

First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul's Use of Creation Narratives

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First Timothy 2:11–15, and especially verse 12, has long been a focal point in modern discussions of the ordination of women. Traditional reservations about the ordination of women as pastors and elders have generally made two assumptions in the interpretation of this passage: (1) that the meaning of *authentēin* in verse 12 is clearly known and should be translated simply as “have authority,” and (2) that the appeal to the creation narrative naming Adam and Eve in verses 13 and 14 implies a universal, “trans-cultural” principle that prohibits the exercise of ecclesiastical authority by women over men in all (or some) circumstances.

The purpose of this article is to argue that both of these assumptions are faulty, and that 1 Timothy 2:11–15, rightly understood lexically and contextually, does not teach any universal prohibition of the ordination of women as pastors or elders. The primary focus of this discussion will be the second assumption, regarding the appeal to the Genesis creation account of Adam and Eve.¹ It will be argued that Paul's *contextual* and *church-specific* appeal to creation texts makes it not only possible, but preferable to see the limitation on women's teaching roles in 1 Timothy 2 as a *circumstantial* and not universal prohibition. Before proceeding with this analysis, however, a few observations will be made regarding the meaning of *authentēin* in verse 12.

***Authentēin*: “have authority” or “domineer”?**

It is well known that *authentēin* in verse 12, a *hapax legomenon*² in the New Testament, has been the focus of considerable attention among lexicographers and biblical scholars in recent decades. Those who favor “traditional” understandings of male ecclesiastical leadership have tended to translate this word in the neutral sense of “have authority” or “exercise authority,” as, for example, George Knight in a widely cited article of 1984.³ In 1988, Leland Wilshire, examining 329 occurrences of this word and its cognate *authentēs*, showed that, prior to and contemporary with the first century, *authentēin* often had negative overtones such as “domineer” or even “murder” or “perpetrate a crime”; only during the later patristic period did the meaning “to exercise authority” come to predominate.⁴

In a 2004 study, Linda Belleville⁵ carefully examined the five occurrences of *authentēin* prior to or contemporary with Paul and rendered these texts as follows: (1) the *Scholia* (fifth to first century B.C.) to Aeschylus's tragedy *Eumenides*: “commit acts of violence”; (2) Aristonicus (first century B.C.), “the *author*” (of a message); (3) a letter of Tryphon (first century B.C.), “I *had my way with him*” (*contra* Knight); (4) Philodemus (first century B.C.), “*powerful lords*”; (5) the poet Dorotheus (first and second centuries A.D.) in an astrological text, “Saturn . . . *dominates Mercury*.” It is clear, especially in instances 1, 3, 4, and 5 above, that a neutral meaning such as “have authority” is not in view.

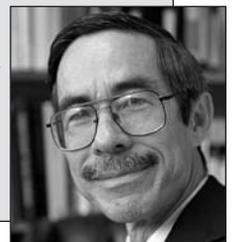
Belleville also notes, significantly, that a variety of *pre-modern* versions of the Bible⁶ translate this word not simply as “have authority” or “exercise authority,” but with some negative sense, e.g., the Old Latin (second to fourth centuries A.D.): “I permit not a woman to teach, neither to *dominate* (*dominari*) a man”; the Vulgate (fourth to fifth centuries A.D.), “neither to *domineer* over a man”; the Geneva Bible (1560 ed.), “neither to *usurpe* authority over a man”; the Bishops Bible (1589), “neither to *usurpe* authority over a man”; and the King James Bible (1611), “nor *usurp* authority over a man.” In none of these cases can the translators be suspected of having a modern, “feminist” bias in translating *authentēin* with a negative sense of “domineer” or “usurp authority.” These instances show that the “traditional” translation of *authentēin* as “exercise authority” is neither uniform nor self-evident in the history of interpretation; if anything, it could be argued that the burden of proof is on the (now) “traditional” view to justify its translation choice.

It should also be observed that Paul, had he the ordinary exercise of ecclesiastical leadership and authority in mind, had at his disposal a number of words that could have served this sense, notably *proistēmi*. This word, occurring eight times in the New Testament and used six times *by Paul* in reference to church leaders (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12; Rom. 12:8), can have the senses of “manage, conduct, rule, direct, be concerned about,” and connotes the “normal” and “expected” type of leadership that should be exhibited by those selected to lead. The fact that a highly unusual and ambiguous word is chosen in 2:12 would be consistent with an unusual set of circumstances in the context to which the text is addressed. It will be argued below that these circumstances, as indicated by clear references in the Pastoral Epistles themselves, involve women who are being deceived by false teachers and, as such, are not suitable for the exercise of teaching or ruling authority in Ephesus.

Paul's use of the creation narratives

The major focus of this article is an examination of Paul's appeal to the Genesis creation narratives, with a view to showing that, in

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this (1 Tim. 2:11–15) and other passages, the apostle refers to these texts with the local circumstances and the problems of specific churches in view. It is here argued that previous discussions of this passage have not given adequate recognition to the *context-specific* way in which Paul applies the creation texts.

When writing to the church in Ephesus, the apostle states that women are not to teach or have (NIV)/usurp (KJV) authority over men because “Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (vv. 13–14). Paul appeals to the Genesis narratives, describing the human situation both prior to the fall and immediately subsequent to it (Gen. 2:18–25, 3:1–7). It has been argued that, since verse 13, referring to the chronological priority of Adam over Eve in creation, is both a *creation* narrative and *before the fall*, the conclusions drawn from it by the apostle are not simply reflective of cultural circumstances or the sinful human condition, but are normative for all times and places and, consequently, bar the ordination of women to certain offices in all circumstances. Paul’s reasoning appeals to a basic order of creation and not merely to a limited cultural context or to the practices of particular churches. For those who accept the authority of canonical Scripture and who take Adam and Eve to be historical individuals, such considerations would appear to be weighty and even insuperable objections to the ordination of women as senior pastors or elders. Even if Adam and Eve were considered not to be historical individuals, but rather archetypal representatives of the first human beings, it could still be argued that the implications that Paul draws from these accounts are of transcultural validity precisely because they are drawn from *prelapsarian creation* texts.

The foregoing argument, however, fails to take into account the way in which the apostle Paul draws implications from creation texts in ways that are specifically related to his pastoral and theological concerns for specific churches and congregations. It should be observed that, in other church contexts, the apostle derives different applications from these same creation texts. For example, in writing to the church in Rome, Adam, not Eve, is singled out as the representative figure who brought guilt and death upon the entire human race (Rom. 5:12–21); Eve is not so much as mentioned. Adam is singled out as the representative head of the fallen human race, just as Christ is presented as the second Adam, the “one who was to come” (v. 14). The focus on Adam is consistent with Paul’s purpose in setting forth his gospel as a gospel for the entire human race, for Jew and Gentile alike. As he had previously stated in 3:9, “*Jews and Gentiles alike* are all under sin”; the righteous standards of the law hold “*the whole world* accountable to God” (3:19, emphasis added). Hence, there is a universal need for the gospel. Later, in the epistle to the Romans, he deals with matters such as eating meat and observing special days (14:5–23) that are of internal concern to a congregation of both Jewish and Gentile converts, but, in the opening chapters (1–3), he is especially concerned with the “global” and

universal relevance of the gospel, and consequently reads Genesis 3 in terms of *Adam’s* disobedience that led to condemnation for *all* people (5:18).

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul makes different applications of the creation narratives that are specifically related to the problems of this local assembly. In giving directives about the proper conduct of women in public worship (1 Cor. 11:2–16), Paul, while pointing to the creational grounding (v. 8, “woman [came] from man”; cf. Gen. 2:21–23),

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qualifies this in the direction of the mutual dependence of men and women (vv. 11–12). Evidently, the apostle expects that the women in Corinth will continue to pray and prophesy in the assembly (11:5), but should do so in an orderly and respectful way that honors the priority of creation—however the latter is to be understood.⁷

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle addresses the danger of being deceived by false teachers. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, he writes that “I am afraid that just as *Eve* was deceived by the serpent’s cunning [Gen. 3:1–6], your minds might be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” by the “super apostles” who are preaching a “different Jesus” (vv. 4–5, emphasis added). The point to be noticed is that Paul draws a parallel here between the deception of *Eve* and the danger of the entire *Corinthian congregation* (or its [male] leaders) being deceived by false teachers. In this text, the figure of *Eve* is clearly taken to apply to the entire congregation and not specifically to the women within it, as though they, merely by virtue of their gender, were uniquely susceptible to such deception. This is to be contrasted with the reference to the deception of *Eve* in 1 Timothy 2:12, when Paul is writing to a church in Ephesus in which he is concerned that some of the younger widows have already “turned away to follow Satan” (1 Tim. 5:15), and is aware of “weak-willed women” in Ephesus who are burdened by sins and have not learned the truth, their homes being infiltrated by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6–7).

This comparison of 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:12 shows that Paul does not have a “one size fits all” hermeneutic when reading and applying the Genesis narratives of creation and fall: “*Eve*” can be seen as a figure of *women* in Ephesus or as a figure for *an entire church* in Corinth—because the local circumstances differ, though false teaching is a danger in both settings. Applications are drawn from Genesis in a church-specific and contextually sensitive way.

Another example of Paul’s contextually sensitive application of creation texts may be seen in the different ways controversies concerning food are addressed when writing to the congregations in Ephesus and Rome. In 1 Timothy 4:1–5, written to Ephesus, Paul’s response to false teachers who are forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from certain foods is that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (v. 4). The principle being invoked is clearly reflective of the teaching found in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The institution of marriage and all types of food—“kosher” or “non-kosher,” meat or vegetables,

sacrificed to a pagan idol or not—are, intrinsically in and of themselves “clean,” reflecting the goodness of God’s creation itself. Paul strongly asserts this principle as over against the false teachers.

In writing to the Roman congregation, however, on similar issues of permissible foods and observance of special days (Rom. 14), Paul takes a somewhat different pastoral approach because of different circumstances. As with the Ephesian congregation, the apostle alludes to the creational principle of the goodness of all food (14:4, “nothing is unclean in itself,” cf. Gen. 1:31), but in the Roman church there are other dynamics to be considered: the practices and scruples of Jewish and Gentile converts whose different religious and cultural backgrounds are creating problems of conscience and troubling the unity of the church. While in principle the Gentile believers in Rome could insist on their “creational right” to eat meat, Paul urges them to forbear in Christian love out of regard for the consciences of their Jewish brethren. In this circumstance, Paul urges that a central redemptive concern for the unity of the church and respect for Christian conscience in secondary matters take precedence over any individual’s “creational right” to eat meat. While Paul is not denying the validity of the creational goodness of meat—as previously noted, in Romans 14:4 he had already stated that “no food is unclean in itself”—this principle is not applied to the life of the churches without regard to the particular circumstances of the congregation in question. In Ephesus, Paul can be more insistent on the “creational right” to eat all foods because the denial of this right is coming from false teachers who are in danger of abandoning the faith and following deceiving spirits (1 Tim. 4:1). Here, the issue of food is implicated with the preservation of the faith itself. In Rome, on the other hand, there is no indication in Romans 14 that either party—Jew or Gentile—is in danger of abandoning the faith, being deceived by demons, or drifting in the direction of heretical doctrine.

Further, the foregoing discussion of food controversies in two churches addressed by Paul suggests that, just as in one circumstance a creational right to eat (1 Tim. 4) does not lead to an unqualified permission to eat in another instance (Rom. 14), so it could also be the case that a creationally endorsed prohibition (1 Tim. 2:12–13) of women exercising ecclesiastical authority does not imply prohibition under different circumstances. In both cases, it is here being argued, Paul applies creation texts in a contextually sensitive manner and in a way that is concerned to preserve the apostle’s core values: sound doctrine and the preservation of the apostolic deposit of faith, the unity of the churches, and harmony and good order in the Christian family.

On this reading of 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Paul is indeed prohibiting women in Ephesus from exercising ecclesiastical authority and would not support their “ordination,” the reason being that false teachers pose a grave threat in Ephesus and women are being misled by false teachers and straying after Satan. Paul sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis 3 and the deception of women in Ephesus, just as he sees a parallel between the deception of Eve in Genesis and the deception of the *congregation* in Corinth. In different circumstances, where women are sound in the faith and their lives consistent with the apostolic core val-

ues of congregational unity and the harmony and good order of the family, the way would be open for their exercise of ecclesiastical leadership. The general, “transcultural” lesson that should be drawn, then, from the Genesis texts, in light of their contextually differentiated uses in 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11, would be that *whenever* and *wherever* either *women or men* are being misled by false teachers, they should not be ordained as church leaders; soundness in the faith is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for service as an elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1–13).

The question of homosexual practices

At this point, it seems appropriate to consider a possible objection to the foregoing line of argument. Those holding a “traditional” understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 raise the concern that the same logic that would argue that creationally grounded prohibitions concerning women in the church do not necessarily apply in all contexts could be extended to argue that biblical prohibitions against homosexual practices grounded in creation are not necessarily forbidden in all circumstances either. In short, do arguments for women’s ordination inevitably lead to justifications for homosexuality? The question is a serious one and deserves a careful answer, for trends in some mainline American churches give plausibility to such concerns.

The response to this concern, however, is to observe that, in the course of redemptive history and in the breadth of the biblical canon, there is *uniformity* in the biblical rejection of homosexual practices while there is *diversity* in the types of public leadership roles played by women in the Old and New Covenant communities.⁸ In the case of homosexual practices, there is one consistent position reflected throughout the Scriptures in both testaments; the biblical assessment of homosexuality is uniformly negative.⁹ There are no historical or cultural contexts mentioned in Scripture in which homosexuality is portrayed in a positive light. The creational distinctions between male and female (Gen. 1:27) which are foundational for the prohibitions against homosexuality have the same implications for all cultural contexts.

In the case of women’s leadership roles, however, there is significant diversity within the canon itself. In 1 Timothy 2, women’s roles are restricted, it is here argued, in light of the local problems of women being misled by false teachers and, plausibly, teaching men in a *domineering* fashion.¹⁰ Elsewhere, one can recall the prominent leadership roles exercised by Deborah the prophet (Judg. 4), Huldah the prophet (2 Kgs. 22), Miriam the sister of Moses (Exod. 15:20–21), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), the four daughters of Philip who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) to be reminded of the ways that women have been used by God at different times in biblical history; there is no hint in the canonical texts that the activities of these women were viewed in a negative light. This diversity—the fact that women’s authoritative leadership is sometimes prohibited (1 Tim. 2) and sometimes permitted (Deborah, Judg. 4)—indicates that *circumstantial* factors are in play, not merely “transcultural, creational” norms that are applied without regard to local problems.

Deborah's leadership

The case of Deborah is especially relevant to this discussion of Paul's use of creation texts in relation to leadership roles for women in the covenant community. The biblical text states that Deborah was *judging* Israel at that time (Judg. 4:4). She "held court" under "the palm of Deborah" in the hill

country of Ephraim and the Israelites "came to her to have their disputes decided" (Judg. 4:5); the biblical author clearly understands her to be exercising judicial authority.¹¹ The verb used to indicate Deborah's activity (*shaphat*)

is the same verb used to describe the judicial activity of Moses (Exod. 18:13) and Samuel (1 Sam. 17:6). The judges who were to be appointed in the various tribes and towns according to the law of Moses (Deut. 16:18–20) were to administer justice impartially and were to be respected as serving the "Lord your God" (Deut. 17:12) and representing his authority. As Robin Davis has pointed out in a recent study, the parallels between Moses and Deborah are numerous and striking: both Moses and Deborah functioned as judges (Exod. 18:13, Judg. 4:4); both sat for judgment, and the people came to them (Exod. 18:13, Judg. 4:5); both proclaimed the word of the Lord (Exod. 7:16, Judg. 4:6); both were prophets (Deut. 18:15, Judg. 4:4); both pronounced blessings (Exod. 39:43, Judg. 5:24); both pronounced curses in the name of the Lord (Deut. 27:15, Judg. 5:23); both had military generals (Joshua, Barak); both gave instructions to the people as to how the Lord would defeat the enemies (Exod. 14:14, Judg. 4:6); in both cases, the Lord caused the enemy in chariots to panic and flee (Exod. 14:24, Judg. 4:15); God's victory is told first in prose (Exod. 14, Judg. 4), then in poetry (Exod. 15, Judg. 5); Moses (and Miriam, Exod. 15:1) and Deborah (and Barak, Judg. 5:1) led the people in worshipping God after their great deliverance.¹² In Judges, Deborah appears as a "second Moses" figure whose authority derives from the God of Sinai.

The case of Deborah poses a special dilemma for the "traditional" reading of 1 Timothy 2:12: If it is true that Paul's use of creation texts is intended to prohibit all women in all circumstances from exercising authority over men in the covenant community, then the apostle is *forbidding* what God has in this instance *permitted*—and this would amount to a contradiction within the canon itself.

Various ways of evading this problem are not convincing. Was Deborah usurping authority rather than exercising it legitimately? There is no indication in the book of Judges, the Old Testament as a whole, or the New Testament that God disapproved of Deborah's activities; on the contrary, Deborah is to be understood in light of the programmatic statement in Judges 2:16 that God, in his mercy, "raised up judges who saved them"; her leadership is a notable example of exactly such divinely empowered activity.

Was Deborah not really "ruling" or "judging" Israel at this time, but merely dealing with people privately when they came to her, as one scholar has suggested?¹³ This argument is unconvincing for three reasons: (1) it overlooks the usage of the verb

shaphat, which is also used to describe the activities of Moses (Exod. 18) and Samuel (1 Sam. 17:6), both of whom engaged in *public* and *authoritative* judging; (2) it overlooks the plain reference to Deborah's place of judgment,¹⁴ the *palm tree of Deborah*, a public location, not a private one, such as a home; and (3) it

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overlooks the plain statement of the text that Deborah was judging *Israel*, a reference to the nation as a whole, not just to various individuals. Deborah's leadership, like that of the other judges, was widely recognized and transcended tribal boundaries.

Was Deborah only God's "second best" because the men of Israel would not lead?¹⁵ This view overlooks the explicit texts such as Judges 5:2 ("When the princes in Israel *take the lead* . . . Praise the Lord!") and 5:9 ("My heart is with Israel's princes, with the *willing* volunteers among the people") where the leaders of Israel are commended, not rebuked, for answering God's call through Deborah.

Nor is it the case that the Deborah texts can be discounted by suggesting that she exercised only "civil" and not "spiritual" authority. This notion of the separation of civil and religious authority makes no sense in the theocratic life of Israel at this time. Such a reading imports into the text modern notions of "separation of church and state" that are foreign to it. Deborah issues commands to Barak in the name of the Lord (Judg. 4:6, "The Lord, the God of Israel commands you"); the kings of Israel were to rule on the basis of the law of Moses (cf. Deut. 17:18, "he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law [law of Moses]"), not according to some secular or merely "civil" law.¹⁶

The implication of the foregoing observations is that Deborah should be seen as a positive and not negative example of a woman exercising authority in the covenant community. Deborah may be unusual and somewhat exceptional in biblical history, but she is a positive example notwithstanding. Since God himself raised up Deborah as a judge, and that which God chooses to do can not be *intrinsically wrong*, it cannot be intrinsically wrong for a woman to exercise authority over a man in ecclesiastical contexts.

The case of Deborah, seen as a positive example, is then consistent with a recognition of the *circumstantial* nature of the prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:12; not all women are prohibited by God from exercising authority over men at all times in the church. The reading here presented then removes the appearance of a "contradiction within the canon" and provides hermeneutical space for the recognition of other "Deborahs" who may be called by God to lead from time to time.¹⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, the following translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is proposed: "I do not permit a woman to teach in a way that dominates over men." This rendering of the verse is consistent with the following considerations: (1) the unusual—in fact, singular—usage of *authentēin* in the New Testament, suggestive of unusual circumstances, rather than Paul's more usual word *proistēmi* for

church leadership; (2) the negative connotations for *authenthein* found in four of the five uses of the word in texts prior to or contemporary with Paul; (3) the translations of “domineer” or “usurp authority” found in earlier versions of the Bible, such as the Old Latin, Vulgate, Geneva, Bishops, and King James; (4) the grammatical and syntactical observation that, in the New Testament, pairs of nouns or noun substitutes (e.g., infinitives) connected by a “neither . . . nor” (*de . . . oude*) construction can define a progression of related ideas or define a related purpose or goal;¹⁸ (5) the church-specific way in which Paul cites and applies creation texts, as seen in the comparisons of 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Corinthians 11:3 in matters of deception by false teachers, and 1 Timothy 4:4 and Romans 14 in the matter of permissible foods; and (6) the positive example of Deborah (Judg. 4, 5) in canonical history as a woman raised up by God to exercise leadership and authority—not just over a local assembly, but over the covenant *nation*.

It is also argued that the proposed reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 is consistent with and supportive of what might be termed Paul’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” in the Pastoral Epistles and his ministry generally: (1) the preservation of sound doctrine and the apostolic faith, (2) the unity and good order of the churches, and (3) the solidarity and harmony of Christian families. It is evident that, in the Pastorals, the apostle is concerned with problems that are arising on all three fronts. The problem of false teaching is frequently mentioned (1 Tim. 1:4–7; 4:1–3, 7; 5:15; 6:3–5; 2 Tim. 2:16–18, 25–26; 3:8–9; 4:3–4; Tit. 1:10–11; 3:9–11). Insubordinate men and empty talkers are disturbing the church (Tit. 1:10). In terms of family life, there are problems with women being deceived by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6); some of the younger widows have already strayed after Satan (1 Tim. 5:15); and some false teachers are even upsetting whole families (Tit. 1:11).

In the face of these problems in the community at Ephesus, Paul stresses the importance of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3, 10; 4:6, 16; 2 Tim. 1:14; 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1), good order in the church (1 Tim. 3:15; cf. 1 Cor. 14:40, “decently and in order”), and good order in the family (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12; 5:14; Tit. 1:6). As Paul contemplates the end of his own life’s work and the transition to the second generation of Christian leadership, he is naturally concerned to “tighten up the ship” in its faith and order in order that the churches might weather the storms that are to come in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1; cf. 4:3–4).

In light of these local problems, where women are being misled by false teachers and where some women may be teaching in a domineering, abrasive, or alienating fashion that creates conflict and division in the assembly and in marriages, the apostle does not permit such women to be placed in positions of leadership in the church. On the other hand, in other circumstances, where gifted women are sound in the faith and have a way of teaching that is not dividing the assembly or marriage relationships in the church—where the apostle’s “fundamental concerns for faith and order” are satisfied—then the way would be clear to recognize the calling of such gifted women and set them apart for leadership in the church.

Arguably, Deborah during the period of the judges could be viewed as an example of such a gifted and called woman whose ministry was consistent with the “fundamental concerns for faith and order”: raised up by the Spirit of God; administering the law of Moses with justice, impartiality, and discernment; recognized and accepted by the community, and with no indications in the biblical text that her ministry created domestic difficulties with her husband, Lappidoth. Churches today would be well advised to reconsider the “traditional” readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 that bar women from certain leadership roles in the church. Traditional readings of the text may be in danger, however unintentionally, of quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), of stifling the service of gifted women, and of depriving the churches of able leadership at a time in redemptive history (Acts 2:17) when the people of God should be expecting more, not fewer, “Deborahs.”

Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, Paul’s authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is assumed.
2. A word occurring only once.
3. George Knight III, “Authenteo in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 145.
4. Leland Wilshire, “The TLG Computer and Further References to Authenteo in 1 Tim. 2:12,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1988): 120–34. The scholarly literature on this passage is comprehensively surveyed in the article by Craig L. Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchalist nor Egalitarian,” in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Paul and His Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 312–24. See also the lexical analysis of Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: Authenteo in 1 Tim. 2:12,” in Kostenberger, Schreiner, and Baldwin, eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 79–80. The favoring of a neutral meaning, such as “have authority,” by Greek church fathers in the fourth and later centuries could be seen as reflective of the church’s changed cultural context subsequent to the legalization of Christianity in A.D. 313, permitting Christian worship to move from the private, house-church setting to more public spaces—public spaces in which, in Greek culture, public leadership roles for women were not generally favored. Byzantine social customs favored the veiling and semi-cloistering of women and a narrowing of social roles; men and women in general led segregated lives. Vern L. Bullough, *The Subordinate Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 123, 126; Julia O’Faolin and Lauro Martines, eds., *Not in God’s Image* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), 74.
5. Linda Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 205–23, at 214–17.
6. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 209–10.
7. For an extensive review of the recent scholarly literature discussing this difficult passage (1 Cor. 11:2–16), see Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchalist nor Egalitarian,” 295–302.
8. See the insightful discussions of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), esp. 135–84 on the interplay between creation, new creation, and cultural elements as they relate to the biblical statements on women and homosexual practices. Webb’s nuanced approach is consistent with the argument of this article, but he does not appear to develop my “context-specific use of creation texts” approach in a focused way.
9. For a comprehensive examination of the biblical texts on homosexuality and issues of interpretation, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001).

10. Traditional interpreters of 1 Tim. 2:13 (“Adam was formed first, then Eve”) see in this an appeal to the order of creation and the principle of primogeniture, or the firstborn being worthy of greater honor. But it should be noted that Paul can also apply the primogeniture principle in context-specific ways. For example, in Rom. 3:1–2 and 9:4–5, he reminds his Gentile readers of the spiritual privileges (law, covenants, temple worship, etc.) of Israel; Israel is God’s “firstborn” in the order of redemptive history. Gentiles should not boast over the branches because “you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (11:18), and yet the thrust of the book of Romans as a whole is to argue for the spiritual equality of both Gentiles and Jews before God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:28–30, cf. Gal. 3:28). The “Adam was formed first” reference in 1 Tim. 2:13 can plausibly be understood as a context-specific response and corrective to a situation in which women were not acting respectfully toward men in the Ephesus congregation and are being rebuked for their (domineering) behavior.

11. Robert Boling comments on this text: “*Judging*. That is, functioning with reference to a recognized office. . . . *Deborah’s Palm*. That she had a tree named after her suggests a setting in which she was responsible for Yahwist oracular inquiry . . . the judgment. Heb. *ham-mishpat*; here it stands for her decision in response to a particular inquiry.” *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 95.

12. Robin E. Davis, “Historical and Literary Parallels Between the Moses and Deborah Narratives,” unpublished paper, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Jan. 2006, 1–7. Davis cites other parallels in addition to those mentioned above.

13. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Press, 2004), 133.

14. Barnabas Lindars comments, “Deborah had her seat below this tree in the sense that she exercised her function as judge here.” *Judges*

1–5: *A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 183; J. Alberto Soggins, *Judges: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1981), 64: “‘Used to sit’: where she exercised her office as a judge . . . in the forensic sense of this term.”

15. Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 134.

16. With reference to Deborah, Thomas Schreiner (“The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006], 211) recognizes her prominent leadership role, but then points, correctly, to the distinction in the New Testament between the roles of prophets (as in Corinth) and elders: The prophets ostensibly did not have the same type of authority by way of continuing office as did the elders in matters of teaching. This distinction, even if correct, misses the main point with respect to Deborah: She had both “charismatic” authority as a prophet and a recognized office as a judge. The two aspects were combined in her case, demonstrating that God can approve the exercise of authority under both aspects by a duly called and gifted woman.

17. Acts 2:17, “In the last days . . . your sons and daughters shall prophesy,” indicates that, in the New Testament age, the age of the outpouring of the Spirit, the church should be expecting more Deborahs, not fewer! What may have been exceptional in the Old Covenant can become usual in the New, fulfilling Moses’ hope that, at some time in the future, “all the Lord’s people” would be prophets (Num. 11:29).

18. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 218, gives as examples Matt. 6:20, “where thieves neither break in nor steal” (i.e., break in with a view to steal); Acts 17:24, God “neither dwells in temples made with human hands nor is served by human hands” (i.e., dwells in human temples with a view to being served by human hands). The translation proposed here is similar to Belleville’s renderings: “I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man,” or, “I do not permit a woman to teach a man in a dominating way,” 219.

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
 They will proclaim his righteousness to *a people yet unborn*—
 for he has done it.

— Psalm 22:30–31

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