

A Rejoinder concerning Genesis 3:6 and the NJPS Translation

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ABSTRACT. This rejoinder counters the thrust of an article published in this journal in late 2013, "Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of עֲמָה in Genesis 3:6b" (*JBL* 132, no. 4: 729–47). That critique focused largely on the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation's rendering, which it assailed. Four flaws in the earlier piece are now adduced, covering every aspect of its argumentation. This rejoinder holds that: (1) the NJPS translators' alleged *motive* for interpretive bias is lacking; (2) the prior author's understanding of the narrated events is not supported by the Hebrew text's *grammar and syntax*; (3) the *nature* of the NJPS translation was misconstrued, so that it was judged according to the wrong criteria; and (4) even if NJPS had rendered this passage as advocated by the earlier article, such wording *would not hinder* misogynistic interpretations. NJPS has not misled readers in this instance, nor has it created an opening for misogyny. Rather, the NJPS rendering of Gen 3:6b accurately reproduced the text's depiction, while remaining true to that translation's approach.

Julie Faith Parker, in her article "Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of עֲמָה in Genesis 3:6b" (*JBL* 132, no. 4 [2013]: 729–47), assails the Jewish Publication Society translation (NJPS) at Gen 3:6: ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה . . . she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate." Regarding the prepositional phrase that depicts Adam as עֲמָה ("with her"), Parker asserts that NJPS misleads readers by omitting a direct rendering—because this encourages their "blaming Eve alone" for bringing humankind to sin (pp. 730, 747). Yet that assessment does not withstand scrutiny, on four counts.

First, a motive hardly exists for NJPS's alleged crime. Jewish translations have little reason to downplay Adam's culpability. The classical and widespread rabbinic term for the fateful feast of forbidden fruit is חטאו של אדם הראשון ("Adam's sin").¹ If traditional Jewish interpretation has downplayed anything, it is Eve's leadership role.

1. In English, see, e.g., Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Publications of the Perry Foundation in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 1:421–26.

Second, the Hebrew text's grammar and syntax do not support Parker's view that עָמְדָה implies that Adam could have intervened to stop Eve from eating the fruit. Our verse does not specify that Eve's acts of eating and of sharing with Adam occurred at the same time or place.² Yet it could easily have done so.³ Rather than "excusing Adam from responsibility" as Parker claims (p. 732), NJPS accurately reproduced the text's depiction of Eve's two distinct acts.

Third, contra Parker (p. 743), NJPS is not a "formal equivalence" translation.⁴ Word-for-word expectations do not apply. As a sense-for-sense translation, NJPS *by design* avoids rendering individual Hebrew words whose import is clear from the idiomatic English wording.⁵

Finally, Adam's whereabouts while Eve ate the forbidden fruit have no bearing on the misogynistic interpretations that (justifiably) trouble Parker. In the narrative itself, Adam is held accountable not for failing to stop Eve, but for eating the fruit (v. 17). All fifty-nine translations cited by Parker state explicitly that Adam ate the fruit. Interpreters who blame Eve for Adam's own disobedience thus depart from the text's plain sense. And if those interpreters did not learn from the unhappy outcome after Adam already attempted to blame Eve (v. 12), surely no construal or rendering of עָמְדָה in our verse will dissuade them from doing so.

2. Each act is expressed via its own Past Narrative (*wayyqtl*) conjugation, a construction that is temporally and spatially imprecise. Nor does the conjunction וְ, which reintroduces Adam, prove that he was present during the previously mentioned event (cf. Gen 38:7, 10). And the complement containing עָמְדָה modifies only its own clause's predicate, regarding the act of sharing. In short, Eve's "giving" may well have occurred later and/or in another part of the Garden.

3. By saying, for example, וְהָאָדָם וְהָאִשָּׁה אָכְלוּ מִפְּרֵי הַגָּן ("she ate—she and her partner"); cf., e.g., Gen 13:1; 33:6. The text's ancient audience probably inferred that Adam was *not* present during Eve's initial eating, because they surely knew that alternative wording to *explicitly* note his presence was readily available to the text's composer(s).

4. Its translators made this point repeatedly. For example, their 1962 preface justified the new translation on the grounds that prior ones "rendered the Hebrew to a considerable extent word for word rather than idiomatically" (n.p.). Their declared goal was "to discard . . . literal, mechanical translation" (Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969], 13).

5. A typical example of NJPS's not reproducing a prepositional phrase is the succinct rendering "and took wives" for וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים (Gen 6:2).