

A Patriarchal Sin Reconsidered: Reuben's Act (Gen 35:22) Retold or: Rewritten Bible as Finding a Scapegoat

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ABSTRACT

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls it has become obvious that the bible manuscripts were not considered to be static entities, but much more as dynamic entities which could be adapted and expanded and even rewritten if the need was felt. Whereas it appears that this is a phenomenon dating from the period of canonization of the Bible, recent examples can be found in which the biblical text is adapted and rewritten. In this paper I compare such a recent example from Papua (Indonesia; formerly called Irian Jaya) with the defilement of Bilhah in Genesis and the way it is rewritten in the Testament of Reuben. The comparison shows that such texts may tend to have special emphasis on one certain aspect of the story which is retold, which might be explained from an ideological or a psychological perspective. In the view of the author it is the scapegoat mechanism which influenced the retelling of the story of Bilhah, blaming her more or less explicitly for Reuben's fall. The rewritten story from Papua, retelling the story of the fall in Paradise, as well as the retold story in the Testament of Reuben both show a clear tendency to blame women for the presence of sin and evil in the world, causing men to fall into sin.

A INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the scrolls in the Judean Desert and their subsequent publication do not only have important implications for the study of the Hebrew Bible, but also for theology in general.² In this line Eugene Ulrich argued that the scrolls are not merely a matter of curiosity: 'Quite to the contrary, I propose that the biblical scrolls are of central importance for the way we think about the Bible, and that they require us to update our way of thinking about it both historically and theologically.'³ One of the matters involved is the way religious communities deal with authoritative texts during

¹ Parts of this paper were read at the Biblical and Ancient Near-Eastern Law section at the SBL 2007 International Meeting at Vienna. Research for this paper has been conducted as Research Fellow of the Department of Ancient Languages at the University of Pretoria.

² For references to the relevant literature, see Talmon 2002:5-6.

³ Ulrich 1999:31.

the course of transmission. It appears that authoritative texts were not considered to be unchangeable, but could be adapted extensively and still were accepted within the community (at least) where these adaptations originated and maybe even within the whole religious group these communities are part of (Judaism or Christianity).⁴ Some texts were considered to be more or less *canonical* (or 'authoritative'),⁵ even when later on they did not become part of the *Bible* (i.e. part of the later canons of subsequent Judaism or Christianity).⁶

But, what is the theological relevance of such a retold or re-written bible and what role may it have within a community? And what makes a rewritten bible distinct from the canonical biblical text? A rewritten bible is in my view an adaptation of a biblical text (narrative, psalm, etc.), while the original is still clearly recognisable, to a new situation by means of addition and/or omission of elements to or from a (canonical) biblical text and which in its rewritten form becomes 'authoritative'.⁷ But how long is this rewritten bible still 'canonical' and when does it stop being 'biblical' making it just a story of its

⁴ Cf. Martone 2004; Swanson 2004. An interesting example is the difference between the shorter Greek (LXX) and longer Hebrew (MT) version of the Book of Jeremiah, which both gained authority within religious groups, the LXX: Alexandrian Judaism, later early Christianity in general (cf. e.g. the *Vetus Latina*, see Bogaert 2003:51-82); and after the first three centuries in the Eastern Orthodox churches alone (see Jobes, Silva 2000:24-26; 83-85); and the MT: Judaism, Roman Catholic church (cf. the *Vulgate*) and later branches of the Christian churches (Jobes, Silva, *ibid.*). Interestingly a shorter Hebrew version, comparable to the LXX, seems to be found in the Judean Desert (4QJer^b), representing a possible copy of the Hebrew Vorlage of the Greek version (cf. Bogaert 1981; Tov 1992a:531-37; Tov 1992b (= 2001):319-27; yet others have their doubts, see Fischer 1997; Fischer 2005:40-41), suggesting that the shorter form of Jeremiah had some sort of 'scriptural' position within the community of Qumran, and thus next to Alexandrian Judaism also within Palestinian Jewish circles. For some additional examples see Tov 1998:334-35; Talmon 2002:7-12.

⁵ Cf. also the following quotation of A. L. Oppenheim (in Talmon 2002:6), who described 'stream of tradition' as a category (paralleling the category 'canonical texts') as something that 'loosely can be termed the corpus of literary texts maintained, controlled, and carefully kept alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes.' In this sense 'canonical' seems to function already *before* a canon – in the sense of 'comprehensive corpus of the Holy Writ' (Talmon 2002:7) – was defined.

⁶ Cf. especially the very clear description of the terminology with regard to 'canon' in Ulrich 2000:117-20. See furthermore Lange 2002:21-24; Brooke 2002:31-40; Swanson 2004:409. Cf. also VanderKam 2002:41-56, esp. 52-53, who emphasizes the need to avoid classifications as 'Bible' and 'biblical' since it may be anachronistic and because we lack the evidence that there was something like a 'Bible' that existed during the Second Temple period.

⁷ For the discussion of some definitions of 'rewritten bible', see Brooke 2000:777-78; Brooke 2002:31-33; Knoppers 2003:129-30.

own, maybe authoritative within a community, but not within the whole or at least a large part of the religious group?

B A REWRITTEN BIBLE IN PAPUA

This kind of question has occupied my mind for a few years now since I began to prepare to work for a number of years in the Indonesian province Papua (formerly known as Irian Jaya), the western part of the island Papua. During the preparatory stage, I read a dissertation on the Imyan people, a tribe at Bird's Head (North-western part of the island Papua) and how they cope with their intricate future.⁸ While reading, I came across a quotation from a sort of sermon held in June 1995 during a prayer meeting, which puzzled me. I quote the following:

For our prayer meeting, I have a story about the first beginnings, when Adam lived in the Garden of Eden. Adam walked around in the Garden of Eden and saw animals having partners; there were husbands and wives and they had sexual intercourse. Adam returned to his house and said, 'Why can't I have sexual intercourse, why don't I have a wife so that I can have sex with her?' Thereupon he went to sleep and while he was asleep there came a soft breeze⁹ and God took a bone from his left side. He created Eve. Adam woke up startled and saw that there was a wife for him.

Adam went for a stroll and again saw animals having sexual intercourse. He returned home and fell asleep. His wife walked around in the Garden of Eden by herself to check the situation. She saw beautiful fruits in the trees. Satan came and told her to eat the fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and bad; she learned the difference between right and wrong. This is the origin of *lait*.¹⁰ Titillated by the idea of having sex, she went home and made love to Adam. Therefore they fell into sin. You can read about this in Genesis 6: humans fell into sin due to their lack of belief. The

⁸ Timmer 2000.

⁹ In some local religious movements God is called '*Wing*', a name that is said to be derived from the word '*win*', which means: wind, breath, spirits, or soul; next to this other associations with the idea of God and spirits coming with the wind are possible as well within the local cults; see Timmer 2000:284, n. 7. Yet, there is also a biblical motif present here as well, cf. already in Gen 3:8, where it is said that God walked לְרֵיחַ הַיּוֹם 'breezy time of the day' (JPS); on the other hand, this is not found in the Indonesian Bible Translation.

¹⁰ *Lait* is an Imyan word, meaning as much as 'death dealing unseen powers or techniques', Timmer 2000:360. In the Imyan world *lait*, as a damaging and killing power, is related to women and came into this world along women; cf. *ibid.*: 178-91.

children of God thus fell under the spell of Satan. The first sin came from a woman and we call it *lait*.¹¹

The story told here can be considered as a 'rewritten bible', since the original story is clearly recognisable, yet it also has its own exegetical emphasis on the question from whom the first sin came. Elements are omitted from the original biblical narrative, while other elements are added, in order to create a story which apparently fits into a new context of a new audience. It appears to be partly a new story, especially with regard to the sexual element in the narrative,¹² although this is not really new in the history of exegesis of Genesis 3 and of theology.¹³ Yet the explicit blaming of the woman for being guilty in bringing sin and death (*lait*) into the world, is not a new way of reasoning and is also found in the Bible (in this case as a matter of fact, the Christian), namely 1 Tim 2:14: καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν· 'and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'.¹⁴ Though even if the text of the narrative diverges from the original, it appears that the narrative is not solely the result of the author's imagination, but might be considered to be an attempt to interpret the biblical text in line with the biblical tradition.¹⁵ The narrative is obvious not 'biblical' (in the sense of 'a part of the scriptures contained in the canon'), but, it still is rewritten Bible and in that sense able to gain authority and thus 'scriptural'.

Admittedly, the example is from an extreme late date, creating an enormous gap between the canonization of the biblical text and this new 'fragment of rewritten Bible',¹⁶ but the main question is still the same. What is

¹¹ Timmer 2000:284-85; for reasons of clarity the Indonesian words inserted in brackets in the original text have been left out in this quotation since they are unnecessary for the argument.

¹² In this element we find a part of the Imyan's own mythological concept of the world, in which *lait* was planted in women at the beginning in their intimate parts, which might explain the connection between intercourse and the transmission of *lait* to men; cf. Timmer 2000:179.

¹³ Regarding the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of texts like Genesis 3; 1 Cor. 11:1-16; Eph 5:21-24; and esp. 2 Tim. 2:11-15, see Roloff 1988:142-46.

¹⁴ See also 2 Cor 11:3. Further reference could be made to Sir 25:24: 'From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die', but since the sermon took place within a protestant congregation, it may be doubted whether the apocrypha were known or had any direct influence. In this respect it is the indirect influence of Sir 25, while the Jewish haggadic exegesis of Genesis 3 via the N.T. also has its effect here; cf. Roloff 1988:138-39.

¹⁵ This contrast of 'imagination versus interpretation' in the classification is based on one of the questions that frequently arises when reading the retellings of biblical narratives from the Second Temple Period; cf. Kugel 1995:525-26.

¹⁶ However, the classification of this text as 'rewritten bible' is not anachronistic as in other cases when applied to texts like some scrolls from the Dead Sea Scrolls; cf.

the goal and function of rewritten Bible, and what makes it to be rewritten Bible (which generally is considered not to be 'biblical' or 'canonical') and not to be an expanded or a shortened 'biblical' text (like, for instance, Jeremiah in MT and LXX)?¹⁷ Processes as we saw at work in this quotation, we encounter frequently within and outside the Bible.¹⁸ Next to the exegetical questions such texts pose to us, they also confront us with the theological problem of canonization and the authority of such texts. It is within the context of these thoughts and questions that I now want to focus on the topic of this paper: 'the sin of Reuben reconsidered'.

C THE OFFENSIVE BIBLE

Some of the stories in the Book of Genesis are preferably neglected or only read together within its larger literary context because of their (sometimes) offensive character. Noah for example became drunk and laid down naked; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were liars and treacherous men; Joseph an unsympathetic brother; the sons of Jacob seem to be rowdies whom one should not trust.¹⁹ Yet since the book of Genesis became the origin narrative of Israel par excellence, it is to be expected that these stories caused some trouble during the course of tradition. This might be obvious from the fact that two texts from the Pentateuch, namely Gen 35:22 and Ex 32:21-35, are only to be read in the synagogue but not to be translated or interpreted during the service.²⁰ This does also apply to the short verse which tells that Reuben slept with Bilhah, Jacob's

Brooke 2002:31; VanderKam 2002:52-53; Knoppers 2003:130.

¹⁷ Tov 1998:334-35. Based on anachronistic arguments these texts can be classified as 'biblical', but the differences and similarities between these two versions suggest that the classification 'rewritten Bible' fits in fact the best to these two editions of the book Jeremiah; cf. in this respect especially the discussion of this classification in Brooke 2002:31-33.

¹⁸ Best known are of course the book of Deuteronomy and Chronicles (cf. also the example of the two versions of Jeremiah in MT and LXX in the previous footnote); whether the latter can be considered as 'rewritten bible' is open to discussion, see the very instructive discussion in Knoppers 2003:129-34.

¹⁹ Cf. also the list of texts in the Hebrew Bible which might be considered to be offensive in Hershon 1883:408.

²⁰ Hershon 1883:408; Klein 1988:80. The latter also lists some other texts which, according to some strands of tradition, should not be interpreted in public. Note also the fact that the verse is marked with a double set of Masoretic accents: marking the end of the verse with **יִשְׂרָאֵל** by means of *silluq* (causing v. 22 to be counted as two verses, which is in line with the number of verses in the parasha [154]; Wickes 1887:130; Jacob 1934:669); and, on the other hand, marking the same **יִשְׂרָאֵל** with *atnah*, which causes the reader not to pause but even to ignore the *p^etûhâ* and to read on to the second *silluq*; cf. Wickes 1887:131; König 1925:648-649, n. 4; Jacob 1934:668-669; Gispén 1983:165; Price 1990:156; Kugel 1995:539-40.

concubine (Gen 35:22), and how the eldest son of Jacob spoiled his preferential status invoking Jacob's anger is reflected in his testament (Gen 49:3-4).²¹

This kind of story raised questions regarding the meaning of these texts: Why are these texts found in the scriptures? Is such a man one of Israel's predecessors? Do we have to be proud of him? Is this story really a text from which we shall learn and become wiser, because they are in the Torah (i.e. 'direction, instruction'²²)? And what is the reaction of other people to these stories – can we present our predecessors as heroes?²³ The history of the interpretation of these verses seems to indicate that answers to these questions were not easily given and that the interpretation caused some problems.

D THE SIN OF REUBEN (GEN. 35:22A)

The 'sin' of Reuben hardly uses one verse (Gen 35:22a):

וַיְהִי בְשֶׁפֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־בִּלְהָהּ פִּילגֶשֶׁת אִמּוֹ וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל

'While Israel stayed in the land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel heard'.

The implication of this short 'story' might be somewhat obscure and at first sight it appears only as a deed of sexual misbehaviour. But is this impression correct? In biblical texts we find a similar act in Absalom's revolt against David, where he seizes his father's harem; whereas in extra-biblical sources we find similar descriptions.²⁴ The condemnation of Reuben's act in Genesis 49:3-4, describing Reuben the eldest son as being 'deceptive as water',²⁵ suits Absalom's as well as Reuben's acts.²⁶ Reuben's act has to be interpreted as an attempt to seize the power²⁷ and not as the sexual misbehaviour of a young man, who is misled by its sexual fantasies.²⁸ It is an act which suggests that the

²¹ Gen 49:4 in which Reuben's sin is mentioned, falls under the same spell in the Targumim as Gen 35:22, and should not be translated in public; see Klein 1988:83-84.

²² HALOT, 1710-2.

²³ Cf. for this problem also Josephus 'rewritten bible', and the discussion of it in *e.g.* Feldman 1998:546-551; Begg 2001:604-605.

²⁴ See EA 196. Cf. also De Moor 1987:210, on KTU 1.15.v:20ff; though others consider the text to be too uncertain to reconstruct it, see Wyatt 1998:218.

²⁵ For the interpretation of the Hebr. root פהז as 'to deceive, act untrustworthy', see De Hoop 1997; De Hoop 1998:89-90; contrast Macchi 1999:44-45; Lange 2001.

²⁶ In addition, cf. De Hoop 1998:351 (with n. 166, for additional bibliography); 512-4.

²⁷ Dillmann 1892:380; Driver 1904:382; Gunkel 1910:384; Hamilton 1995:387; Alter 1996:200.

²⁸ Hamilton 1995:387; Macchi 1999:52-53. In this sense neither the description as

pater familias, Jacob/Israel, has had his time in the view of his eldest son and that the era of the next generation had dawned. In short, the story is a story about power and a claim to power.

In Genesis 49 Reuben is rebuked for his act (as is his two brothers, Simeon and Levi, for their treacherous act after the defilement of Dinah) and he is denied the blessing with birthright of power and leadership among the brothers as older son (Gen 49:3-4 [Simeon and Levi: vv. 5-7]). It is rather assigned to the next son in line: Judah (49:8-12).²⁹ For the purpose of the present paper it is irrelevant in which era exactly the text(s) under discussion (Gen 35:22; 49:3-4, 5-7, 8-11) came into existence, in later times they were read in a synchronic way and they were interpreted as such. It might be important, however, to consider the fact that the stories (including the text of Gen 49) were composed in order to function as an interpretation of the historical situation(s) which were in need of explanation and legitimatization. Two facts are relevant: the role and position of Judah among the other tribes apparently had to be explained, while the position of the ruling king of that time had to be legitimatized as well. These texts were not meant to function as real histories about Israel's ancestors, but they function much more as mirror-stories about these ancestors, reflecting the present situation and *status quo*.³⁰ This *status quo* is legitimatized by means of these stories and function to empower the position of the ruling party at the cost of other groups or individuals. However, at the moment these stories become the genesis-stories of Israel's tribes, the role of these 'anti-heroes' in the book of Genesis becomes problematic. That is what one sees happening during the course of transmission of these origin-narratives.³¹

E THE NARRATIVE IN TRADITION

When this short verse is studied in the different versions it is obvious that it caused – already in early textual tradition – problems to the readers. In the LXX the text only has a plus after MT וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל 'and Israel heard',

'shameful act' (*Schandtat*, Westermann 1981:677) nor as 'rape' (*verkrachting*, Gispén 1983:165) fits, since this terminology emphasizes too strongly the reprehensible sexual and moral part of the act, while ignoring the focus of the short report, namely the assault on the social position of the patriarch.

²⁹ De Hoop 1998, 511-514, 522-530; De Hoop 2000 [2001]:695-706; in a number of cases a diverging point of view is found in Macchi 1999:41-54, 81-139.

³⁰ De Hoop 1998; De Hoop 2001; De Hoop 2004.

³¹ We see this already happen with the line of descendants of Reuben in 1 Chron 5, where we find in the first verse a kind of interpretation of what happened to Reuben and the birthright in Genesis 47:29-49:27. Whereas in Gen 49 the birthright implicitly seems to be given to Judah, the text of 47:29-48:22 offers some difficulties and somehow needs to be interpreted; on this reinterpretation and the (among others, textual-critical) problems involved, see Knoppers 2000:115-26.

describing some reaction of Israel: καὶ πονηρὸν ἐφάνη ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ 'and it seemed evil in his sight'. Tg-Onq and Tg-Neof hardly seem to change the text and offer a literal translation in Aramaic of the entire verse.³² Tg-PsJ presents a midrashic paraphrase of the text, which reflects Talmudic discussions of it.³³

While Israel dwelt in the land, Reuben went and disarranged the couch of Bilhah, his father's concubine, which had been arranged opposite the couch of Leah his mother, and it was reckoned to him as if he had lain with her. When Israel heard (this) he was distressed, and he said, 'Woe! Perhaps an unworthy person has gone forth from me, as Ishmael went forth from Abraham and Esau went forth from my father.' The Holy Spirit replied and said thus to him, 'Fear not, for they are all righteous, and there is no unworthy person among them.'³⁴

The fact that the text was not to be interpreted in public, or that it received an expanded (re-)interpretation as quoted above, demonstrates that the text embarrassed the readers. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the text was skipped over by Josephus, whose concern it was to demonstrate that the biblical heroes were fully comparable to the pagan heroes.³⁵ However, it is not only because of the comparison with the traditions of other people, but also because of questions of interpretation within the biblical context that readers had some trouble with this short verse. This embarrassment and problem of interpretation can be found in the Pseudepigraphic literature, namely in the book of Jubilees and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, where the story found some considerable reinterpretation.³⁶

In the book of Jubilees the short episode is narrated as a complete new expanded story, which fills in all kinds of detail with the help of other episodes from the Hebrew Bible.³⁷ Reuben saw Bilhah bathing (2 Sam 11:2, David and Bathsheba), he entered her house and then approached her at her bed. Bilhah screamed. Jacob did not have intercourse with her again (2 Sam 16:20-23; 20:3,

³² Klein 1988:82-83; McNamara 1992:168, with n. 21. Most mss of Tg-Onq represent Hebr. פָּנָה with Aram. פָּנָה suggesting an accusative here, yet a few mss (three, cf. Sperber 1959:59) read Aram. פָּנָה. This does not change, however, much in terms of the interpretation of the text.

³³ Klein 1988:82-84; Maher 1992:121, n. 22; see also Hershon 1883:408-409; Ginzberg 1909:415-16.

³⁴ Translation according to Maher 1992:121; regarding the righteousness of Reuben in Rabbinic interpretation, see also Hershon 1883:408; Jacob 1934:668-69; Aberbach, Grossfeld 1976:4-6.

³⁵ Feldman 1998:546-51.

³⁶ Quotations from the book of Jubilees and from the Testament of Reuben are from the translations in Wintermute 1985 and Kee 1983 respectively.

³⁷ This has abundantly been demonstrated in Kugel 1995:528-48.

David's concubines). As Kugel convincingly demonstrated, the episode of the bath is not just an apologetic invention, but is based on the Testament of Jacob, where Reuben is called פְּהוּז כַּמַּיִם 'deceptive as water' (Gen 49:4), but which most likely was read as פְּהוּז בַּמַּיִם 'deceptive [deceived??] in or with the water'.³⁸ The interpreter must have thought that Jacob's reference to the water had somehow to do with Reuben's sin with Bilhah, which might have triggered this adaptation of the story. The elements that are brought in, qualify Reuben's deed now as an obvious sexual act which was the result of his desire, which is in line with 'the typical biblical narrative of sexual sin: a man "sees" a woman, "desires" or "loves" her beauty and acts on this desire' (Gen 34:3; 2 Sam 11:2; 13:1).³⁹ Though scholars seem to consider this version of the narrative to be free of any apologetic or anti-feminine bias,⁴⁰ in my view the addition of the 'narrative trigger leading to the sinful deed' (Rosen-Zvi 2006:71) does not only function as the narrative trigger, but simultaneously as the explanation and apology for Reuben's deed: seeing a woman bathing (*implicitly* referring to her nakedness) makes his deed at least understandable.⁴¹ Compare in this respect the remark in T.Reub 3:11, 'If I had not seen Bilhah bathing in a sheltered place, I would not have fallen into this great lawless act.'

After the retelling of the story in Jubilees the act is interpreted in light of the Pentateuchal laws concerning incest and as such qualified as sin (Jub 33:10-20). The problem, however, is that the sin in the laws meets with a death-penalty, whereas this does not happen to Reuben. Apparently this raised problems regarding the interpretation since a paragraph is added to the text discussing why Reuben did not die while he committed a crime which was forbidden in the law. The solution is that he did not yet know the law since it was not yet revealed. Yet it is an exception and does not imply that the law as given by Moses might be ignored. The same day the crime is committed, they shall be uprooted from the earth (Jub 33:14).

However, the retelling of the story seems to be further developed in the Testament of Reuben. The retelling of the story in the latter document finds a

³⁸ Kugel 1995:528-31. Kugel based himself on a different interpretation of the stem פְּהוּז, namely meaning 'wanton' or 'lewd' as argued already by Greenfield (cf. De Hoop 1997:17, n. 9), but the difference in interpretation between Kugel (following Greenfield) and me, might be of minor importance here.

³⁹ Rosen-Zvi 2006:71.

⁴⁰ Kugel 1995 ; Rosen-Zvi 2006:71.

⁴¹ It has to be admitted that the version in Jubilees has a passage, which explicitly advocates Bilhah's innocence (Jub 33:5-7), as argued in Rosen-Zvi 2006:70. It still might be asked, however, whether this reference to Bilhah's bath does not excuse Reuben in the sense of falling victim of looking at a woman, who in the wisdom literature is considered to be dangerous, cf. Sir. 9:8; 25:21; 42:13-14; and see also the discussion of parallels in wisdom literature in Rosen-Zvi 2006:72-73, n. 28.

comparable reinterpretation, also seeking to explain how this could have happened. But in this case it is one that goes even further, representing the typical reaction of those making mistakes: explaining how it could happen and where possible trying to blame the other party. In that sense the 'Testament' could certainly be an original document! But, not only the sinner tends to blame the other party, also those who somehow identify themselves with the 'sinner'.⁴²

Reuben mounted the bed of his father where he slept with Bilhah. How is it possible that it could happen? The answer is easily given: Reuben – though admitting his own sin – explains how it came to be. 'If I had not seen Bilhah bathing in a sheltered place' (3:11; cf. Jub 33:2), he would not have done such a thing. He was absorbed because of her naked femininity (2:12). She became drunk, sound asleep, naked in her bedchamber (cf. Jub 33:3). Until the reader reaches this passage it still seems to be Reuben himself who committed the act and did what was wrong. His act is qualified as promiscuity, an act of rebellion, an impious deed, which is the result of desire.⁴³ Yet, as Rosen-Zvi has demonstrated, whereas in the book of Jubilees there was no explicit reference to Bilhah's nakedness,⁴⁴ her nakedness is now mentioned explicitly four times, in addition to her drunkenness which, taken together, might be considered to be an open invitation to iniquity.⁴⁵

In this sense the application of the narrative is completely in line with this tendency of the narrative, for the children are exhorted not to pay heed to the beauty of women. It finally appears that Reuben is not completely to blame: whereas in the beginning it appears that Bilhah is more or less unaware of what will happen to her, the following chapters indicate that as a woman, bathing and sleeping naked and becoming drunk, she was the cause of Reuben's fall. In this way it appears that ultimately women in general are the dangerous species: 'For women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks (5:1).⁴⁶ ... women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men (5:3). It finally appears women are worse than men, behaving like harlots. In other words: could Reuben have done

⁴² See also Kugel 1995:528-29, who reckons with the possibility of apologetic motifs in the rewritten stories, which is, however, more radically discussed in Rosen-Zvi 2006.

⁴³ In this line, Kugel 1995:534.

⁴⁴ Cf., however, n. 41 above.

⁴⁵ Rosen-Zvi 2006:70. Cf., e.g., T.Reub 3:14 where seeing the nakedness of Bilhah causes Reuben to act.

⁴⁶ For some additional examples of the linking of wine, deceit, harlotry, etc. in Ben Sira, see De Hoop 1997:20-24.

otherwise? Wasn't he deceived by Bilhah's beauty, becoming a victim of her tricks even when she is asleep?⁴⁷

On the other hand, whereas the book of Jubilees seems to suggest Reuben was not punished because of his sin, the Testament of Reuben has a note on his punishment. According to this version, Reuben was struck with a severe wound in his loins which lasted seven months and which was healed only because of the prayer of his father. He would otherwise have been destroyed (T.Reub 1:7-10).⁴⁸ This conclusion of the narrative deals with another aspect from wisdom literature, namely the problem of the *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*. The retold story seems to suggest that there is no forgiveness without punishment, someone has to be punished for the sins and that is what is happening. In this way the retold story suggests that the friends of Job are finally right and that Job, despite God's vindication, is proven to be wrong.⁴⁹

F SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

In both – the book of Jubilees and in the Testament of Reuben – Reuben's sin is reinterpreted in a sexual sense as being the result of lust and desire. By means of this reinterpretation one of the leading themes in the book of Genesis is ignored, namely the theme of the struggle for power and for the inheritance of the blessing, which continually is passed over to a younger brother while the older brother, the firstborn, is forsaken.⁵⁰ In the book of Jubilees an attempt is made to find an (*implicit*) excuse for Reuben's misbehaviour, which was forbidden according to the law (which was given only later). Yet in the Testament of Reuben an *explicit* attempt is made to find an excuse – or should we say a scapegoat? – for his deed.⁵¹ The theological message of the book of Genesis shifts and becomes a different one. Whereas one of the theological (?) messages of the book of Genesis is the preference God has for giving his blessing to the younger and the weaker, in Jubilees and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs his preference shifts to the upright and pious ones. Moreover, the invention of the *femme fatale* in this rewritten story opens the

⁴⁷ Rosen-Zvi 2006:73.

⁴⁸ The formulation of who struck Reuben with the wound, is somewhat obscure: God or Jacob? The following sentence, which implies that the Lord would have destroyed him if his father had not prayed for him, suggests that the Lord is the subject.

⁴⁹ On the *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*, cf. Von Rad 1970:165-81.

⁵⁰ Syren 1993:130-35. Cf. also Alter 1981:186, who correctly points out that the rivalry between Leah and Rachel are part of the recurring motif of the strife between siblings in the book of Genesis, generally solely described as between brothers. In this regard Reuben's misbehaviour also might be considered to be part of the motif, abusing his father's concubine, but also the maid servant of Rachel, his mother's rival (Alter *ibid.*, 164; see also Hershon 1883:408-09; Alter 1996, 200).

⁵¹ Pace Ginzberg, 1909:415-16; 1925:319-20, n. 312.

possibility to blame women for the missteps of men, which may be due to the birth of sexuality as it was called once,⁵² but basically is due to the scapegoat-mechanism: 'if there is someone else to blame for my faults, I am excused'.

The differences between these different stories are interesting from a literary historical perspective. Yet these differences also prompt us with a much more intriguing question, namely what are the theological implications of these differences for us? It brings us to the question what are the limits of interpretation and reinterpretation? Was the approach by the author of Jubilees legitimate? But if so, what about the approach of the author of the Testament of Reuben? At which level is it still permissible and at which level does it cross a border or is it even 'a bridge too far'? These questions bring us even to the crucial issue of canon, because we find this kind of interpretation and reinterpretation within the canon itself, or between the textual versions of biblical books (Samuel, Jeremiah). The fact that for example in the book of Chronicles אֲדָרְשִׁי 'an adversary' (1 Chr 21:1)⁵³ is found instead of Yhwh as the actor who incited David to take a census (2 Sam 24:1),⁵⁴ presents us with a first grade theological difference between the two versions, a difference which rose out of the need for theodicy and which apparently is possible within the context of the canon.

There are differences between the narratives as found in the book of Genesis and the versions as found in Jubilees and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. In the latter books we find a strong tendency to excuse Reuben for his misbehaviour by means of adapting the role of Dinah, which is a clear example of rewriting the text in service of the interests of a certain group within the religious community (men). This obvious goal of rewriting the text cannot be adduced as objection against the canonical status of the text. The book of Genesis itself has its own ideological features which served the interests of parties within Israelite society (governing elite),⁵⁵ whereas it still is inserted within the canon – albeit maybe because of ignorance of such ideological and political factors in the text and reinterpretation of objectionable passages. It appears that the canonization of scripture is much more an empirical fact in history, one which is not always based on obvious intrinsic arguments and careful exegesis and yet nowadays still governs the discussion of what is 'biblical' and 'non-biblical' within scholarship.

⁵² Rosen-Zvi 2006.

⁵³ For the translation as a name and not, as is usual, as a proper noun, cf. Japhet 1993:373-75; Knoppers 2004:743-44.

⁵⁴ On the differences between the version in 2 Sam 24 and 1 Chron 21, and how the latter chapter now functions within the book, see Japhet 1993:372-73; Japhet 2003:460-61; and Knoppers 2004:751.

⁵⁵ As argued in De Hoop 1998; cf. also De Hoop 2001; De Hoop 2004.

This brings me back to the example of rewritten Bible from Papua at the beginning: was that retelling legitimate within the context of the canon and in the context of Papua? As we have seen, the message of this retold story is – or can be – based on the Bible and as such it seems to be on par with reinterpretations of the biblical text in the Targumim or, as has been demonstrated by Kugel, with the exegetical tradition as found in the Testament of Reuben. Such reinterpretations did happen and still happen. Even if they did not receive a canonical position within Judaism and Christianity, they influenced the canonical texts. It will depend on the insight of the religious communities whether they will accept such escape routes for their members, blaming the female part of the world as scapegoat for the wrongs in the world, allowing themselves not to ponder their own participation in the origin of evil in the world. In this sense it appears that the narrative of the fall in the garden of Eden and the subsequent discussion of ‘who-done-it’ (Gen 3:12-13) still is the mirror story *par excellence*, which holds the key to the understanding of the scapegoat mechanisms which gave raise to these rewritten Bible stories.

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