**Preface**

The present edition has taken as its starting point the venerable New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation, whose preparation began in 1955. After three decades of effort, in 1985, the complete rendition was published in one volume under the title *Tanakh*.[[1]](#endnote-1) Thirty-five years later, in 2020, The Jewish Publication Society commissioned a revision, because the English language had since evolved. In particular, a set of far-reaching changes had made NJPS seem more male-oriented than its translators intended. This state of affairs, in turn, was making it harder for today’s readers of the *Tanakh* to gain an accurate picture of what is going on in the original text; furthermore, the translation had come to unduly alienate many individuals and communities.

This revised edition seeks to restore the ability of NJPS to provide an accurate picture of how gender is handled in the Bible—the original text’s presuppositions, ascriptions, and prescriptions. It introduces a wide range of changes in labels and pronouns both for people and for God, and in related areas. The intended result is to restore the vital access that a translation of the Hebrew Bible can afford to its world and its timeless lessons.

Diverse kinds of people open up an English translation of the Bible, and for many of them the accurate treatment of gender is a goal that matters deeply. If you are such a person, then this revision is dedicated to you. It is dedicated, as well—and with gratitude—to the original translation teams who created NJPS, whose trailblazing path has been followed here. Although several English translations of the Hebrew Bible have since been marketed as gender-sensitive, NJPS appears to have been the first to deal with the issue of unduly male-oriented language.

**NJPS as (Incidentally) Gender Sensitive**

As recounted by Harry M. Orlinsky *z"l* (1908–1992), a professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion and the champion of what came to be called NJPS, in 1955 its initial translation team began to consider gender issues (although that label was not used at the time) upon assuming the freedom to depart from the traditional renderings of earlier English versions.[[2]](#endnote-2) As a matter of course while parsing the Hebrew text, the committee members would ask themselves about the scope of a given “male” personal noun: in this particular context, did it mean “son”—or “offspring”? “Fathers”—or “ancestors”? They posed such questions for the sake of their ultimate goal: to ascertain the text’s plain sense, so as to render it accurately into modern English idiom.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In other words, already prior to the 1970s, when (second-wave) feminists called for an end to male-oriented Bible translation, NJPS had inadvertently led the way in what came to be called gender-sensitive rendering. Indeed, just prior to the 1985 publication of the full *Tanakh*, Prof. Orlinsky carefully checked a third of its thirty-nine books for additional passages that might warrant inclusive language. He found what he later described as “exceedingly few instances” where such a change was needed.[[4]](#endnote-4) In short, Orlinsky had good reason to argue that for at least a significant portion of the biblical text’s personal references, the NJPS translation process had represented gender accurately.

**A Flood of Shifts in English Usage**

Much as a flooding river can reconfigure the channel through which it subsequently flows, rapid changes in English usage have, in the years since NJPS was published, reshaped how its achievement is viewed. Whereas NJPS had frequently employed both the masculine pronouns *he/him/his/himself* and the noun *man* in their classic generic sense, such usage has since been swept away—disappearing from everyday parlance. The language’s altered course has thus skewed the gender picture that NJPS’s readers see in many passages.

An example illustrates the challenge that readers now face. A legal section of Exodus declares: “He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death” (21.12, NJPS, first published in 1962). Two labels denote the parties involved: *He* and *man*. The translation committee surely intended that both of them have gender-inclusive force.[[5]](#endnote-5) In the early 1960s that was common parlance in the realm of American law. Even in 1985, such wording was still considered normal diction in formal documents.

Since then, however, nearly all jurisdictions in the USA have intentionally replaced *he* and *man* as generic terms in the wording of their laws or ordinances. That way of speaking and legislating has become rare—and is therefore unexpected, if not jarring or even alienating. Hence present-day readers of NJPS may well conclude that this verse is talking only about *male* perpetrators and *male* victims—or at least pause to wonder about that prospect. Or worse, they might conclude that in the biblical world, only males were deemed worthy of the text’s attention. These are difficulties that follow in the wake of the altered course of our English language.

Meanwhile, that same evolution has even affected many NJPS passages where women are *not* in view. It has reduced their perceived coherence. For example, in 1 Samuel, when King Saul hears a proposal that certain rogues be executed (11.12; cf. 10.27), he demurs, replying: “No man shall be put to death this day!” (11.13, NJPS, first published in 1978). Although the scoundrels in question are almost certainly men, this fact is beside the point, because the king is making a categorical statement. NJPS surely employed *man* here in its broadest classical sense (“no man” = nobody).

Nowadays, however, *man* is seldom used in that way; the king’s point would normally be expressed in other, more clearly gender-neutral terms. The baseline of expected wording has shifted. Saul’s apparent departure from the (new) normal way of speaking then evokes an impression that he is making an issue of the maleness of those implicated. Although that inference is blunted by the fact that their gender is not otherwise a concern in this story, it leaves Saul’s utterance (as rendered in NJPS) sounding odd.

At the same time, due to a related shift in English parlance, speakers increasingly make personal reference without recourse to gender. Nowadays we tend to separate our mention of a person’s accomplishments and social roles from the gendered garb in which we used to clothe their expression. For example, in discussions of America’s establishment, it has become common to avoid the classic term *founding fathers* in favor of *founders*—while leaving it unstated that they were almost all men.[[6]](#endnote-6) An artful act of specification (taking the referents’ maleness as a given and then expressing the role in those terms) can also function as an act of exclusion (an endorsement of the fact that women were usually not eligible for positions of communal leadership). Present-day parlance favors the avoidance of exclusion over the specification of a gendered role. In that light, when God says to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers…” (Gen. 31.3, NJPS, first published in 1962), the locution *fathers* now comes across as suspect. Aren’t his mother and grandmother also in view?

**The Impact on God-Language**

Thus far, we have been talking about the Bible’s references to human beings. Actually, however, the most prominent character featured in biblical accounts is Israel’s Deity. The aforementioned recent gender-related changes in English have likewise affected audience perceptions about the NJPS renderings of references to God. Those too seem more male-oriented, for third-person pronouns such as *He* have become harder to construe as not ascribing gender.[[7]](#endnote-7)

A further challenge is “the Lord,” the classical substitute for God’s ineffable personal name. When this epithet is used in place of the Name, it implicitly treats God’s persona as male, compared to a baseline non-gendered synonym such as “Sovereign.” Nowadays in many Jewish circles, people who are reading aloud from NJPS avoid saying “the Lord,” due to its male connotation. (They substitute something else instead.) For such readers, God is a persona not only in the ancient text but also in present moments—and the Deity whom they themselves have experienced is not a male.

In sum, due to changes in the English language since NJPS was published in 1985, it has been increasingly construed as unduly male-oriented and somewhat ponderous—much like the long tradition of wooden equivalents that its translators had, at one time, so proudly transcended. For many readers of the Bible in English, this distorted state of affairs is discomfiting, and even outrageous. For some, the translation’s amplification of the Bible’s predominantly male-centered concerns painfully compounds the relative exclusion of girls and women from the Jewish textual tradition. Likewise they view the God-language as rather scandalously implying that divinity exists only apart from the feminine.

**The Making of a Revised Edition**

The Jewish Publication Society’s staff has been well aware of the trends described above. It has explored a variety of ways to respond to the gender-related changes in English that were affecting how NJPS was construed. In 2020, the right combination came together of institutional support, available translation expertise, a funding partnership with Sefaria, and an increasingly interested audience. The publisher therefore embarked upon a full revision of *Tanakh*.

Happily, the revision effort was able to build upon a foundation that JPS had established initially through an earlier publishing partnership, with URJ Press. That effort had focused only on the Torah (also known as the Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses, which is the first major section of the Hebrew Bible). In 2006, the outcome had been published in *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation*. (The revised Torah translation itself is referred to in scholarly circles as CJPS, which stands for “Contemporary JPS.”)

The present revision of the full Hebrew Bible has treated CJPS as a pilot project, incorporating nearly all of its modifications to NJPS for the Torah. The CJPS methodology also served as the starting point for the present project, which has retained certain CJPS innovations while modifying others.[[8]](#endnote-8) When an abbreviation is needed for convenience, the publisher now asks scholars and others to refer to this new version of the NJPS translation as “RJPS”—that is, the Revised Jewish Publication Society translation.

The remainder of this preface—before concluding with due acknowledgments—will outline in a general way the RJPS approach to revision. For further details about the methodology, see the Notes on Gender in Translation, available online at \_\_\_.

**The Treatment of References to Human Beings**

Translation can be said to involve two dimensions. One is dealing with *what was said* in the source text, by ascertaining and rendering its plain sense into a tongue that the reader finds more comprehensible. The other is accounting for *what went without saying*—especially, in this case, the gendered social roles and mores that the original text’s wording presupposed, yet nowadays may be unfamiliar.[[9]](#endnote-9) Like NJPS, the present translation renders the ancient text as if all its voices were speaking Modern English. At the same time, it brings the salient gender-related presuppositions and norms into view (often in the notes).[[10]](#endnote-10) The first goal affords the reader a ready comprehension of the *Tanakh*, while the second maintains a historical and cultural authenticity.[[11]](#endnote-11)

One important decision for any translator between cultures (such as *ancient* versus *modern*) is to what extent the world that is presupposed by the original utterance should be made relatable and familiar. The present edition offers readers a faithful and unvarnished view into a somewhat strange world that is not only fascinating but also occasionally unsettling—and perhaps even disturbing. Some of the norms of ancient Israel were not those of a liberal Western society, to say the least. In particular, their society was more committed to gender asymmetry and hierarchy than is our own; women’s and men’s lives were supposed to be strongly distinct.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Regardless, the revision has hewn to the same charge that was initially presented to the NJPS translation team: “to render the Hebrew text as they believed the original author of that text meant it to be understood” by its original audience.[[13]](#endnote-13) As before, this rendition is meant neither to endorse nor condemn the ancient ways that it describes, but rather to be a witness to them. For as Prof. Phyllis Bird, a pioneering feminist biblical scholar, has memorably put it, “the aim of a Bible translator…should be to enable a modern audience to overhear an ancient conversation, rather than to hear itself addressed directly.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

In some cases, reporting the “ancient conversation” has meant adopting a gendered rendering even where a gender-inclusive one was defensible. For example, as recounted in 1 Kings, when Naboth rejected King Ahab’s bid for his vineyard, he fatefully said, “God forbid that I should give up to you what I have inherited from my אֲבוֹת *’avot*!” (21.3). Which rendering of his final word is best: “fathers”—or “ancestors”? Given the brusqueness (and even rudeness) of Naboth’s reply, the ancient audience would have understood him to be taking a bold stand in the well-known competition between major authority structures in ancient Israel: the monarchy (headed by a king) versus the traditional reliance upon patrimonial households (headed by a father). That conceptual frame sets up an equivalence between the opposed authority figures. Therefore, just as “king” is gendered in English, so too the rendering of אֲבוֹת should be. Accordingly, “father” was preferred.[[15]](#endnote-15)

The revising team examined each personal reference in the Hebrew text that employed grammatically masculine inflections or male terms. It assessed whether women as well as men were in view. After assessing the gender implications, the team weighed how well NJPS conveyed them to a contemporary audience. The team also sought to ensure that references to women were rendered in a manner that did not add undue connotations, and that references to men did not unduly emphasize maleness. The rendering was tweaked as needed. (When introducing changes, the team adopted the same overall rendering style and footnoting style as NJPS.) In sum, the revising translators strove to make gender no more and no less of an issue than the text’s original audience would have perceived it.

**The Treatment of References to Israel’s God**

The God-language in this edition presupposes that most readers will identify its main protagonist with the non-gendered God that prevails in present-day religious Judaism. It also respects the fact that the Hebrew text does not allow us to determine exactly what its composers themselves believed about the gender of God’s persona.[[16]](#endnote-16) Such indeterminacy is best preserved via a gender-neutral presentation, for it allows either reading.

In order to refer to God as a persona in a manner that does not ascribe manly gender, the present edition has adopted the following three measures:

*The Name (Tetragrammaton)*. For representing the four-letter “personal” name of God (tetragrammaton), this edition employs a hybrid of two classical German-Jewish practices.[[17]](#endnote-17) As a default rendering, it adopts Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch’s approach in his translations of biblical books (starting in 1867)—namely, a typographically distinctive version of *Gott*, the German word forGod. In the example shown, the letterspacing in the leftmost word is what signals the divine Name.[[18]](#endnote-18)



*Gott, euer Gott*—the end of Lev. 19.2 in S. R. Hirsch’s translation.

The present translation employs a similarly familiar convention in English typography, namely the same small-capitals treatment (“God”) that NJPS gave to its rendering of the divine name (“the Lord,” or occasionally “Lord God”).

However, in order to avoid bewilderment upon hearing phrases like “God your God” read aloud, the present edition substitutes—as needed—a coinage by the German-Jewish philosopher and translator Moses Mendelssohn (1783), namely *der Ewige* “the Eternal.” Such substitutions yield more felicitous-sounding phrases. The following table shows some examples, compared to the NJPS reading.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RJPS** | **NJPS** | **Citation** |
| The Eternal God planted a garden in Eden | The Lord God planted a garden in Eden | Gen 2.8 |
| Thus says God: | Thus says the Lord: | Exod. 4.22 |
| O my Sovereign God | O Lord God | Deut. 3.24 |
| You shall love the Eternal your God | You shall love the Lord your God | Deut. 6.5 |
| The Sovereign God of Hosts | The King Lord of Hosts | Isa. 6.4 |

*Other References*. The revision avoids all third-person personal pronouns.[[19]](#endnote-19)

*Metaphors as Epithets*. The ancient poets who called God “Rock” were not claiming that their Deity was made of stone. Rather, the metaphor succinctly expressed a reassuring sense of reliability. By analogy, another popular image, which cast God as Father—with the people Israel as God’s child—does not allow us to conclude that the speaker believed that God’s persona is male.[[20]](#endnote-20) More assuredly, that figure expressed the Deity’s generative role in the social order. This gendered imagery also likened the ongoing relationship between God and Israel to a ubiquitous social contract: ideally, one’s father promised legitimacy, protection, and sustenance in return for loyalty. This image reflected the distinctive role of the head of a household in the ancient Near East.[[21]](#endnote-21) The present edition, committed to gender accuracy, therefore preserves the NJPS rendering “Father,” while noting the ancient perception of that role.

So, too, this edition retains the gendered epithet “King” where it is employed in a military context. In the ancient Near Eastern stereotype, it was the responsibility of a king (but not a queen) to lead the army into battle. Gender is thus salient in that metaphor of protection and authority, which (to reiterate) did not necessarily mean that the speaker believed that God’s persona is male.

**Additional Revisions**

In the process of making the gender-related changes, the translation team attended to several other aspects as well.

*Farewell to Some Archaisms*. As the English language has evolved, certain expressions in NJPS have come to seem so dated that they become a distraction, if not a stumbling block. Here and there, the revised version replaces such terms with others that sound less archaic to early twenty-first-century ears. Gone are expressions such as *beseech*, *bewail*, and *played the harlot*. By design, their substitutes are not intended to be noticeable.[[22]](#endnote-22)

*More Precise Ritual Terminology*. To express certain concepts related to priestly concerns, the present edition has moved away from some traditional renderings that have seemed to obscure the picture. Regarding what scholars call “ritual purity,” it replaces “clean” and “unclean” with “pure” and “impure.” Terms of cleanliness have the disadvantage of evoking misleading images of hygiene and dirt. Rather, what is intended is a pair of complementary states of being that affects one’s ability to engage with the Deity—and with associated persons, places, and objects. Similarly, this edition employs “purgation offering” rather than “sin offering,” and “reparation offering” rather than “guilt offering.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Such sacrifices are often prescribed even where sin and guilt, respectively, are not central to their function.[[24]](#endnote-24)

*Clarifying References*. NJPS usually hewed very closely to the Hebrew text in using a pronoun to make reference to someone or something, rather than a more descriptive (noun) label. In certain places, the intended reference is thereby unclear, so the translators helpfully supplied a clarifying footnote. However, when those passages read aloud, audiences sometimes struggle to keep track of who or what is being talked about. The present edition strives instead to make reference clear within the translation text itself, while acknowledging in a footnote that the Hebrew text is more vague.[[25]](#endnote-25)

*Copyediting Corrections*. More than two hundred corrections of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and minor wording have been made for clarity, precision, and consistency among the various portions of the Bible. As for style changes only one is truly widespread: the replacement of the restrictive use of *which* with *that*, to reflect standard American usage.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this revised translation has realigned NJPS with normal, pres­ent-day English parlance for ascribing gender (or not). It has also continued to provide a forthright encounter with the cultural world depicted in the ancient text, where gender is concerned. Consequently, this edition should once again evoke for today’s audience the same mental picture as the original text apparently evoked for its ancient one. And therefore this edition preserves the differences between the Bible’s world and our own, while allowing the biblical text to speak to contemporary readers who might otherwise find it alienating.

The latest team of translators, by retracing the pathway taken by its predecessors, has hopefully accomplished a restoration that the original NJPS teams would be proud of. Perhaps it can even be said: the result is just like NJPS, only more so.

Both the publisher and the translation team are truly pleased to be offering RJPS to the reading public, knowing that it matters a great deal to many of you. Those who consider the accurate treatment of gender, and a non-gendered depiction of God, to be vital aspects of a Bible translation may experience a range of reactions. Some may well feel relieved to no longer be continually provoked—while reading or studying it—to wonder why it gives the impression that the feminine does not count for much. Others may appreciate no longer needing to inwardly correct the translated words as they encounter them. Still others may be excited to encounter a text that better reflects their values and commitments, while remaining historically and linguistically accurate. Hence they may once again feel eager to share a JPS *Tanakh* translation with younger generations—whether the latter are reckoning with the Bible in university courses, or learning about their heritage as they come of age, or encountering sacred texts in communal worship. If so, dear reader, take this translation in hand, and proceed!

**Acknowledgments**

Many people deserve credit for helping this project to reach completion. First and foremost, the translation team acknowledges its immense gratitude not only to the director of The Jewish Publication Society, Rabbi Barry Schwartz, for initiating and championing this project, and to the Society’s board of directors for their vote of confidence in it, but also to its co-sponsor at Sefaria, Daniel Septimus, as well as to Sally Gottesman, who generously funded the project.

In addition, we thank the following for their generosity:

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• Profs. Alan Cooper, Gary Rendsburg, and S. David Sperling — for making staffing recommendations.

Of course I must also mention Rabbi Hara Person, editor-in-chief of URJ Press, who sponsored an initial “gender-accurate” adaptation project in 2003–2005; she also served as the first critical reader for the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. In addition, the consulting editors for that earlier work on the Torah (which became CJPS in 2006), who provided crucial guidance, were Prof. Carol L. Meyers, Prof. Adele Berlin, and JPS editor-in-chief Ellen Frankel.[[26]](#endnote-26) As noted above, the present work benefited immensely from their pioneering efforts.

Finally, a more personal note. In 2020, JPS engaged me to prepare this edition within an ambitious time frame that required my getting professional assistance. I could not have predicted how fortunate I would be to work with Rabbi Beth Lieberman, Literary Editor and Revising Translator; Job Y. Jindo, Revising Translator; Hilary Lipka, Academic Consulting Editor; and Benjamin Denckla, Technical Consultant and Proofreader. Each of us had primary responsibility for a certain aspect of the project, and I am deeply grateful to all of them for their splendid contributions. Ultimately I am the one responsible for the revision’s flaws.

May the “fidelity and steadfastness” of the above contributors, advisors, and supporters enable the result of this joint endeavor to “find favor and approbation / In the eyes of God and human beings” (Prov. 3.3–4).

David E. S. Stein

Project Manager and Revising Translator

13 September 2022 / 17 Elul 5782

1. See the “Preface to the 1985 Edition” that immediately follows this one. In 1999, a second edition that incorporated miscellaneous corrections was issued along with the publication of *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Given the nature of the English language, a literal style of translation from Hebrew is, on the whole, biased toward male renderings. See the supporting essay “Notes on Gender in Translation” (hereinafter: Notes), available online at purl.org/jps/gender. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Orlinsky, Harry, “A Jewish Scholar Looks at the Revised Standard Version and Its New Edition,” *Religious Education* 85, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 211–21; idem, “Male Oriented Language Originated by Bible Translators.” In *A History of Bible Translation and the North American Contribution*, edited by Harry M. Orlinsky and Robert G. Bratcher, 267–77. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Orlinsky, Harry, “A Jewish Scholar Looks at the Revised Standard Version and Its New Edition,” *Religious Education* 85, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 211–21, here 217. He checked the thirteen books that he had helped to translate. Nonetheless, for the other books the translation committees may well have been less rigorous in avoiding male-oriented renderings. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. No warrant exists for translating in gendered terms here. (Although gender is at issue elsewhere in this passage, that fact does not affect the rendering of this particular clause.) The grounds for this claim are as follows. (1) The original Hebrew text is framed categorically, in terms of a situation that is sketched out in a schematic way; it is not making an issue of the gender of either the perpetrator or the victim. (2) Neither the sentence’s grammar nor its way of making reference specifies the gender of those parties. (3) Considerations of both consistency and genre suggest that both for the text’s composer(s) and for the ancient audience, it went without saying that women are in view. (4) In the case of the noun in question, construing it here gender-inclusively finds support in a couple of biblical dictionaries. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Commendably, such a change in wording is meant to expand the conceptual frame with regard to whose contributions to society are seen as valuable. This move, however, is not cost-free. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For the second edition of the NJPS translation (1999), a disclaimer on the copyright page stated: “As in the first edition (and in Hebrew), masculine terms for God such as ‘He’ should be understood as gender neutral….” [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The most obvious departure from CJPS lies in how God’s personal name is represented. (CJPS reproduced the Name via unvocalized Hebrew letters throughout.) On this edition’s treatment of the Name, see below; and on other differences from CJPS, see the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See “What Goes without Saying” in the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. On the “thought-for-thought” translation approach used by NJPS, see its preface. A distinguishing feature of that approach is that it enables today’s audience to engage the ancient text readily—that is, with little recourse to explanatory notes. That being said, although the notes accompanying RJPS are fairly sparse, the translators consider them to be an integral part of the translation. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. As a reminder to the reader, gender-neutral wording does not necessarily mean that women are in view. In normal English idiom, if everyone knows that only men are view (i.e., when discussing professional athletes who play for a popular men-only sports league, such as the National Basketball Association), that fact can go without saying. Accordingly, in this rendition, a gender-neutral formulation may well presuppose that only men are in view—a fact that the audience is expected to realize. See “Translating Gender in Light of English Idiom” in the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See “What Goes without Saying” in the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Orlinsky, Harry, “Introduction.” In *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*, 3–40, here 18. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Bird, Phyllis, “Translating Sexist Language as a Theological and Cultural Problem,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42, nos. 1–2 (1988): 91. The same point was later reiterated to the present author by Tikva Frymer-Kensky *z"l* (1943–2006), professor of Bible at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. She insisted that an *authentic* translation needs to convey forthrightly the distinctions that the Bible had drawn between men and women according to the norms of ancient Israelite society. Happily, in the years since NJPS was published, the ability of Bible translators to fulfill that aim has improved greatly, due to the spectacular growth in scholarship on women, men, and the construction of gender—not only in the Bible but also in ancient Israel and across the ancient Near East. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. To give a more detailed analysis: Masculine plural reference does not specify the gender of the persons in view, so it justifies either the gendered “fathers” or the gender-inclusive “ancestors.” Both terms denote those who had passed that estate on to him. Presumably the ancient audience would have granted that perhaps one of more of those forebears might have been a daughter who (for one of several reasons) had inherited from her father, for such things were known to happen on occasion. And yet a gender-inclusive scope would not have been in Naboth’s mind, because he was in a dialogic situation of contrast and refusal, in which a speaker normally makes recourse to a *stereotype*. And in the case of one’s patrimony, the stereotype is gendered as male. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Whether the Bible’s composers intended to depict a Deity whose persona is beyond society’s gender categories is a matter of longstanding debate in academic circles. See “Israel’s God: The Case for Gender-Neutral Language” in the Notes online, which explains why a gender-neutral depiction may also be the most historically accurate one. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Since Antiquity, the tetragrammaton has been treated unlike other Hebrew nouns, both in speech and in writing, as if it referred to something totally other. Such distinctive treatment appears to be a reflex of the monotheistic concept of God as unique and transcendent. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. The benefit of this approach is that it emulates the ancient experience of the Name primarily *as a name* (i.e., not in terms of some intrinsic meaning). While *God* is technically a job description rather than a name, in English parlance it is typically employed with unique reference, just like a name. Such usage makes it a worthy substitute for *the Lord*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See “Third-Person References to Israel’s God” in the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See “Gender and Figurative Language” in the Notes online. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Typically the head of a household was designated the “father” of its members, even those who were not his literal offspring. A linguistic reflex of this social structure is that the absence of a father was felt so keenly that Hebrew had a special word for it. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. At the same time, this edition retains certain social terms that no longer reflect current conditions, such as *maiden* and *maidservant*, for they reflect more accurately the society of the ancient Near East than contemporary terms such as *teenager* or *domestic*. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. NJPS, in its note to Lev. 4.3, acknowledges the inaccuracy of “sin offering.” [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. To give one example for each of those terms: (1) The offering that a woman is obliged to bring after giving birth (Lev. 12.6) is for wiping away any lingering ritual impurity from that momentous occasion (vv. 7–8); she has committed no sin. (2) As an animal offering that is allowed to be converted into payment in silver (Lev. 5.15), the reparation offering is apparently more about making amends than guilt per se. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. For example, NJPS follows the Hebrew wording for the last verse of the book of Exodus, which reads: “For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night.…” (40.38). Where exactly was the fire said to appear—does the pronoun *it* refer to the Tabernacle, or to the cloud? The revised translation reads: “…fire would appear in that cloud by night….” Every language has certain conventions for how speakers are expected to help their audience keep track of who is being talked about. Ancient Hebrew conventions of this sort differ from English ones. Hebrew is more likely to employ a pronoun and rely upon the audience to sort out the intended reference (based upon salience), whereas English prefers to clarify matters via a noun. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. That gender-accurate adaptation of Exodus through Deuteronomy first appeared in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, Revised Edition (URJ Press, 2005). I served as revising editor both for that translation work and for what appeared in *The Contemporary Torah* (JPS, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)