Tarja Philip, in "Woman in Travail," writes that "the death rates were high, and thus many men must have been anxious when their wives gave birth. This might explain the simile's regular appearance in the context of death."¹³⁷ The constant risk of a woman's life makes childbirth an apt metaphor for the anxiety that the prophetic writers try to convey in their oracles.

Despite a constant reference to childbirth, it is lacking in lengthy descriptions of the actual process of childbirth. This is most evident in the lack of terminology in narratives of childbirth.¹³⁸ Even in Isaiah 42:14, this passage contains two *hapax legomenons* to describe the birth pangs of labour. This indicates that Biblical writers are not interested in the birth itself, but the assumptions of the physiological effects that accompany childbirth. During childbirth, the woman is most vulnerable, and the physiological toll of labour is conveyed in biblical writing. Fear and confusion are characteristics of childbirth.¹³⁹ As a result, Biblical writers have omitted medical information on how midwives helped deliver babies in favour of emphasizing the emotional and physical strain of the mother. A reason for this is that birth remains uniquely female. Jeremiah 20:14-15 seems to suggest that fathers were not present while mothers were in labour. It says: "Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, 'A child is born to

¹³⁶ Ebeling, *Women's Lives in Biblical Times*, 101.

¹³⁷ Tarja Philip, "Woman in Travail as a Simile to Men in Distress in the Hebrew Bible," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, edited by S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 502-503.

¹³⁸ Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1-18*, (New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 67.

¹³⁹ Amy Kalmanofsky, "Israel's Baby: The Horror of Childbirth in Biblical Prophets" in *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* (vol. 16, no. 1, 2008), 66.

you, a son,’ making him very glad.”¹⁴⁰ Also, in Palestinian ethnography, a man would leave while his wife goes into labour to call a midwife. The female relatives of the woman and her husband, along with female neighbours, would come attend to her.¹⁴¹

Biblical writers have taken childbirth and overemphasized its dangerous aspects to the audience. Even though great joy can also accompany childbirth, the position that the biblical writers have taken is that childbirth acts as a great threat. A sense of horror is conveyed when the male audience of the biblical prophets is compared to a birthing woman, because of the impending peril.¹⁴² Prophetic texts use female behaviour to illustrate how males will behave during a crisis, such as by holding their breath, gasping, and panting.¹⁴³ The description of this behaviour is influenced by features of the physical reaction of women giving birth.¹⁴⁴ The gender reversal is meant to convey insult and a sense of irony. Although childbirth is a universal experience, it has been written with cultural filters in prophetic texts, which makes analyzing it as an associated commonplace necessary. Childbirth is not seen as a simple natural event, but a medical emergency.

Claudia Bergmann, who has done extensive research in the area of childbirth in prophetic texts, argues that childbirth always refer to some sort of crisis. She demonstrates that throughout the ancient Near East, childbirth not only has negative connotation, but indicates a terrible situation. The associations of childbirth are that it is unstoppable, and both the mother and child are at the crossroads of death.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps this can give insight to YHWH’s activity, in v. 14, where he can no longer be passive and is forced to take action. Childbirth, like a crisis, is seen to

¹⁴⁰ All Scripture citations are in the English Standard Version.

¹⁴¹ Ebeling, *Women’s Lives in Biblical Times*, 101.

¹⁴² Kalmanofsky, “Israel’s Baby,” 68.

¹⁴³ Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 67.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 68.

have an unforeseeable outcome.¹⁴⁶ This contributes to the uncertainty of giving birth. In a Sumerian Proverb, it says: To be sick is relatively good, to be pregnant is bad, to be pregnant and sick is too much.¹⁴⁷ This indicates that there is a widespread attitude that pregnancy is even more lethal than illness.

Furthermore, in the genre of Neo-Assyrian magico-medical texts, there contains a myth of the moon-god Sin, portrayed as a bull and impregnates a cow, who has difficulty giving birth. The cow is meant to represent a woman giving birth, and the pregnancy of the cow/woman has labour cries that reaches the heavens and covers the earth like a linen cloth.¹⁴⁸ Many texts in the Cow of Sin tradition depict a difficult birth and the necessity for incantations to be practiced in order for a successful birth.¹⁴⁹ The fact that there is a genre of magico-medical texts for incantations to be recited reveals that labour is seen as a common emergency, and this collection of texts in the magico-medical tradition indicates an attitude of worry and common knowledge of extreme pain that surrounds childbirth.

War as an Associated Commonplace

Next, it is impossible to speak on the associated commonplaces of the simile כִּי־לָקָה without mentioning war imagery. As discussed previously, the popular phrase is often used with relation to war. Comparing pregnant women and warriors is not a motif that is isolated to the Hebrew Bible. Multiple ancient Near Eastern texts contain this imagery. For example, Ligahue 33-50, a Middle Assyrian medical text, compares a birthing to a warrior that is about to lose the battle drenched in his own blood.¹⁵⁰ War imagery takes the experience of women and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁴⁷ Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer I*, (Bethesda, Md: CDL Publications, 1997), 38.

¹⁴⁸ See Sumerian UM 29-15-367.

¹⁴⁹ Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

reinterprets it to reflect the terror of war. These observations may not be historical, but it transfers the attitude of childbirth onto the attitude of war.

In ancient Near Eastern times, war is to be understood as organized violence that is not an isolated violent activity, but done with the consent of the social group.¹⁵¹ It is a communal activity, regardless of whether all who participate in war actually supports the cause. However, there has been an argument that the idea that war, according to the ancient Israelites, was considered religious in nature. War is to be seen as a sacrifice on a large scale, and was a way in which the gods can restore cosmic order through divinely ordained human kings.¹⁵² If this assumption is correct, war is more than violent activity, but should be understood as a continuation of divine activity. Israel's understanding of war, then, should be understood with religious connotations.

Since war is considered to be connected with religion, it is not uncommon for there to be a divine warrior motif. Israel shares the tradition with ancient Near Eastern literary sources that a divine warrior will appear to help fight the battles of his/her people. The divine warrior is not unique to childbirth language, as ancient Near Eastern texts conventionally included patterns of mother or child, as well as divine assistance.¹⁵³ Since war and childbirth imagery often overlap, it should not be a surprise that the divine warrior overlaps into the discussion of motherhood.

Furthermore, the image of the divine warrior is common in ancient Near Eastern myths, such as Baal's conquest of the sea, or Marduk's conquest of Tiamat in the creation myth. In some way, the divine warrior also has associations with creation. There are common patterns of the functions of the divine warrior. They are as follows:

¹⁵¹ Frank Rithel Ames, "The Meaning of War: Definitions for the Study of War in Ancient Israelite Literature," in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. by Brad E. Kelle and Frank Rithel Ames, (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 44.

¹⁵² Ibid., 48.

¹⁵³ Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 59.

- 1) The divine warrior goes to battle in chaos.
- 2) Nature has a physical reaction and convulses.
- 3) The divine warrior returns triumphant.
- 4) The divine warrior speaks from the temple, and all of nature responds with joy and fertility.¹⁵⁴

In Deutero-Isaiah, YHWH's role as creator is one of the focuses of the text.¹⁵⁵ This is most evident in Isaiah 42:14's birthing metaphor.

Some scholars, like Katheryn Pfisterer Darr in her article "Like Warrior, Like Woman," have rejected the maternal metaphor on the basis that the warrior language has overcome the language of childbirth. Although כִּי־לִקְרָה does have a history of being used in the context of war, when applied to YHWH, it is YHWH that changes. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the phrase does not function like a traditional simile, but a metaphor because it is being assigned to YHWH. The implication of reading it as a simile is that it ignores the language of childbirth and only focuses on the warrior imagery. The associate commonplaces of war and childbirth cannot be ignored, and it is not uncommon for a divine warrior to also be involved with fertility as well.¹⁵⁶ Marc Brettler has devised a way of mapping conceptual metaphors of YHWH through four root metaphors: master, king, parent, and husband.¹⁵⁷ Even though his work has been widely criticized since, it can be helpful to think of metaphors as being formed by structures that lay the foundation for the imagery. Martin Klingbeil points out that metaphors often work in clusters,

¹⁵⁴ Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 49.

¹⁵⁵ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 50.

¹⁵⁶ This will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Marc Z. Brettler, "The Metaphorical Mapping of God in the Hebrew Bible," in *Metaphor, Canon, and Community: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Approaches*, ed. by Ralph Bisschops and James Francis (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 219-232.

and when this is the case, there is a root metaphor and a sub metaphor.¹⁵⁸ In this instance, it can be argued that motherhood belongs to the root metaphor of parent, and the divine warrior would be a sub metaphor that adds nuance and meaning to the root metaphor.

Klingbiel, who has done work in metaphor theory and the divine warrior in the Psalms, divides the divine warrior into several categories: *attributes*, which indirectly refer to YHWH's body; *position*, which are theophanies; and, *constellation*, which are depictions of YHWH's interaction with humankind and nature.¹⁵⁹ Isaiah 42:14 appears to fit well under the category of constellation, where YHWH is interacting with people and creation, as seen in v. 13 and v. 15 respectively. However, v. 14 does not fit under any of the categories of a divine warrior, so advocating that v.14 is simply warrior imagery because of the common usage of the phrase is not sufficient in understanding what the passage actually means.

Furthermore, the audible nature of Isaiah 42:14 can be read as combining a woman's cries to a battle cry. There is a noisiness in this passage that can be read as a woman giving birth, but also as the divine warrior's vocal interruption to a period of inactivity. The woman's role in childbirth is more active than passive, and YHWH's vocal actions reflect this. Darr writes that "warrior and travailing woman similes, different though they be, share both profound intensity and a markedly auditory quality. These similarities suggest that their juxtaposition is not simply the (meaningless) result of a process whereby two originally discrete units were brought together for reasons unrelated to the similes. Principally, however... that within its context, the travailing woman simile— like the warrior similes in v 13—serves to underscore Yahweh's power."¹⁶⁰ She

¹⁵⁸ Martin G. Klingbiel, "Mapping the Literary to the Literal Image: A Comparison between Sub-Metaphors of the Heavenly Warrior in the Hebrew Psalter and Iconographic Elements of the Storm and Warrior God Ba'al in ANE Iconography," in *Die Welt des Orients*, (vol. 39, no.2, 2009), 207.

¹⁵⁹ Klingbiel, "Mapping the Literary," 215.

¹⁶⁰ Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17" in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (vol 49, no. 4, 1987), 654.

argues that YHWH's gasping and panting as a woman in labour is linked to a divine warrior acting and shrieking in a battle cry.¹⁶¹ In v. 14b, YHWH says נִפְחָץ where the verb is a *hapax legomenon*. It is often translated as, "I shall groan," which is derived from the Aramaic meaning, "to bleat."¹⁶² Whether the verb really means groaning or, bleating, or even an emphatic shouting does not take away from the warrior context or labour cries. Darr concludes that the opening of the mouth and blowing is enough to insist that this verb contains an audible nature.

Next, YHWH says, "I shall both gasp" נִפְחָץ and "pant," נִפְחָץ which is also another *hapax legomenon*. This is likely a form of the root נִפְחָץ and נִפְחָץ is from the same root, which is a feminine noun, which means breath. This noun, which also appears in a parallelism with Isaiah 42:5, sometimes refers to the breath of YHWH. At times, YHWH's breath can act as a destructive force.¹⁶³ Instead of viewing war and birthing as a change in metaphor, it can be said that they are interacting with one another. The heavy breathing of YHWH corresponds with what is expected of a warrior going into battle, but the construction of Isaiah 42:14b makes it clear that this is childbirth terminology.¹⁶⁴ The *hapax legomenons* in v.14 indicates that these terms are unique to childbirth, and should not be overlooked because the simile has a history of being used in reference to war. The description of YHWH's labour is clearly vocal, as gasping and panting is involved.

In Isaiah 42:10, the passage begins with the phrase "new song." This phrase only appears here in the Hebrew Bible apart from the Psalms.¹⁶⁵ As mentioned before, war is seen to have religious connotations, and victory songs were used to not only defeat of the enemy, but

¹⁶¹ Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman," 567.

¹⁶² Ibid., 568.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 569. See also Ps. 18:16, Is. 30:33, Job. 4:9.

¹⁶⁴ Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 141.

¹⁶⁵ Psalms 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1.

YHWH's intervention for his people.¹⁶⁶ Music stops on earth when there is violent activity, as seen in Isaiah 24:1-13, but through a victory song, the music is renewed. The word is equivalent with the technical term for a victory song in the context of warfare, and unifies the audible nature of a warrior and woman in labour.¹⁶⁷ Together, with the victory hymn and YHWH's audible character, the language of motherhood and war cries are blurred. Generally, being compared to a birthing woman was to be looked upon with negativity, but it can also reflect the strength that a birthing woman has. The phrase כִּי־לָדָה does not signify YHWH's defeat; rather, it is seen as YHWH's intervention over the crisis of inactivity. It is usually negative, but when applied to YHWH, it refers to a new beginning.¹⁶⁸ Masculinity in warriors are depicted as successful, and it is curious that a divine warrior would be compared to a woman, which usually conveyed a sense of shame.¹⁶⁹ A nation is understood as weak and defeated, like a woman that must surrender to the physical consequences of childbirth, yet there in this case, it is a sign of victory.¹⁷⁰ Ironically, when compared to a woman in labour, the phrase usually suggests that the people should anticipate death, not life. However, in the case of these associated commonplaces overlapping, it should give the audience reason to see that this popular phrase is being reinterpreted and allows the hearer to expect something new.

There is a clear metaphorical shift in understanding the associated commonplaces of the vehicle to the tenor. The associated commonplaces help the hearer understand something more about the tenor through its standard definitions and common understanding of its intended audience. In Isaiah 42:14, the associated commonplaces are childbirth and divine warrior, which helps reinforces that YHWH is a birthing woman. By connecting these two associated

¹⁶⁶ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 52.

¹⁶⁷ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 138.

¹⁶⁹ See 1 Samuel 4:9, where warriors are told to become "like men."

¹⁷⁰ Ebeling, "Israel's Baby," 67.

commonplaces, it shows that giving birth is no longer a sign of weakness, but of strength, which is very suitable for a deity.

COGNATE DEITIES AND THE MOTHERHOOD OF YHWH

In order to understand the feminine attributes of Isaiah 42 and 49, cognate Canaanite deities must be considered for a fuller scope of the issue. Although the Hebrew Bible portrays the Israelites to be strongly monotheistic, scholarship has argued that the Israelites were not always monotheistic. In later periods, it is quite possible that the cult of Asherah, and other female goddesses that were widely venerated at the time, were absorbed into the cult of YHWH during the religious reforms of pure Yahwehism. The language of YHWH giving birth and breastfeeding is not language that is alien to the Israelites; instead, it contains attributes of Canaanite goddesses. In this chapter, I will discuss how other ancient goddesses may have bearing on the motherhood of YHWH.

Overview of Fertility Goddesses

There are multiple goddesses in the Canaanite pantheon, Ashtoreth, Asherah, Astarte, Attoret, Anath, or simply Elat or Baalat.¹⁷¹ Not all texts differentiate between these goddesses; for example, the Hebrew Bible refers to Anath and Astarte as the same deity. Although it is unclear to what extent the Israelites worshiped these goddesses, only the goddesses most relevant to understanding YHWH's feminine attributes would be discussed.

Asherah was a mother goddess, and both she and her daughter, Anath, were wet nurses to the rest of the gods. Both of these goddesses were known as fertility goddesses, although they had several other functions. Many small clay figurines of Asherah depict her in the nude and

¹⁷¹ Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Press, 1978), 163.

clutching at the breast to emphasize the fertility aspect.¹⁷² Neither goddess holds a definitive position in the pantheon. For example, although Anath is known as a fertility goddess, she is also depicted as a virgin, yet is Baal's lover and consort. Furthermore, there is constant confusion over the differentiation of goddesses. In the pantheon, the goddess Asherah was constantly mistaken for Astarte or Ishtar because they had similar roles. The fact that there were deities outside of Ugarit that had similar names or characteristics with Asherah suggests that the role of Asherah tend to be transported from one people group to another, and that the ancient Israelites incorporated Asherah as part of their religious practices. This is most clearly seen in the condemnation from the prophets on the worship of Asherah. Not only that, but the biblical writers seemed to confuse Asherah with Astarte, who was a lesser fertility goddess but still had similar characteristics.¹⁷³

As mentioned before, Anath's attributes are often polarizing. She is often misnamed Astarte, or Ashtoreth, whose name means "womb" or "what comes from the womb." This meaning is appropriate for a goddess of fertility, since the primary meaning of her name means that she gives birth.¹⁷⁴ Not only is she a fertility goddess, but she is also a goddess of war. It's been recorded that even the older male deity, El, hides in the innermost chamber in fear of Anath.¹⁷⁵ In contrast with Asherah, who pleads with El to give Baal a palace, Anath threatens to "smash his head, make his gray beard flow with blood" if he did not give Baal what he wanted.¹⁷⁶ When the Philistines defeated Saul, they took his armour and placed it in the Temple of Ashtarothe, another name of Anath in the Hebrew Bible, which reveals that they believed

¹⁷² Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 45.

¹⁷³ Richard J. Pettey, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 204.

¹⁷⁴ Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 58.

¹⁷⁵ Stone, *When God Was A Woman*, 165.

¹⁷⁶ William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Israel*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 210-211.

Anath to be a war goddess. Although Anath was not venerated to the extent that Asherah was in Israelite times, it is worth noting that Anath had the combining attributes of fertility, wet nurse, and a fierce warrior. This is helpful in understanding Isaiah 42, where the metaphors of warrior and childbirth interact. Perhaps some memory of the fierce and polarizing goddess has overlapped with worship of YHWH.

Even though Anath is a vital figure in understanding YHWH's contrasting identities in Isaiah 42 and 49, Asherah was still more venerated than Anath and is seen as the main patron goddess. In the Kirta Epic KTU I.I5.2.26-28, it reads, "He (the king's son) will suckle the milk of Asherah, suck at the breasts of Virgin Anat, the two wet nurses of the gods."¹⁷⁷ This confirms a sacral kingship, but also that these fertility goddesses had roles not too different from YHWH. YHWH, in Isaiah 49:15, is described to be a breastfeeding mother. The point is that this language of a deity giving birth, suckling a child, and even having these metaphors overlap is not alien only to YHWH in Isaiah.

It should also be noted that the function of the goddess may change over time. Asherah was first seen as the goddess of the sea, yet she slowly became known for her other attributes instead.¹⁷⁸ This is possibly due to the fact that the religion had spread inland to different regions. The non-aquatic setting of Asherah worship indicates that the sphere of influence had spread to areas that venerated her despite of her worshipers not being close to the water. Thus, she had to have fulfilled another role that was not simply because of her relationship to the water. The fertility aspects of Asherah are of great importance to understanding why this goddess became so prominent in Canaanite and Hebrew culture.¹⁷⁹ There is fluidity in the pantheons, and the identity

¹⁷⁷ Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women and Judges in Ancient Israel*, (New York: Doubleday Press, 1998) 141.

¹⁷⁸ Pettey, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel*, 203.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

of each goddesses is not fixed. Each local cult would have stressed which attributes appealed to them most, and the most important factor of this study is that the Israelites worshiped mother-fertility goddesses.¹⁸⁰ William G. Dever writes that “the three great goddesses of Ugarit—Asherah, Anat, and Astarte, are all in effect hypostatizations of the cosmic Great Goddess of Canaan, all playing the same role but each perhaps venerated in a particular local manifestation, tradition, and cult.”¹⁸¹

Social Status of Women and Goddess Worship

The status of women is closely connected to the worship of a female deity. The veneration of a female deity depended on the status of women because sexes of the deity were determined by the sex of those that held powerful positions.¹⁸² Ugarit society was matrilineal, where the inheritance is passed through the female line. Husbands, sons, and male relatives only have access to the property and title through their relationship to the women.¹⁸³ This does not necessarily mean that women have much authority, but it reveals that women were able to own property. This is in congruence with Babylonian law, where the father gives the young bride possessions that only the husband can use but cannot own. If she becomes divorced or widowed, she is still the sole owner of her possessions.¹⁸⁴ Not only that, but women did not need to be responsible for their husband’s premarital debts, which further suggests that women may have undertaken some financial responsibility.¹⁸⁵ Although it is unclear to what extent women’s roles

¹⁸⁰ Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*, (New York: NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 206.

¹⁸¹ Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 236.

¹⁸² Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 31.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

were, the social status of women, and in particular the mother, was high. The status of women leads to the worship of goddesses that have a lot of authority in their own pantheon.¹⁸⁶

The social status of women affects which deities are venerated because it reveals what kinds of deities were preferenced. The function of the deity reflects the type of position and authority held by women in the family and society.¹⁸⁷ Women were particularly responsible for fertility and children, so it is appropriate for there to be a female goddess that is known to be a mother and also be connected to fertility. In Canaanite culture, they are multiple female goddesses, such as Asherah, Astarte, Anat, Ishtar, and multiple others. Most relevant to this study are Asherah and Anat, since the Israelites have most likely also venerated these two deities as well.

The significant role women had was most evident in the queen mother. Dating back to fourteenth century BCE, there is archaeological evidence at an Ugaritic city where a woman's title was translated as "Important Lady of the Royal House." She was called "Adat", which is the feminine form of "adon," meaning "lord."¹⁸⁸ In Ugarit culture, the queen mother could own property and was able to buy land. She also owned her own storage facilities and had a warehouse of oil and agriculture belonging solely to her. Furthermore, she had her own household staff and entourage.¹⁸⁹ An example of the queen mother exercising her authority is in the Phoenician inscription of King Eshmunazor of Sidon (500 BCE), where the queen mother acted as a regent since the king was only a boy.¹⁹⁰ Although the social status of women in

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁸⁷ Erhard S. Gerstnerberger, *Yahweh-the Patriarch: Ancient Images of God and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 66.

¹⁸⁸ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 54

¹⁸⁹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 134.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 125.

Hebrew society was significantly lower, the concept of the female holding authority was retained in the queen mother.

Susan Ackerman argues that the high position of the queen mother in Israelite culture was based on religious reasons. The Northern Kingdom rarely mentioned the queen mother by name, but the Southern Kingdom was more prolific in naming the queen mothers. It seems that the role of the queen mother was much more prevalent in the Southern Kingdom than the Northern, with some exceptions. The office of the queen mother may have been more important in Judah than Israel since the records of Kings, for example, preserve all the names of the queen mother but only gives the reader one name of the Israelite queen mother, Jezebel.¹⁹¹ It seems that the Northern Kingdom did adopt some of the practices that the Southern Kingdom had, but the main difference in principle is that in Judaeon ideology, the king is seen to be divinely appointed.

The role of the divine monarchy best explains the role that the queen mother plays in Jerusalem. YHWH is understood to be the divine father for the king. This is clearly seen in Psalms 80:18 and 110:1, where there are themes of divine sonship at play since it is describing the king sitting at the right hand of God.¹⁹² Sitting at the right hand of the monarch is to be seen as a place of honour. Most notably, in 1 Kings 2:19, when Bathsheba went to speak to Solomon, he went up and bowed to her, and had her seated at his right hand. This indicates a position of high honour and falls under the assumption that the queen mother is second in command after the king.¹⁹³ The chair assigned to Bathsheba, following Solomon's actions, reveals how Judaeon ideology viewed the position of the queen mother.

¹⁹¹ Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: in Antiquity and Today*, ed. by Karen L. King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 180.

¹⁹² Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 136.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

Furthermore, the high authority the queen mother has is closely tied to religion. In 2 Kings 11, Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, decides to take the Judean throne after her son had died. According to Hebrew law, women were not allowed to reign alone, yet it took a revolution to dethrone her several years afterwards. In her reign, she re-established the religion of her family throughout the Judaeen region. Jezebel's parents, were the high priestesses and priests of Ashtoreth and Baal.¹⁹⁴ This reveals that the role of the queen mother was more complex than simply being the parent of the king, but indicates that much of the queen mother's authority derived from her religious background.

This is reflected not only in the monarchy, but is seen in the pantheon itself. When Baal wanted permission to build a house from El, he asked Asherah, his mother, to speak on his behalf. When Baal died, El asked Asherah to name one of her own sons as his successor.¹⁹⁵ By appointing a new heir, Asherah's role is like Bathsheba to Solomon.¹⁹⁶ Since the goddess has more authority than the god, it can be attributed to the queen-mother king structure.¹⁹⁷ If the king is seen to have divine sonship from YHWH, and Asherah is understood to be his consort in Israelite culture, then it would make sense for the queen mother to be seen as an earthly counterpart of Asherah, since Asherah is the patron goddess of the queen mother.¹⁹⁸ For example, in 1 Kings 15:2-14, Maacah had made an image of Asherah and her son, Asa, and took it and destroyed it, while also removing her from the position of queen mother. This reiterates the idea that the queen mother's patron goddess is Asherah, and also that the queen mother had some type of position over the nation.

¹⁹⁴ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 57.

¹⁹⁵ Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 38.

¹⁹⁶ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 139.

¹⁹⁷ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 32.

¹⁹⁸ Ackerman, "Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," 180.

Although the Hebrew Bible does not reveal detailed Asherah worship, the Ugarit Kirta Epic provides interesting themes as to how the Canaanites viewed their patron gods and goddesses. Kirta has been told by El to take Hurriya as his wife, and he offers sacrifices and prepares for his conquest. However, he comes across a shrine of Asherah, and there Kirta makes a vow that he will dedicate gold and silver to her if he is successful. Later, in the epic, Kirta forgets this vow and becomes deathly ill. However, it is extremely unclear as to why Kirta would make this vow to Asherah in the first place, as El was the one that told him to take Hurriya as his wife and would have secured his victory already.¹⁹⁹ Susan Ackerman posits that “even though El is the high god of the pantheon and the one who determines destinies, matters concerning queen mothers appropriately fall within the province of Asherah. Kirta, when seeking a mother for his royal heir, dare not ignore the mother goddess.”²⁰⁰ Since the Kirta Epic seems to contain the same ideas of sacral kingship, it would be able to assume that this was the same for the Israelites as well. Taking these Canaanite themes into account, the queen mother’s identification as the earthly counterpart of Asherah is the source of legitimization and authority in Israelite society.²⁰¹

This is an indication that veneration of Asherah was part of Israelite religion for some. Since the Canaanites and the Israelites were neighbours, it seems likely that Asherah, a goddess venerated all over the Ancient Near East, would have penetrated Hebrew religion as well. Family and state religion was mixed, and the Israelites worshiped both YHWH and Asherah at the same time.²⁰² Whatever faith was advocated by the leadership, there was a divergent version. It is unclear to what extent the Israelites combined worship of the Asherah into their Yahwehism, since most of the Israelite writings are strongly monotheistic, but it is clear that the Israelites

¹⁹⁹ Ackerman, “Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 186.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 186.

²⁰¹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress*, 143.

²⁰² Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 39.

were interested in worshipping deities aside from YHWH. This is shown in the narratives and repeated warnings of worshipping idols. “The evidence of the Bible, which, in spite of the efforts of its monotheistically oriented authors and/or editors, contains incidental information as to the court ritual and popular religion which a few judges and kings and all the prophets strove to suppress, eliminate, and replace by monotheistic Yahwism.”²⁰³

Conflation of Asherah and YHWH Worship

However, not only did worship of Asherah happen alongside YHWH, but worship of the two came eventually to be conflated. Evidence for this has been demonstrated archaeologically, since the Khirbet El-Qom inscription reads, “I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah.”²⁰⁴ This indicates that Asherah was adopted from her Canaanite pantheon into the temple cult and was seen as YHWH’s consort instead of El’s. As discussed previously, this was not uncommon as Ancient Near Eastern culture readily adopted deities from different pantheons and incorporated these figures into their own distinct religion. In fact, “as long as a god is alive, he can easily cross international frontiers and establish himself in a new country in superficially changed but basically identical image and function.”²⁰⁵

The influence of Asherah, and to some extent, Anath, as mother-fertility goddesses reflects a possible psychological need for the people of Israel to worship a somewhat nurturing mother-goddess. This appears to be felt not simply as a deviant of Yahwehism in the family structure, but as mentioned earlier, is seen to the highest level of the monarchy as well. A point to consider is that getting rid of the worship of Baal seemed to be much more effective than removing the worship of Asherah.²⁰⁶ A possible answer to this discrepancy is that Asherah may

²⁰³ Ibid., 37.

²⁰⁴ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 148.

²⁰⁵ Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 33.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 47.

not have been seen as a competitive deity, as much as a complementary deity.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, it would not have been unlikely for the Asherah image to be placed in the Temple itself. In Deut. 16:21, it commands the people not to set up an Asherah beside the altar. This implies that veneration of Asherah was so common that it had spread as a part of Yahwehism. If there was an Asherah beside the altar of Yahweh, it indicates that worship of Asherah had reached the pinnacle of Hebrew religion, and that both Asherah and YHWH were seen as a divine couple.²⁰⁸ After the death of the priest Jehoiada, Joash gave into the demands of the people and allowed the people back to the worship of Asherah. Later, Hezekiah (727-698 BCE) removes it, but his son Manasseh (698-642 BCE) reinstates it. This pattern reveals that the people of Judah believed that veneration of Asherah was important and necessary. Asherah was seen as an integral part of worship and religious life, and Hezekiah's reform as a failure because it was seen to be a part of Yahwehism.²⁰⁹ Although Anath is not as prevalent as Asherah, both goddesses have been absorbed into Yahwehism, and one could account for the mother attributes, and another rage and war.²¹⁰ The two main goddesses of Canaan have characteristics that could account for YHWH's emotions and relationship to his people.

It seems as though the identity of Asherah, and by extension Anat, has gradually disappeared from the religious reforms to be monotheistic. If this is the case, then it seems as though YHWH's nature would have to compensate for the loss of the fertility and mother goddess. It would be easy to assume that YHWH would have absorbed some aspects of Asherah and Anat into his own personality, which is best seen in his breastfeeding, since Asherah and

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Pettey, *Asherah: Goddess of Israel*, 206.

²⁰⁹ Dever, *Did God have a Wife?*, 212.

²¹⁰ Jacob Rabinowitz, *The Faces of God: Canaanite Mythology as Hebrew Theology*, (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1998), 94.

Anat are known to breastfeed, as well as being a mother and acting as a warrior simultaneously.²¹¹

The historical Isaiah lived during Hezekiah's reforms, and Deutero-Isaiah would have been written when monotheism was closer to becoming a full reality. However, even with the disappearance of the goddesses from the Temple cult, these attributes have become part of YHWH's character. Although the later writers of Deutero-Isaiah mocked those who made idols, the need to venerate a deity that contained the aspects of the goddesses remained. There is no evidence in the 6th century where a male deity is chosen over a female deity, but is understood that there is only one God over many other gods and goddesses. The monotheistic theology originated as a response to the horrors of exile, and motherhood, fertility, and other primary areas of the female deities had slowly disappeared in favour of the need to worship YHWH exclusively. In the end, the only way the female survived was through incorporating these subtleties into the orthodox religion.²¹²

Thus, although the Israelites saw themselves apart from the Canaanites, they not only venerated their deities as well but incorporated this worship as part of Yahwehism. This is shown through the role of the queen mother, who acts as an earthly counterpart of Asherah, while her son is seen to represent YHWH. Later, during the monotheistic religious reforms, the identities of the goddesses have vanished but still remain part of Yahwehism by fusing attributes of the goddesses into YHWH's emotional core. This gives a fuller scope when YHWH compares himself as giving birth during a scene of war, or when he refers to himself as breastfeeding. The female deities show that the motherhood of YHWH is not unique to YHWH alone, but is seen throughout ANE culture.

²¹¹ Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel*, 81.

²¹² Dever, *Did God have a Wife?*, 87.

ASSOCIATED COMMONPLACES IN ISAIAH 49:15

On its own, Isaiah 49:1, *לֹא וְאֶנְכִי תִשְׁכַּחנָּה אֶלֶה־גַּם בְּטִגְלָהּ בֶּן מִרְתָּם עֹלֶה אִשָּׁה הִתְשַׁכַּח* seems like an obvious choice to demonstrate that YHWH, in the poet's imagination, was shown as a mother in Deutero-Isaiah. However, if the verse is read in conjunction with Isaiah 49:14, it seems as though the overarching metaphor is actually part of the marriage metaphor, with Zion as the wife and YHWH as the husband. Commentators, like Klaus Baltzer, have interpreted v.15 in accordance with v. 14 as a woman who appeals to a judge because her husband has left her.²¹³ Sarah J. Dille writes that the husband imagery with Zion is central to Is. 49:13-21.²¹⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that since YHWH is the husband, he cannot be portrayed as a mother because a mother is strictly female, and YHWH cannot both be male and female at the same time.²¹⁵ I am positing that even with the marital metaphor in the background, Isaiah 49:15 clearly refers to motherhood because of its content and that the marital imagery does not affect the language of motherhood in the verse.

Marriage Metaphor in Isaiah 49:14

Zion's speech is understood to be an accusation of a wife that has been abandoned by her husband. There are several reasons that v. 14 should be read as a marital metaphor. The marital metaphor would have been familiar to the audience at the time.²¹⁶ Not only that, but the Akkadian equivalent for *עָזַב* is means to abandon a spouse, or to divorce.²¹⁷ Furthermore, the term is typically used in the Hebrew Bible in times of lament. If this is the case, then v. 14 can be

²¹³ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 312.

²¹⁴ Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 139.

²¹⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 310.

²¹⁶ Gerlinde Baumann, "Prophetic Objections to YHWH as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah" in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Athayla Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 113.

²¹⁷ Hanne Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender?* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 183.

understood as a lament. Dille posits that to understand this passage, the genre of lament must be considered. For her study, she argues that this Isaiah 49:13-21 borrows mainly from the lament genre. Although I disagree with her suggestion that the marital metaphor is central to understanding the passage, her discussion on the lament genre and in relation to v.14-15 is helpful. The typical genre structure of an Ancient Near Eastern lament is where the gods or goddesses have made a decision to destroy the city, so the patron goddess is driven from the city. The enemy comes like a storm against the city, and the social hierarchy is broken down. People die, and the current state of desolation is contrasted with the previous state of prosperity. When the goddess is able to return to the city, the restoration begins.²¹⁸ A text may have the same features of a city lament without actually having all the characteristics of a typical city lament.²¹⁹ The term נָחַם could indicate that v. 14 is a marriage metaphor, but taken into context, this entire passage can be read as part of the city lament genre, where the deity comes back and restores the city to prosperity. The idea that the goddess restores the city is significant to v. 15 because although the previous verse contained marital language, the city lament genre changes the focus of the text. The archetype of a goddess returning can be helpful in understanding v. 15, where YHWH, the deity, promises that he has not forgotten his city through metaphorical terms. Because it is generally a goddess that returns to her city, it should be of no surprise that Isaiah 49, in the genre of a city lament, has YHWH portrayed as female in response to Zion's accusation of abandonment.

The interweaving of marital and motherhood imagery arises here because YHWH plays two roles in v. 14-15. Within v. 15, YHWH answers the lament, and there is a contrast with former prosperity (Is. 54:1b) reversal and a breakdown of the family. For Dille, it seems that part

²¹⁸ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 131.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

of the breakdown of the family and social structure is seen in Zion's abandonment by her husband. In the Mesopotamian city laments, the goddess is strongly identified with the city, yet she is also a deity. When the deity abandons the city, it means abandonment of the city by the goddess herself. Even if she does not want to leave the city by arguing with the other gods, her forced absence means that the city does not have protection against its enemies. In the Hebrew Bible, the deity that destroys and abandons the city are both YHWH. This overlap of roles can easily cause confusion as to how v. 14 and v. 15 should be understood. YHWH's roles seem to switch from v. 14 to v. 15.

A common understanding of v. 15 is that it is contrasting mothers and YHWH. The notion of a mother abandoning her child is not alien to the Israelites, as there were reports that women have eaten their own children during sieges. However, a question that needs to be explored is whether the connotation of an imperfect mother, as part of the associated commonplaces of the mother, can intersect with the features of abandonment in the city lament genre. The undertones of the mother that can eat her own child are used in response to the deity that abandons its own city.²²⁰ The loving mother, although a widely accepted universal truth, is not necessarily a concept that is known to the Israelites. Although it is difficult to construct a full view of the historical audience's understanding of mothers, it can be likely assumed that they knew that though a mother's bond with a child is recognizable, abandonment is possible. Since it is difficult to quantify what consisted of the Israelite's understanding of nursing mothers are, we must look to the associated commonplaces in the text that strictly belong to the female site. In this case, it is breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding as an Associated Commonplace

²²⁰ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 131.

Breastfeeding, which explicitly occurs in the female body, is mentioned here through the use of the term “suckling child.” This undeniably refers to a woman breastfeeding her child. Whether “mother” can be translated out of the Hebrew “woman” is another issue that will be mentioned later on, but it reveals that YHWH is comparing himself to a woman, nonetheless. Because the Hebrew does not actually read if a mother forgets her own child, the possibility of YHWH comparing himself to a wet nurse is not out of the question. However, it does not seem very likely for several reasons. Although wet nurses were not uncommon, they were mostly hired by the wealthy. Most Israelite women nursed their own children up to ages two or three. Wet nurses were only hired by the affluent who could afford it. Secondly, most Israelite women were able to produce their own milk and did not need to depend on another source to feed the infant.²²¹

There are several ways breastfeeding could have been understood by the ancient Israelites. Breast-feeding as an associated commonplace was more complex than simply feeding the infant. It is often assumed that breastfeeding carries connotations of emotional bonding with the infant, but perhaps the ancient Israelites understood it differently. Cynthia Chapman notes that breast milk is a biblical conceptualization of describing closeness and importance, which carries connotation heavier than other substances, like blood or semen.²²² Blood is rarely used in the Hebrew Bible for building kinship relationships, and is understood as the basis of life and also important for sacrifice. זָרַע, meaning seed or semen, is used to explain lineal relationship between a father and his descendants.²²³ There are only three instances where the term “seed” is

²²¹ Mayer I. Gruber, “Breast feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia” in *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* (v.19; 1989), 81.

²²² “Bone and flesh” עֶצֶם וְבָשָׂר is another term that describes relationship and identity. In Genesis 2:22-23, it is used to communicate the relationship between a son and a mother’s relative. In many other cases, the term is used in speaking of marital relations between a husband and wife.

²²³ Cynthia R. Chapman, ““Oh that you were like a brother to me, one who had nursed at my mother’s

used in terms of mother, and that is Eve in Genesis 3:15, Hagar's offspring in Genesis 16:10, and Rebekah's offspring in Genesis 24:60. In all other occurrences of the Hebrew Bible, seed refers to patrilineal terms.

Breastfeeding, an action that directly occurs in the female body, can have the contrasting effect of "seed," where it is more often used to refer to matrilineage, but is much more complex than that. As mentioned previously, although most women would have breastfed their own children, there were times when wet nurses were employed for affluent families or if the mother could not physically produce her own milk. Breastfeeding, then, must be understood more than being simply a defining act to describe the relationship between mother and child. It is likely that the ancient Israelites also saw breastfeeding as a way to establish kinship identity. Through breastfeeding, the wet nurse or the mother was able to transfer her own ethnic identity or social status onto the infant.²²⁴ This notion of breastfeeding as a "kinship forging substance" is seen in biblical birth narratives of prominent kings.²²⁵ This is mentioned in order to establish a foundation for the king's royal or priestly roots. An example of this is in Ruth 4:16, where Naomi becomes Obed's wet nurse. Even though Ruth was a Moabite woman, this detail helps solidify David's Israelite heritage. Similarly, this is also seen in Moses' mother, where the substance is understood to transmit his ethnicity. The detail that they were nursed by Israelite women is a necessarily in order to legitimize their identity in the narrative context. It should be noted that these households could have contained foreign wet nurses that could have breastfed the child instead. The breastfeeding by a specific woman, then, could be understood as a status or ethnic differentiation from foreign influences.

breasts': Breast Milk as a Kinship-Forging Substance" in *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (12, 2012), 1.

²²⁴ Chapman, "Breastmilk as a Kinship-Forging Substance," 3.

²²⁵ Ibid.

This idea is also seen in Susan Ackerman's work on the queen mother being a human counterpart of the fertility goddess. It is not any female divine figure that is able to nurse the king, but is specific to the particular fertility goddess that watches over the people.²²⁶ Kings who have been recorded to have nursed at the breasts of divine figures bolster their own divine status and kingly leadership.²²⁷ Not only that, but even divine kings are described to have nursed at the breasts of goddesses. In the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish*, Marduk's complete birth narrative contains an explicit description that he "sucked on the breasts of goddesses."²²⁸ In Isaiah 49:23, the combination of being adopted by kings and ingesting royal breast milk allows the exiled Israelites to have royal status. By evoking breastfeeding once again, it establishes the role that there is transference of royal status between the one who nurses and the one suckling.²²⁹ This is significant for Isaiah 49:15 because not only does it remind the audience of the tenderness of YHWH's devotion to the Israelites, but that it also evokes the connotations of transference of identity. Here, YHWH can be understood as a counterpart to the female deities that nurse Babylonian and Assyrian gods. Not only is YHWH's speech about care for the people, but also brings into account the transference of divine status onto the people. YHWH's response to Zion's accusation of forgetting her makes sense since the argument now turns to how dedicated YHWH is to Zion.

The idea of breastfeeding acting as a kinship-forging substance is also seen in Isaiah 66:11, where only through the ingesting of the breast milk can they reclaim their status as a glorified city. This glory is a feature of YHWH's royal power, and by suckling Jerusalem's milk, the Israelites can rebuild their previous home. This post-exilic imagining of the people regaining

²²⁶ Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult of Israel" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, (112:1993), 401.

²²⁷ Chapman, "Breastmilk as a Kinship-Forging Substance," 8.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., 13.

prosperity is made possible with the suckling of Jerusalem's breasts. Chapman believes that these references to breastfeeding are the writers of Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah's ways of re-establishing Judah's ethnic identity. While this does not seem inaccurate, the breastfeeding metaphor attributed to YHWH is more complex than just reimagining a future where they will prosper. YHWH's response to being a breastfeeding mother describes the Israelite identity as being closely linked to YHWH's. This concept is largely drawn from the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of divine kingship and fertility goddesses watching over the people. Here, the breastfeeding metaphor makes YHWH's identity like one of the previous fertility goddesses. YHWH fulfills the role that other goddesses usually take on.

Not only is breastfeeding used as reassurance that the Israelites would return to their land, but it also shows that there is much importance placed on whether or not a mother can breast feed. Breastfeeding can be seen as a sign of good fortune. This is best seen in the Judean pillar figurines, which are figurines dated back to the eighth or seventh century B.C.E. during the Assyrian invasion and conquests. These figurines were found exclusively within Judah, and about half of the thousand that were found were excavated from Jerusalem. These figurines were most commonly found in cisterns and burial sites.²³⁰ The physical attributes of the figurines is that the breasts are protruding and enhanced, and attention is drawn to the breasts by the arms and hands cupping the breast. The breasts are also emphasized because there is lack of detail in the lower body of the figurine, which remains smooth stone. These figurines signify a possible view of breastfeeding in the ancient Judah, which is that it acted as a talisman for nursing mothers to continue to produce milk for their infant. About a thousand of these figurines were found and this could indicate that many households were concerned with whether nursing mothers can provide sustenance for their child.

²³⁰ Chapman, "Breastmilk as a Kinship-Forging Substance," 14.

Furthermore, these figurines were found in places besides domestic settings. They are also found in burial sites, which could indicate that it was believed their magic held properties beyond only nursing mothers. Milk, on its own, is seen to be a symbol of prosperity and abundance. This is a concept seen in the Hebrew Bible, when YHWH promises the Israelites that he will bring them into a land flowing of milk and honey.²³¹ Breast milk was understood to not only contain these attributes, but also to have healing properties as well. In Egyptian literature, breast milk was included in medicinal prescriptions for rashes, burns, colds, and fevers for adults and infants.²³² Conversely, there was a belief that illnesses were formed from children receiving bad breast milk.²³³ These figurines could be understood to promote continual milk production, but also could imbue the healing properties of breast milk as well. If breast milk can be understood to contain all these nuances, then it can be argued that the metaphoric comparison of YHWH to a nursing mother in Isaiah 49:15 has restorative connotation.

There are different ways that the ancient Israelites could have understood breastfeeding. Most interpreters see breastfeeding as a way to establish some sort of emotional bonding between mother and child.²³⁴ This emotional bonding is difficult to analyze because unlike the biological features of a woman's nursing body, emotional bonding cannot be "proven." However, this concept is generally held to be true and is also seen in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. For example, Isaiah 66:11-12 links nursing to the image of prosperity and fulfillment.²³⁵ Likewise, Lamentations 4:3-4 describes the cruelty of refraining from breastfeeding and suckling

²³¹ Exodus 3:8

²³² Erin Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 337.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²³⁴ Mayer I Gruber, *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 355.

²³⁵ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 190.

Isaiah 66:11-12 "that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom. For thus says the LORD: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees."

one's child.²³⁶ Withholding from the infant is depicted as an act of horror and evil. Not only that, but because a breastfeeding woman produces hormones that acts as a natural contraception, many women were anxious to produce a male after the birth of a female. In Leviticus 12:1-5, extra time was given for the mother and daughter to breastfeed her to counter the desire to produce a son. This margin of time enabled the mother and daughter to not only bond, but for the daughter to be fully attended.²³⁷ This only serves to reinforce the positive view that an ancient Israelite might have had on breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding within the Female Body

The performance of breastfeeding itself would have constantly reminded the woman that she was nursing a baby, and the act itself controls the production of milk. Giving birth would have caused a fall in progesterone and estrogen levels, which gives rise to prolactin, the hormone which causes the production of milk. However, a few days after giving birth, lactation stops being hormone driven to being caused by the removal of milk. The prolactin levels rise and fall to the frequency of nipple stimulation caused by suckling. Milk production is dependent on the infant, and the constant suckling of the child causes continued milk production, whereas lack of milk removal limits milk production in the breast.²³⁸ Although the ancient Israelite women would not have understood that hormone levels, they would have been familiar with the fact that milk production is dependent on the infant. The experience of many mothers and wet nurses is that a longer interval between nursing causes physical pain in their breasts that can only be remedied by emptying the milk in their breast. The body of the mother is a strong reminder that the mother

²³⁶ Lamentations 4:3-4: "Even the jackals offer the breast and nurse their young, but my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything. (NRSV)

²³⁷ Gruber, *Motherhood of God*, 68.

²³⁸ Jan Riordan, *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*, (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett, 1999), 102.

of the child makes her “physically unable to forget her child.”²³⁹ Furthermore, it is not uncommon for mothers to think of their children that would lead to a milk ejection reflex.²⁴⁰ Mothers can also experience milk ejection when hearing a crying baby or seeing an infant.²⁴¹ The spontaneity of the woman’s body shows how difficult it is for a mother’s body to forget her child. The physical pain in her breasts and the involuntary milk ejection would have reminded the mother to nurse her child. This proves an inability for the mother’s body to forget that she is nursing. The ancient Israelites would have also had these physical experiences. The issue though, is not whether or not the women would have known that their bodies were stimulated by the constant removal of milk, but whether or not they can forget, like Isaiah 49:15 states. Dille writes that: “The primary focus of [Isaiah 49:15] is whether a mother would forget. The nursing image emphasizes the inability to forget. A nursing mother must stay near and stay available to her infant. And how can she forget? A hungry infant is able to remind its mother of feeding time with its crying. Additionally, the mother’s own body is a reminder to her of the need to feed her infant. Finally, the act of nursing itself strengthens the bond between the mother and the child.”²⁴²

By understanding the associate commonplace of breastfeeding, an explicitly female act, it can be said with certainty that Isaiah 49:15 is a maternal metaphor. Although Isaiah 49:14 is likely a marital metaphor, it does not diminish the comparison between YHWH and nursing mothers. By surveying the nuances of breastfeeding and breastmilk itself, YHWH’s response to Zion can be understood not only as a nurturing or devoted figure, but also to convey a sense of identity and prosperity to the Israelites.

²³⁹ Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 192.

²⁴⁰ Riordan, *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation* 103.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 150.

INTERPRETIVE ISSUES IN ISAIAH 49:15a

The textual variants in Isaiah 49:15a has caused some interpretive discrepancies between scholars. Not only that, but there are also disagreements over the nuances of certain words. Although this is not uncommon for ancient manuscripts, the question that should be asked is whether or not this affects the language and link to motherhood. This chapter will explore the difficulties of the verse and show that despite the slight differences in translation, this is still referring to the language of motherhood.

Issues in Translation

The verse אִשָּׁה עוֹלִיָּה מִרְחֶם בְּרִי-בִטְנָהּ גַּם-אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחנָּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֲשַׁכַּחְדָּהּ תִּשְׁכַּח is typically translated as “can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?” yet there has been an argument to translate אִשָּׁה as “mother” and not “woman.”²⁴³ Most commentators agree on a literal translation of the verse, opting for “woman” and not “mother.” However, Gruber suggests that “mother” should be used in translation instead of “woman” because אִשָּׁה appears in “gender matched synonymous parallelism” with “father.”²⁴⁴ The “woman” is a secondary understanding to the word and “mother” should be primary, since אִשָּׁה and מִרְחֶם both refer to motherhood.²⁴⁵ Gruber does not provide additional support for his translation from “woman” to “mother.” This is problematic because it is a stretch from what the verse actually says. The only textual variants that translate it as “mother” is the Alexandrinus manuscript (μητέρα) and the Vulgate (*mulier*). 1QIsa reads אִשָּׁה, as well as LXX, which reads γυνή, Alexandrinus manuscript aside. Targum Isaiah avoids any reference to a mother entirely.²⁴⁶ The traditional interpretation of the verse, which keeps אִשָּׁה as “woman” is probably the most

²⁴³ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.

²⁴⁴ Mayer I Gruber, “Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah” in *Revue Biblique* (1983:90), 355.

²⁴⁵ Mayer I Gruber, *Motherhood of God and Other Studies*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 11.

²⁴⁶ Hanne Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender?* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 165.

accurate. One of the reasons for this is that there is already a Hebrew word for “mother,” and if it was necessary to make an explicit reference to the woman being a mother, it would be possible. In addition, the use of the term אִשָּׁה does not take away from the understanding of motherhood in this text. As mentioned in the previous chapter, breastfeeding is the source of the metaphor in this passage. The woman who bears a child and suckles the infant is language of motherhood already, and changing from “woman” to “mother” is unnecessary in determining the meaning of the metaphor.

Furthermore, the term עוֹלֵלָה is usually understood to come from the verb עוּל, which means “to suckle.” It is referring to an infant that is breastfed. The understanding of עוּל as suckling in Isaiah 49:15 has been questioned, and some scholars and bible editions choose to omit or deemphasize breastfeeding.²⁴⁷ The translation will typically read “baby” or “little child.” However, the noun is only used here in verse 15, as well as Isaiah 65:20 and Job 24:9. In all of these instances, suckling is a possible translation to the word. The term is also found in old Babylonian, where it can be translated to a “child of the breast.”²⁴⁸ The translation that deemphasizes the suckling is not a text critical issue, but an interpretive one. 1QIsa is identical to the MT but without the vowel points. Targum reads *bar*, which is the Aramaic version of בֶּן. The LXX reads παιδίου, and the Vulgate has *infantem*. בֶּן generally refers to “son” in the singular sense, and παιδίου can refer to a small child or a newborn. Even though the Aramaic and the Greek terms do not emphasize suckling, it does not mean that this understanding is excluded from the term. An example of this is in Isaiah 11: 8, where LXX has παιδίου and the MT has יוֹנֵק,

²⁴⁷ Some translations include:

“Does a woman forget her baby?” Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 321.

“Does a woman forget her little child” Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66 Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 217.

“Can a mother forget her infant” New American Bible Revised Edition

²⁴⁸ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 165.

which clearly refers to a suckling child. This shows that παιδίον could mean either a small child or newborn, or a suckling infant.²⁴⁹ It seems that perhaps the original depiction of a breastfeeding infant has been downplayed in the Greek (and other) translations.²⁵⁰

Gruber recommends that עויל should not be translated as a suckling infant because the original audience of the text would not have had the etymological background of the word. He writes that “it is conceivable however, that the anonymous prophet may not have had in mind BDB’s etymology! Hence my rendering ‘infant.’”²⁵¹ Although Gruber is correct in assuming that the historical readers would not have the etymology of the word derived from modern research, it is erroneous to assume that this conclusion would have prevented the historical audience from understanding other meanings of the word. Loland writes that “historical etymology as determinative for the meaning of words has been strongly questioned... Hebrew was a living language, and thus we can presuppose that the meaning of the verb עויל was known and that a historical reader would connect the noun עויל with this verb, even without the historical etymology.”²⁵² Modern research is guided by the evidence of historical etymology, and the argument that the ancient audience would not have understood the term to be a “suckling child” is not a strong one for translation. Translating עויל as “suckling child” is an extremely plausible reading and should not be dismissed.

Furthermore, alternative readings of מִרְחָם have been suggested. מִרְחָם is a piel infinitive prefixed with a preposition מִן in the front. This can be translated as “that she should show no compassion for,” which is agreed upon by LXX, Targum Isaiah, and the Vulgate.²⁵³ Targum

²⁴⁹ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 167.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Gruber, “Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah,” 355.

²⁵² Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 167.

²⁵³ Ibid.

Isaiah reads, *malraḥēmāh*, which can be translated as “that she should show no compassion.”²⁵⁴ The Vulgate reads *ut non meseratur*, which can be translated to “in order to have no mercy.”²⁵⁵ North, following the BHS translation, considers it a piel participle and translates “can a woman
“can a woman forget the child she suckled, a compassionate mother the son she bore?”²⁵⁶

Gruber suggests an alternation to the MT text. His translation is “will a mother forget her infant? Or a woman the child of her womb?”²⁵⁷ He argues that “the initial mem of MT’s מְרַחֵם derives from an ancient copyist’s omission of the ‘aleph of an original ‘im raham... “or a woman”....Note should be taken of the prophet’s subtle play on words in the second clause of Isaiah 49:15 where he points to the special bond which should link mother and child by referring to the mother as raham “woman” a cognate of rehem “woman” and the woman’s progeny as her ben-gitna “child of her womb.”²⁵⁸ The issue with Gruber’s translation is that he alternates the consonants in the MT text for his translation. Although this emendation may preserve the parallelism of the poem better (where the piel participle comes from the verb “womb”; like ‘em, “mother”), the form does not need to be feminine because gender is already strongly implied in this instance.²⁵⁹

Compassion and Womb

Moreover, the language of the womb has been consistently argued to refer to compassion. This was first suggested by Phyllis Tribble in her influential book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, where she shows that the words compassion and womb are linked. She argues that the “physical and psychic meanings unite” in Isaiah 49, where the word “compassion” is repeated

²⁵⁴ Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus, and Notes*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 97.

²⁵⁵ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 168.

²⁵⁶ Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL-LV* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 193.

²⁵⁷ Gruber, “Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah,” 356.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 168.

multiple times.²⁶⁰ The climax of the poem is v. 15, where compassion and womb are mentioned together. She writes that “in this divine speech, the metaphor takes a new direction. Heretofore its journey has accented similarities between the womb of woman and the compassion of God.”²⁶¹ She points out that “womb” has the same root word in “compassion” and that compassion and womb refer to one another. Part of her argument is in Jeremiah 31:20c, where womb and compassion are both explicitly mentioned. She uses this as evidence that womb and compassion must attest to one another.

Trible’s work is extremely influential, and many scholars have taken up her suggestion of the womb-compassion etymology to interpret verse 15. However, in recent years, there has been some critique as to whether or not this is the proper understanding of the verse. In v. 13, YHWH comforts his people and his responses in v. 14 uses the same root word “compassion,” which is supposed to link this as an attribute between mothers and YHWH, since compassion is understood to be a characteristic of motherly feelings. However, it is important to note that these words are not etymologically linked. They are distinct in Akkadian, where *remu* means womb and *ra’amu* means love.²⁶² Tribble argues that she is pointing out “semantic correspondences, not of etymologies.”²⁶³ Because Tribble’s argument is based on the understanding that Jeremiah 31:20c refers to an expression for YHWH’s motherly compassion, an issue that arises is whether or not the concept of motherly compassion can be applied here since the poet writes about the compassion of fathers afterwards. However, Tribble states that this “shift in parental language approaches a balance that recalls our basic metaphor, the image of God male and female.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 51.

²⁶¹ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 51.

²⁶² Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 139.

²⁶³ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 51.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Trible does not seem to be bothered by this transition in language, and I am inclined to agree, since metaphors can overlap.²⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the issue is whether or not there is an etymological connection between “womb” and “compassion.” Gruber argues that “just as Tribble in our time has seen a connection between *riham* (compassion) and *reham* (womb) so was it possible also in antiquity for poets and for those who read or heard poetry to see *rahamim* “compassion” as a characteristically motherly attributes.”²⁶⁶ In this, I think it is quite possible that there is a link between womb and compassion.

The Female Body

Despite these considerations, what may be a stronger argument for the language of motherhood is not necessarily the etymological connection between womb and compassion, but the fact that it is situated in the female site. The reference to the woman’s body, *בֶּן-בִּטְנָהּ*, is a parallel between the suckling child and the child in the womb. It is impossible not to read, *בֶּן-בִּטְנָהּ* with the understanding that it is evidence for female gender. It reveals the origin of the child and strengthens the connection that mothers cannot forget their children because they are physically linked to them. Loland recommends that *רֶחֶם* refers to a spatial or temporal understanding of birth and is more nuanced than being simply a womb. She goes back to Isaiah 46:3, where the preposition of *מֵן* indicates space and time. It indicates a movement out of the womb. Loland suggests that a better understanding of *רֶחֶם* refers to a birth canal than the actual womb because of this aspect. In all occurrences of *מֵן* and *רֶחֶם*, there is also a combination of movement. Even though the ancient Israelites would not have had an understanding of a birth canal, they seemed to comprehend that there was a movement of the child spatially, and regarded

²⁶⁵ The argument that because YHWH is shown as one gender and cannot be the other has been used as the basis against female metaphors. In my previous chapter on associated commonplaces in Isaiah 42:13-14, I have argued that metaphors do overlap, and specifically, gendered metaphors.

²⁶⁶ Gruber, “Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah,” 358.

birth as a process. Although birth canal may be an anachronistic interpretation of the word, Loland argues that birth canal may be a step closer to the actual meaning of the word than simply translated as womb.²⁶⁷

Although Loland's discussion on מְנִי is helpful, she applies this understanding of מְנִי onto Isaiah 49:15 in order to show that there is an implicit bodily connection. It is unlikely that the connotations of the birth canal would apply in this setting. מְנִי is used differently in v. 15 because there is not a preposition preceding it. Loland suggests that Isaiah 46:3 refers a mother carrying her child, and takes this understanding and applies it to Isaiah 49:15, where YHWH is the metaphorical mother carrying Zion.²⁶⁸ This is a weak comparison because YHWH is not explicitly mentioned to be carrying a child, while Isaiah 46:3 is. Loland tries to use this argument to show that there is a female body connection here by bringing up the understanding of מְנִי from Isaiah 46:3. Unfortunately, though her discussion is helpful, it does not strengthen the language of motherhood in Isaiah 49:15.

She is, however, correct in saying that the site of the female body is enough to suggest the maternal metaphor. Viewing מְנִי as part of the gestating process can be helpful in combining Loland's spatial and temporal nuances of the word with the meaning of the text. The full term for gestation is 280 days, although the Israelites believed the duration to vary between 270-274.²⁶⁹ Some ancient Near Eastern sources believe that it is ten months. It has been suggested that the ten lunar months had 28 days, which lead to the 280 days for gestation. The woman knew they would give birth when the astrological signs were in the same position as the last time they had

²⁶⁷ Loland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 153.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ In two instances of the Hebrew Bible, a woman is told that she would have a child after one year. See Genesis 17:21 and 2 Kings 4:16.

menstruation.²⁷⁰ Not only that, but there is a connection between breastfeeding and the uterus. When the mother breastfeeds, she may experience contractions that can be felt as cramps.²⁷¹ According to Jan Riordan’s medical study on breastfeeding and the female body, “oxytocin has another important function—to contract the mother’s uterus. Uterine contractions help to control postpartum bleeding and to aid in uterine involution.”²⁷² It is clear that there is already a strong bodily connection here already. Even if חָמָה does not refer to a spatial or temporal understanding in verse 15, חָמָה itself contains a lot of imagery pertaining to the birth process and the body. Despite the flexibility of how long the gestation process might have been understood, the Israelites would have had the birth competence to understand that it was a lengthy process that affected the woman’s body.

Moreover, the use of the word חָמָה seems to correspond best as a response to Zion’s fears. Isaiah 49:13-14 both connect compassion and motherly affection. The issue in Isaiah 49:13-26 is that Israel asserts that YHWH has forsaken her and that she is childless and left alone. In verse 21, she says “ ‘Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?’ ” Barrenness was seen as a sign of being forgotten.²⁷³ Like Hannah and Rachel, who were both barren, their ability to procreate was seen as a merciful act from God. In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah prayed “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life.” Later in the narrative, it is recorded that “and Elkanah knew Hannah his

²⁷⁰ M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonian and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: STYX, 2000), 22.

²⁷¹ Jan Riordan, *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*, (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett, 1999), 103

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 140.

wife, and the LORD remembered her.”²⁷⁴ Similarly, Rachel had been barren for many years and had finally been granted divine favour. Genesis 30:22 records it as:

“Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.” There seems to be a strong connection between YHWH remembering his people in terms of granting them children. The continual repetition of the themes of children, wombs, and compassion should not be seen as accidental. Verse 15 can be read as the beginning of YHWH’s response to Zion, where he compares his devotion as a mother.²⁷⁵ This is significant because it is an answer to Zion’s complaint, which is that she is forsaken and barren. In this understanding, the language of motherhood is more plausible, not because it leans solely on the etymological connection between womb and compassion, but also shows that this is implicitly part of the female body and makes sense in this context.

Therefore, the language of motherhood is not weakened using the traditional interpretations of the text. In this chapter, the possible different translations of verse 15 have been presented and shown that the maternal metaphor is still strong despite philological issues. Also, the connection between womb and compassion is quite plausible and is helpful in understanding the full context of the passage. The language of motherhood is fully supported by the bodily connection that can only refer to the female body as a mother. In this, Isaiah 49:15 clearly contains language of a maternal metaphor.

²⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 1:19.

²⁷⁵ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 141.

CONCLUSION

The readings and analysis of Isaiah 42:14 and 49:15 have confirmed that these texts either explicitly or implicitly refer to YHWH as mother. These passages show YHWH as bringing forth and nursing a child. These images definitively refer to the female body and suggest that the individual is a mother. In my study of these texts, I also mentioned that the language and concept of YHWH could have been influenced by cognate female deities and metaphors based on societal or personal circumstances. If anything, this reveals that a masculine concept of YHWH is not a complete impression, and it is a hindrance to contain YHWH to specific models. There is much more to be learned about who YHWH really is.

For centuries, women have had to struggle with exclusive male dominated language. The familial language of describing YHWH cannot be ignored. Personal metaphors have been used to describe who YHWH is, whether YHWH is a Father, or a Mother. In the discussion on metaphors, it should be understood that YHWH is not a male human being, nor is YHWH literally a “father.” YHWH as a “Father” implies that there are some limitations, which is why YHWH is also described as a Mother. The insistence that YHWH is a Father yet cannot be a Mother is erroneous in the least. YHWH as a Mother prevents male language from dominating the discussion. It is all too easy for male exclusive language to create a binary understanding, where men are equated with power, dominion, superiority, and women as a result become weak, subordinate, and inferior.²⁷⁶ This is problematic for obvious reasons. Although many consider the divine genderless, neutrality does not exist in reference to YHWH. The default understanding of YHWH will always be male, whether gender is stated or not. The metaphoric models of King, Shepherd, and especially Father, will always have male connotations.

²⁷⁶ Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.

Inclusive metaphors are paramount because they generate and perpetuate the concepts that are understood of YHWH. Even though there is a broad agreement that YHWH is not necessarily male, the dominant metaphors and language for YHWH still only reflect maleness. Since much of the language about YHWH is expressed through metaphor, this is problematic. Inclusive language becomes fundamental because an institutionalized view of YHWH is restraining and normative. Re-conceptualizing YHWH can give readers renewed appreciation of who this figure is. It challenges the current model of YHWH and allows new vocabulary for ways to describe this deity. It helps deconstruct what was previously thought and prevents preconceived notions. YHWH is not limited by gender or sex, but can be simultaneously male and female. Although literal language prevents this from being conveyed properly, the metaphorical images in Deutero-Isaiah suggest that YHWH contains traits that are certainly Mother.

The metaphors people know the most are the ones that relate to themselves. That is why personal metaphors are so appealing, and why YHWH as Father has become part of tradition. Sallie McFague writes that, “The tradition says we are the imago Dei, and that inevitably means we imagine God in our image.”²⁷⁷ The resistance over YHWH as Mother reveals more about our perception of YHWH and our cultural values than YHWH’s being. Personal metaphors that are modelled after human beings provide the best entry point for grasping the abstract. To model YHWH after ourselves is not a danger, because humans are their own most complex and nuanced creatures, and capable of depth.²⁷⁸ To be able to speak of YHWH from personal metaphors are more insightful than speaking of YHWH through non-personal metaphors. Religious metaphors work in a two-fold way where it reveals something about the divine, but it

²⁷⁷ McFague, *Collected Readings*, 36.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

also demonstrates the level of the participants understanding. If religious language is an expression of demonstrating who YHWH is, it would be a grave error to only reveal his maleness and not his femaleness as well. The dominance of male centered models for YHWH reveals a patriarchal culture.

To represent YHWH as Mother can revitalize our understanding of YHWH's character. The metaphor of motherhood contains connotations of sex, blood, birth, and nourishment. All of these components make it necessary for life to begin and continue. YHWH as Mother represents one of the most primary and primitive of human relationships. The basics of YHWH as Mother are that "it brings us closest to the beginnings of life, to the nurture of life, and to the impartial fulfillment of life."²⁷⁹ This model suggests intimacy and bridges the distance that patriarchal models have. Although YHWH as Father is still an immanent metaphorical model, deconstructing the patriarchal model of understanding YHWH allows a balance of religious power between the sexes. The patriarchal models of YHWH have a difficult way of truly being immanent if they are alienating of other groups. If there are male only models of YHWH, they can be viewed as domineering, individualistic, and transcendent. This is why the model of Mother is necessary. It is able to prevent this from happening and works inclusively. It should be taken seriously to be used as a personal metaphor and model for YHWH.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, there has been mention of YHWH as Creator. This is shown in Genesis as YHWH forms and creates. However, the birth metaphor has been erased from understanding YHWH as a female Creator. "The birth of the world and all its beings, has not been permitted the imagery that this tradition uses so freely for the transformation and fulfillment of creation" due to the exclusion of the female.²⁸⁰ Creation is shown to be from the

²⁷⁹ McFague, *Collected Readings*, 43.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 45

work of YHWH's words and hands, yet is not understood as a Mother. One reason for this is that to understand YHWH as Mother and YHWH as Creator are two very different metaphors.

Creator is gender neutral, and as mentioned earlier, when terms are gender neutral, masculine ideals often become the default understanding. YHWH as Creator is understood to be masculine. However, YHWH as Mother suggests a different type of creation, where there is an intimacy and connection between the divine being. There is closeness conveyed, where creation and Mother experience a period of gestation, birth, and lactation, where there is an imaginative picture of being cared for. YHWH as Mother provides a picture of complete interdependence for survival.

A question that could arise is whether advocating for this strong model is actually falling prey to what patriarchal models do. I tend to disagree, because not only does it begin to balance the patriarchal equilibrium of male metaphors, but YHWH as Mother is more relatable and imminent than any other model. All humans, whether male or female, were created by mothers and have been gestated. Understanding that YHWH is Mother allows for a theology that sees YHWH as one that nourishes the weak and vulnerable and allows for a continuation of life. Being able to envision new ways in speaking about YHWH makes room a relevant relationship between the divine and human beings while being non idolatrous.²⁸¹ This will then become meaningful to those that were previously excluded, as well as being pertinent to those that have benefited from traditional patriarchal models. YHWH as Mother can deconstruct previous patriarchal descriptions and begin to undo the damage that has been done. Although metaphors can never fully describe a divine being, it slowly allows interpreters to begin to reimagine new ways of experiencing and studying YHWH.

²⁸¹ McFague, *Collected Readings*, 82.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aarons, David H. *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*. Leiden: Brill. 2002.
- Ackerman, Susan. "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East." *Women and Goddess Traditions in Antiquity and Today*. Edited by Karen L. King. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1997. Pages 179-209.
- Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women and Judges in Ancient Israel*. New York: Doubleday Press. 1998.
- Alster, Bendt. *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer I*. Bethesda, Md: CDL Publications. 1997.
- Ames, Frank Ritchel. "The Meaning of War: Definitions for the Study of War in Ancient Israelite Literature." *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*. Edited by Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritchel Ames. Atlanta: SBL. 2008.
- Baltzer, Klaus. *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2001.
- Barton, John. *The Oxford Bible Commentary: Isaiah*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001.
- Bauman, Gerlinde. "Prophetic Objects to YHWH as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah." *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*. Edited by Athayla Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 2001.
- Bergmann, Claudia D. *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1-18*. New York: W. de Gruyter. 2008.
- Binger, Tilde. *Asherah: Goddess in Ugarit, Israel, and the Old Testament*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 1997.
- Black, Max. *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*. New York: Cornell University Press. 1962.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday. 2002.
- Brettler, Marc Zvi. "Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40-66." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. No.78. 1998. 97-120.
- "The Metaphorical Mapping of God in the Hebrew Bible."* *Metaphor, Canon,*

- and Community: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Approaches*. Edited. by Ralph Bisschops and James Francis. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. 219-232.
- Bronner, Leila Leah. "Gynomorphic Imagery in Exilic Isaiah (40-66)." *Jewish Bible Quarterly*. Vol. 12:2. 1983. 71-83.
- Chapman, Cynthia R. "'Oh that you were like a brother to me, one who had nursed at my mother's breasts': Breast Milk as a Kinship-Forging Substance." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, 12: 2012. 1-41.
- Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2001.
- Chilton, Bruce D. *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus, and Notes*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1987.
- Darby, Erin. *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual*. Mohr Siebeck. 2014.
- Darr, Katheryn Pfisterer. "Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10-17." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Vol. 49. 1987. 560-571.
- Dever, William G. *Did God have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Israel*. Grand Rapids: Michigan. W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2005.
- Dille, Sarah J. *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.
- Douglass, David. "Issues in the Use of I. A. Richards' Tenor-Vehicle Model of Metaphor." *Western Journal of Communication*. Vol. 64, no.4, 2000. 405-424.
- Ebeling, Jennie R. *Women's Lives in Biblical Times*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2010.
- Fogelin, Robert J. *Figuratively Speaking*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1988.
- "Metaphors, Similes, and Similarity." *Aspects of Metaphor*. Edited by Jaakko Hintikka. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1994.
- Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *Bread Not Stone: The Challenges of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- Frye, Roland M. "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles." *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 41. 1960. 441-469.
- Frymer-Kensky, Tivka Simone. *Studies in Feminist Biblical Criticism*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. 2006.

- Gersternberger, Erhard S. *Yahweh—the Patriarch: Ancient Images of God and Feminist Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1996.
- Gruber, Mayer I. “The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah.” *Revue Biblique*. 1983:90. 351-359.
- “Breast feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia.” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*. 19:1989. 61-83.
- The Motherhood of God and Other Studies*. Atlanta: Scholars Press. 1992.
- Hadley, Judith M. *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2000.
- Innes, Doreen. “Metaphor, Simile and Allegory as Ornaments of Style.” *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*. Edited by G. R. Boys-Stones. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003.
- Kalmanofsky, Amy. “Israel’s Baby: The Horror of Childbirth in the Biblical Prophets.” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*. Volume 6, no.1, 2008. 60-82.
- Klingbeil, Martin G. “Mapping the Literary to the Literal Image: A Comparison between Sub-Metaphors of the Heavenly Warrior Metaphor in the Hebrew Psalter and Iconographic Elements of the Storm and Warrior god Ba’al in ANE Iconography.” *Die Welt des Orients*. Volume 39, no.2, 2009. 205-222.
- Loland, Hanne. *Silent or Salient Gender? The Interpretation of God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46, and 49*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2008.
- McFague, Sallie. “God as Mother, Lover, and Friend.” *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2013.
- North, Christopher R. *The Second Isaiah*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1964.
- Osborne, Susan. “Feminism: A Short History.” *Feminism*. Harpenden: Herts. Pocket Essentials. 2001. 7-36.
- Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press. 1990.
- Paul, Shalom M. *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*. Eerdmans Critical Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2012.
- Pettey, Richard J. *Asherah: Goddess of Israel*. New York: Peter Lang. 1990.
- Philip, Tarja. “Woman in Travail as a Simile to Men in Distress in the Hebrew Bible.” *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*. Edited by S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Project. 2002. 499-505.

- Rabinowitz, Jacob. *The Faces of God: Canaanite Mythology as Hebrew Theology*. Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications. 1998.
- Richards, I.A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1936.
- Riordan, Jan. *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*. Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett. 1999.
- Schmitt, John J. "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother." *Revue Biblique*. Vol. 92. 1985. 557-569.
- Schoors, Antoon. *I Am God Your Saviour: A Form Critical Study of the Main Genres of Isaiah XL-LV*. Leiden: Brill. 1973.
- Schungel-Straumann, Helen. "God a Mother in Hosea 11." *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets*. Edited by Athayla Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 1995.
- Sommer, Benjamin D. *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1998.
- Soskice, Janet Martin. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1985.
- The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007.
- Stol, M. *Birth in Babylonian and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*. Groningen: STYX. 2000.
- Stone, Merlin. *When God was a Woman*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Press. 1978.
- Tirrell, L. "Reductive and Nonreductive Simile Theories of Metaphor." *The Journal of Philosophy*. 88. 1991. 337-358.
- Trible, Phyllis. "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Volume 41:1. 1973. 40-38.
- God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1978.
- Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1969.
- Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1972.