

# Worksheet 8

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

4:15 PM

## Mothers of Covenant Naomi, Rebekah, and the Architecture of Lineage

### **Summary of the Lesson:**

This lesson contains a deep dive into Naomi's narrative arc and identity specifically through the cultural context and the linguistics of the text. We continue to compare Women's role in First and Second temple eras. We finish this lesson exploring the multiple theories on how the Pentateuch was written and edited.

### **Reflections:**

**As we continue wrap up our studies of the old testament, how do you combine the tools of Truth Towers, Bayesian Reasoning, Steelmanning and The Plumb Line when studying a traditional reading of a figure like Eve, Sarah or Miriam?]**

For further study, you can explore

Aaron Chalmers' work through Interpreting the prophets

<https://www.ivpress.com/interpreting-the-prophets>

Daniel Kahneman's foundational research on cognitive bias in

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thinking,\\_Fast\\_and\\_Slow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thinking,_Fast_and_Slow) and

John Walton's contextual approach to scripture in

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/the-lost-world-of-genesis-one/>. Additional methodological grounding can be found in

<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674237827> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Structure\\_of\\_Scientific\\_Revolutions?utm\\_](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Structure_of_Scientific_Revolutions?utm_), which together provide a broader framework for understanding how knowledge is formed, challenged, and refined.

## Key Terms (include a pronunciation guide):

Paronomasia: soundplay between related words

semantic pairing: intentionally linking words

narrative irony: a reversal of what's stated

Pentateuch: Genesis through Deuteronomy

## Significant Hebrew words and their meaning:

נְעֻמִי (Na'omi): "pleasantness" or "sweetness,"

מָרָא (Mara): "bitterness"

מלא (male'): "full"

ריק (req,): "empty"

בֵּית לֶחֶם (Bethlehem): "house of bread"

מְנוּחָה (menuchah): rest or security

נוח (nuach): carries the sense of settling or being established.

בֹּעַז (Boaz): often associated with strength or stability.

חֶסֶד (Hesed): the love of God in action

נִבְיָא (NBY): "to prophesy," has both masculine (נָבִיא, nābî') and feminine

(נְבִיאָה, nēbî'āh) forms in the text

גֹּאֵל (Go'el) the blessed to save or redeem the family

## The document theory:

The documentary theory has helped us see that the biblical text did not emerge as a single unified composition, but instead is a layered work shaped over time through collection, editing, and theological changes.

Oral Traditions -> Editing and Redaction -> Judge and Jury -> Law and Institutions

|                     |                                             |                                                     |                                                                         |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Independent Sources | Selected, Revised, Merged and Reinterpreted | Chose what to keep, what to change and what to omit | The Covenant , Priestly Authority, Kingship, Purity and Law and Worship |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|

These editors were never neutral transmitters, they acted with clearly

identifiable intention, selecting which traditions to preserve, revising language, merging sources, and at times omitting or reframing material to align with developing institutional priorities. In this understanding, they operated as the curators and arbiters of the text, shaping it as a form of theological architecture to fit their second temple understandings. Understanding this should not diminish the value of scripture for you, but it should push you to read the text with greater awareness. When you encounter contradictions, repetitions, or shifts in tone, you should see the fingerprints of these editorial decisions.

For your studies going forward, instead of assuming a flat or uniform narrative, you begin to ask where voices have been emphasized, where others may have been softened or removed, and how these editor's concerns like covenant, authority, and identity influenced the final form of the text. This becomes important when exploring themes that appear to have been erased or obscured from the text, like the roles of women, priestesses, prophetess and alternative theological traditions.

**Reflection: Is there any figure we have not studied yet who you feel needs to be looked at through the document theory? Who is it? Have you already started studying their text? If not, do you have any theories about what the meaning of that figure might have originally been? If you do have a theory go back into the text and see if there is any evidence you are right or wrong?**

To explore this further, you can begin with [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Structure\\_of\\_Scientific\\_Revolutions?](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Structure_of_Scientific_Revolutions?), Richard Elliott Friedman's accessible introduction in <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Who-Wrote-the-Bible/Richard-Friedman/9781501192401> and Joel Baden's more technical treatment in <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300152630/the-composition-of-the->

[pentateuch/?](#).

For a broader theological and historical perspective, Mark S. Smith's work can be explored through [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Early\\_History\\_of\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Early_History_of_God) which examines how Israelite religion developed within its wider ancient Near Eastern context.

## Paronomasia and Linguistic Structure in the Naomi Narrative (Ruth 1–4):

| Word      | Meaning                                                      | Significance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Naomi     | Pleasant                                                     | Naomi reclaiming her name after calling herself Mara transforms her narrative and identity from one of loss to restoration.                                                                                                                           |
| Mara      | Bitter                                                       | Her community continues to call her Naomi, meaning the narrative and God wouldn't accept her self-depreciation.                                                                                                                                       |
| Full      | Conceptually filled or restored                              | By Ruth 4, she is symbolically restored, even though the exact language of “fullness” is not repeated. This is characteristic of Hebrew narrative technique, where resolution often occurs conceptually rather than through direct verbal repetition. |
| Empty     | Deprived                                                     | Although Naomi declares herself empty, the unfolding events demonstrate that she is being filled.                                                                                                                                                     |
| Bethlehem | House of Bread                                               | The story starts with Naomi leaving the land due to famine and ends with her returning during the full harvest, fulfilling the promise in its name.                                                                                                   |
| Rest      | physical safety, marital stability, and covenantal placement | Naomi hopes for this rest for Ruth, then later in Ruth 3, Ruth rests at Boaz's feet. The narrative plays on the elasticity of the term, allowing a single word to carry physical, social, and theological implications at once.                       |
| Boaz      | associated with strength or                                  | He restores Naomi's household and secures her lineage. This is an example of onomastic                                                                                                                                                                |

|     |            |                                                                                                                   |
|-----|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | stability  | alignment, where a name reinforces the function of a character within the story.                                  |
| Son | Male Child | in Ruth 4:17, where the text declares, "A son has been born to Naomi." Naomi once described as empty is now full. |

### **The Significance of the Story:**

Ruth stands as one of the lesser edited books in the Hebrew bible. Ruth contains paranomasia, through deliberate onomastic signaling, through semantic pairing, and even through toponymic echoes that anchor the story in both geography and meaning. It also keeps its oral cadence through the repetition, the tension, the symmetry and the naming patterns.

"It also reflects what I would call the work of the original "weavers," those early transmitters of the tradition who structured meaning through sound, rhythm, and layered association rather than through rigid systematization." - Jared

At the center of that weaving is *hesed*. It is covenantal loyalty, relational devotion, a binding force that operates in the most sacred human relationships. In this narrative, *hesed* is embodied and holds the entire story together.

So when we read Naomi, we are encountering one of the clearest surviving examples of how the earliest traditions were constructed and preserved. It is a story shaped by the weavers, carried through oral cadence, grounded in sacred language, and designed to teach that life itself is not found in extremes, but in the careful balance that *hesed* sustains.

"Naomi is not just a story about survival. It is one of the last places where we can still hear the original weavers at work, threading together suffering and joy into a single, sacred pattern, held together by *hesed*." - Jared

### **Naomi's Name and Identity (Ruth 1-4):**

Naomi's story in Ruth 1–4 is an example of a broader pattern in ancient Hebrew storytelling where names given or aligned with a higher purpose that persist beyond moments of human rejection in the Wisdom of God.

Naomi rejects her given name meaning “pleasantness,” “sweetness,” or “delight,” when she is grieving. She says “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara” (Ruth 1:20). This declaration rewrites her identity into one where she is bitter.

Potgieter and Taute, are two scholars who break this down that this new name reflects a conscious reframing of herself in response to trauma, particularly widowhood and loss. Within the narrative structure, this moment functions as a declaration of dissonance between divine identity and present experience, suggesting that Naomi is rejecting her circumstances and the name that once defined her covenantal place.

However, the text itself does not ultimately sustain Naomi’s self-designation as Mara. Instead, it quietly but deliberately restores her original identity through narrative action rather than direct proclamation. Using a semantic motif chain in this onomastic study we can see By Ruth 4:17, the women of Bethlehem declare, “A son has been born to Naomi,” even though biologically the child belongs to Ruth. This linguistic choice is the key to the original oral narrative. The text does not say Ruth has borne a son alone, but frames the birth as belonging to Naomi, signaling a restoration of her role, identity, and name. Without explicitly renaming her again, the narrative reasserts “Naomi” through communal voice and covenantal continuity. This teaches Naomi’s arc, moving from pleasantness to bitterness and back to restored identity, shows us a beautiful covenantal identity that can be obscured by suffering but is not ultimately erased. The plan of God is perfect and out of her suffering came joy again through others she served. The restoration comes poignantly through relational service and participation in lineage, as Naomi becomes central to the birth of a child who will stand within the Davidic line.

### First and Second Temple Eras: Women's Roles in Israel

| First Temple Era                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Second Temple Era                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Names several women as prophetesses, including Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), all functioning as recognized channels of divine communication.</li><li>Prophetic authority was not restricted by gender at the level of language or concept (Hebrew root נִבֵּא (NBY), meaning “to prophesy,” produces a</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Following the reforms associated with King Josiah and the broader Deuteronomistic movement, earlier forms of worship</li></ul> |

masculine (נָבִיא, nābî) and feminine (נְבִיאָה, nəbî'āh) forms in the text)

- Women functioning as mediators of divine or weavers of the web of life (Akkadian terms such as apiltum refer to female prophetic figures who served in royal and temple contexts)
- Women's participation in the temple life as weavers identified in the priesthood roles (References to these women weaving garments for Asherah (2 Kings 23:7) and serving at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22))
- Wisdom literature, particularly Proverbs 8, presents "Lady Wisdom" as a feminine, personified figure present with the Lord at creation, proving a theological framework in which feminine divine imagery remained meaningful and authoritative for a time.
- Popular Israelite religion included veneration of a divine Goddess, often identified as Asherah alongside Yahweh or El (Archaeological discoveries such as inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud).

that included feminine divine imagery were systematically removed from the official narrative.

- Asherah is destroyed in the temple, bring a reform of practice but also a redefinition of acceptable theology (2 Kings 23).
- Asherah veneration had previously coexisted alongside Yahwistic worship, particularly in domestic and local cult settings (scholar Judith Hadley argues this).
- Worship and standardized belief are edited to take president, meaning divine consort roles were cut from the text and only male priesthood was preserved in the text.
- By the time of the rebuilt Second Temple, religious roles were formally restricted, with priesthood tied explicitly to male descent and women

largely excluded from liturgical functions beyond designated communal spaces.

- Later writings such as Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon retain the concept of wisdom but shift it toward abstraction, identifying it more closely with law, order, or divine instruction rather than a personified feminine presence.
- This movement from embodied imagery to conceptual principle reflects a broader theological trend toward systematization and control.

For further reading on the First Temple Era, students can explore

<https://archive.org/details/womeninhebrewbib0000unse>,

Mark S. Smith's work on early Israelite religion in

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Early\\_History\\_of\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Early_History_of_God)

and Carol Meyers' socio-historical analysis in

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/discovering-eve-9780195117332>.

Additional primary context on ancient Near Eastern prophecy can be found through resources like <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mari-ancient-city-Syria>, which help situate Israel within its wider cultural and linguistic environment.

For further reading on the Second Temple Era, students can explore

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3267110>,

Judith Hadley's detailed study in

<https://archive.org/details/cultofasherahina0000hadl>,

and broader context in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Temple-of-Jerusalem>

For the development of wisdom traditions, see

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/Wisdom-literature> and comparative analysis in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wisdom-of-Solomon>, which trace how earlier poetic imagery becomes increasingly philosophical and abstract over time.

## Models of Pentateuch Composition: Competing Explanations of the Same Data

Modern biblical scholarship has proposed several major models to explain how the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) came into its present form. While these models differ in structure, they are all attempting to account for the same observable features in the text: repetition, variation in divine names, shifts in style, and apparent tensions within the narrative. The three most influential frameworks are the Documentary Hypothesis, the Supplementary Hypothesis, and the Fragmentary or Tradition Hypothesis.

|         | Documentary Hypothesis                                                                                             | Supplementary Hypothesis                                               | Fragmentary or Tradition Hypothesis                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theory  | The Pentateuch is composed of multiple originally independent written sources that were later combined by editors. | There was an original core text that was gradually expanded over time. | The Pentateuch came from a collection of smaller, independent traditions, including oral stories, legal collections, and local narratives, which were eventually gathered and organized into a larger whole |
| Sources | J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly)                                                      | Later additives                                                        | Various interfaith traditions                                                                                                                                                                               |

|             |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Process     | Several documents were written separately and later combined to form a connected story.             | Later authors or editors added material to this foundational narrative.                           | These traditions may have circulated independently for long periods before being compiled.                                                 |
| Explanation | Rationalizes why there might be attempts to reconstruct the original sources behind the final text. | Authors were able to instill new theological insights, legal traditions and narrative expansions. | Suggests that the text reflects a tapestry of inherited traditions rather than a structured set of documents or a single expanding source. |

What is critical to recognize is that these models are not describing different texts, but different interpretations of the same textual evidence. All three acknowledge that the Pentateuch reflects development, editing, and transmission over time. The disagreement lies in how that process is best understood: as the merging of documents, the expansion of a core text, or the compilation of traditions.

**Is there one Model of Pentateuch Composition that you feel is the primary way the document came to be? Do you feel all three theories equally shaped the text? What evidence do you have to support your theory?**

https://biblebrisket.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/biblewithsources-

[intro-and-first-chapter.pdf?](https://biblebrisket.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/biblewithsources-intro-and-first-chapter.pdf?)

<https://a.co/d/05hTg0ow>

Joel Baden's composition of the Pentateuch

<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300152630/the-composition-of-the-pentateuch/>