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ENG 115

25 March 2020

Oral Presentations : Female Fertility

* 1. Present your claim, argument, perspective, thesis – what were you trying to explain, explore, examine or prove

**Claim:**  Fertility in Genesis and Exodus is important to the familial lineage of the first descendants and determines a covenant with God. Between Genesis and Exodus the women who suffer from infertility are Sarah and Rebekah and it ultimately affects their womanhood and their identity. In opening and closing the womb God and faith play a central role in fertility and is the determining factor of conception and occurs in his timing. Fertility among women and families in the Bible is interpreted as prosperous for the future generations to come.

* 1. Discuss the evidence – the specific passages you used or references from *The Bible and Its Influence* which you used to support your claim

**Key words:** Opening and closing of the womb.

**Passages:** The main passages are from Genesis and Exodus.

**Sarah and Abraham:**

Sarai, the wife of Abram, struggles with her infertility and is barren. God promises a great nation from Abram’s offspring but Abram is still unsure of God’s statement since he is childless, “‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless…’ … ‘You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir’” (Gen.15:2-3). God refutes Abram’s statement and promises him and his descendants great land and reassures Abram by making a covenant with him. Sarai, unable to bore Abram children, offers the Egyptian slave-girl to bear children and from her she shall obtain children by her. The story implies the dangers of human attempts to fulfill a promise outside of God’s will, when God specifically stated, “‘This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir’” (Gen. 15:4). As Sarai and Abram grow older God appears to Abram and makes another covenant with him promising him and Sarai to be “exceedingly fruitful”. When the covenant was made God told Abrham that Sarai’s name will now be Sarah and says, “‘I will bless her, and moreover give you a son by her, I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of people shall come from her’” (Gen 17:16). This further expands on the motif God and fertility and the importance of his role in conception and timing. Although Abraham and Sarah both laughed at the thought of bearing a child at the age of a hundred and ninety, their laughter is used to stress the incredibility of God’s promise. God’s intentions were fulfilled and Sarah bore Isaac and establishes a covenant with him of everlasting offspring. This example from the Bible not only touches the topic of infertility but the importance of timing and faith in Sarah and Abraham.

**Isaac and Rebekah :**

With the story of Abraham and Sarah similar parallels occur in with Isaac, son of Abraham, and his wife Rebekah also known as the second generation fertility, “Isaac prayed to the Lord of his wife, because she was barren and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived” (Gen. 25:21). Isaac has hope that God will fulfill his and Rebekah’s desires of conceiving their own child, and God notices Isaac’s willingness and faith and grants his wishes. The continuation of infertility in the familial lineage does not end with Isaac and Rebekah but a similar pattern is seen in the story of Jacob and the birth of his children.

**Jacob, Leah, and Rachel:**

In Jacob’s story, Leah was given to Jacob by Laban. Jacob originally intended to marry Rachel but it was not a custom to give the younger daughter away before the first. Jacob works hard for Rachel, as he loves her more than Leah. When the Lord saw Jacob loved Rachel more, he opened Leah’s womb and Rachel was barren. When Leah bore her children she was content with God and now sure that Jacob was going to love her, “‘Because the Lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me’” (Gen. 29:32). It’s clear that Leah had felt disregarded for quite some time and craved to be loved by Jacob. She felt unworthy of being loved and when she bore two more of Jacob’s children she was sure that they would be joined. Rachel became desperate and felt that she was being judged by God. Rachel felt like a disgrace not being able to conceive children to go as far as wishing her own death, “Give me children, or I shall die” (Gen.30:1). She felt ashamed and wanted to have her own children and went as far as giving Jacob her maid Bilhah; similar to Sarah when she gives her slave-girl Hagar to Abraham. Through Bilhah Rachel was able to conceive children. Leah took notice and when she had ceased bearing children she gave Jacob her maid Zilpah. It was an ongoing custom of who bore more children but at that time it determined who was worthier and who was loved more by Jacob. The text in the Bible says, “Then God remembered Rachel and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach’” (Gen.30:22-23). When God opens Rachel’s womb, this act further determines that God is in charge of opening and closing the womb and in charge determining conception and making the women fertile.

**Egyptian midwives:**

In Exodus the king of Egypt had sent a message to all the midwives to kill all the Hebrew boys born into the families. The midwives had a greater fear and it was God, “But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live” (Exod.1:17). When God saw that they had feared him and divine retribution and done what was right in their hearts he granted them with families, “So God dealt with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong” (Exod.1:20). In this case God saw that they had saved the lives of Hebrew boys and granted them with children of their own. Fertility was notably a sign of blessings and prosperity.

* 1. Explain how the evidence and/or your review of the text expanded or clarified your understanding of the text

**Evidence:** The evidence from the text expanded my knowledge on how importance the Hebrew God has in the role of women fertility in the Bible. The “opening and closing of the womb” may be seen as troubling to some but from the readings it seems to be all in the Hebrew’s Gods timing and their willingness to have faith. When the Hebrew God sees the families and women acting in faith he grants them children and even more fruitful generations.

* 1. Share your conclusions

**Conclusion:** The similar patterns that occur in Genesis and Exodus are parallels to one another. The three generations all dealt with infertility and repeat cycles such as the women giving their maid to their husband to conceive for them. For these three women unable to bear children took a toll on them and feared for their marriage. Feeling unloved and unworthy, God opened all their wombs when he felt was right. It is clear in opening and closing the womb God is central in the conception of women and their fertility. The customs that took place were normal at the time but also signs of desperation of wanting a child of their very own. When God granted the women open wombs they were able to conceive more than just one child, for example Rebekah who bore twins, and Rachel who bore more children after Joseph. It is clear when women were able to bear children of their own as a sign of prosperity and blessings.

* 1. If you can provide a handout with your references or an outline of your paper, that will help your peers with the commentary

**Reference:**

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Fourth Edition. Michael D. Coogan, ed.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

1. Response from Classmates – Commentary format
   1. A commentary may be an explication or analysis of a complicated idea, an exploration or inquiry into a problematic passage or concept, or a reflection on some lines or image of interest. (adapted from Professor Sheridan Blau, UC Santa Barbara & Columbia Teachers’ College)
   2. After listening to your peers’ presentations, select one for which you’ll write a commentary – discussing the perspective, evidence, and findings—the commentary will be your SSW for that class period. It will be helpful to take notes on the oral presentations so you are able to do the commentary