

Article

Pursuing Partners: Traveling for Marital Partners in the Hebrew Bible

Søren Lorenzen 

Faculty of Protestant Theology, Bonn University, 53111 Bonn, Germany; s.lorenzen@uni-bonn.de

Abstract: Pursuing marital partners far from home can be a complicated endeavor, and the motives to travel for a companion can be a combination of pushes from one's locality and pulls toward something new. In the Hebrew Bible, several narratives concern pursuing a partner far from home, but the motives of the person traveling have not seen much scholarly attention. In this contribution, the entangled motives are traced in three select narratives (Judg 14; Gen 24; Tob) that each represents a specific category of pursuing a partner. Samson pursues a known partner, Isaac and his family pursue an unknown partner, and Tobias unknowingly pursues a partner. These three narrative categories are explored utilizing the framework of actor-network theory to tease out the entangled human and non-human actants that affect the motives and the pursuit itself. This contribution reveals that motives are always entangled in more extensive networks, agency is distributed among various actants, and no pursuit of a companion in the Hebrew Bible is exactly like another.

Keywords: travel; motives; partner; Hebrew Bible; actor-network theory; agency; endogamy; exogamy

1. Introduction

The human being is a creature of habit. “[M]uch of everyday action is characterized by habitual repetition” (Neal et al. 2006, p. 198), and straying from one's daily routines or creating new habits can sometimes be challenging endeavors (Arlinghaus and Johnston 2019). Staying within daily rhythms and engaging the same people keeps the human being in somewhat predictable behavior, a behavior that is mirrored in the choice of partners. A partner is often a person that is found relatively close to home, e.g., at work and school or through friends and family (Nolsoe 2020). Breaking the calming comfort of daily routines to embark on a complicated international venture to pursue partners is less common.¹ Such a venture can involve learning a new language, navigating complex cultural codes, and fighting with a bureaucracy of complicated visa regulations. However, the motives for engaging in such complicated pursuits can be multiple, and circumstances and other's agency often shape them. The motives can be practical, emotional, or powered by a sense of adventure. For some, the motives resemble a push away from one's geographical area. Local life can be challenging and dangerous, which means a foreign partner could lead to a different and perhaps more peaceful existence. The local area could also lack eligible or desired partners, which pushes a pursuing person out into the world.² For others, the motives can be more of a pull toward something culturally different, something presumably better, or a specific someone who has caught one's fancy. Frequently, the pushes and pulls are entangled.

Many contemporary motives for embarking on long journeys to pursue a partner could be explored, but what motives can be identified in the Hebrew Bible? And which distant marital partners are pursued in the ancient texts? In biblical scholarship, much focus has been given to foreign women (e.g., Berlejung and Grohmann 2019; Brenner 1994), marriages (Jackson 2011), and how endogamy, in various forms, creates and maintains collective identities (e.g., Frevel 2011; Moffat 2014), particularly in the Second Temple Period (e.g., in Ezra-Nehemiah). However, the theme of individuals' sometimes complicated



Citation: Lorenzen, Søren. 2024. Pursuing Partners: Traveling for Marital Partners in the Hebrew Bible. *Religions* 15: 324. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030324>

Academic Editors: Elisa Uusimäki, Eelco Glas and Rivkah Gillian Glass

Received: 13 February 2024

Revised: 2 March 2024

Accepted: 6 March 2024

Published: 8 March 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

motives to pursue partners in distant lands has slipped into the background. In this contribution, I will explore the dynamics of pulls and pushes that move a person out of one's locality for a companion. To do this, I will borrow insights from the non-theoretical actor-network theory (ANT) and identify the entangled motives, circumstances, and agencies at play when persons in the biblical texts pursue a partner far from home.³

2. Choice of Texts and Actor-Network Theory

Many biblical texts could qualify for an analysis of traveling for partners. However, this study is limited to narratives about people crossing longer stretches of land for (potential) marital partners. The biblical narratives feature a considerable distance between a person and the person's partner, which leaves out texts where partners are found closer to home (e.g., Hosea's marriages in Hos 1 and 3). In the selected texts, there is, of course, more than one person involved, and I will attempt to trace what motives and intentions are entangled in each situation and whether the move is a result of pushes or pulls.

The texts are sorted into three broad categories, or typologies. Of course, the categories overlap, but for analytical reasons, it is helpful to establish some initial boundaries to engage the theme of pursuing partners. The first category concerns persons pursuing known partners over distant lands. This category looks at narratives where the pursuing persons know, or are aware of, the individual they pursue. The second category is the pursuit of unknown partners, which concern situations in which the pursuing person do not yet know the pursued person. The third category concerns persons who found a partner in a distant land, although this was not the original intention. I have thus categorized the examples in the third category as persons who unknowingly pursue partners. Each section contains several examples from the Hebrew Bible, but most texts will only receive honorable mentions. Instead, I will focus on one representative text in each category to provide a more detailed analysis of the entangled agencies at work.

The narratives are approached with a specific focus on agency inspired by ANT, a framework prominently linked to the sociologists Bruno Latour and John Law. In this framework, agency is decentered from human individuals since humans and non-humans exist in relations that interact with each other (cf. [Malifouris 2016](#), pp. 211–12; [Bennett 2010](#)). Instead of being a unique trait reserved for the human being, agency is distributed and emerges in relations between entities, i.e., actants. This also entails that humans do not fully control an action ([Latour 2007](#), p. 44)⁴ because an action emerges in a specific moment and a particular practice. In other words, an actant is not a "source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it" ([Latour 2007](#), p. 46). Therefore, in anthropologist Annemarie Mol's words, the methodological endeavor pursued through ANT is not to figure out "where the activities come from, but rather where they go" ([Mol 2019](#), p. 255). The focus is thus not on competing wills or intentions of human beings but on reverberations of the effects of several actants. In this way, both human and non-human actants send reverberations into the network, which results in certain effects that could not have happened if the network was constituted differently. The focus on a network does not entail that actants are passive puppets of previous actions because the actants "are still active" ([Mol 2019](#), p. 258; [Bennett 2010](#), p. 38). Actants can make something new happen, that is, send new reverberations into a network even though they are always entangled in them. Many facets and possible developments of ANT can be highlighted with diverse studies (e.g., [Elder-Vass 2008](#)). Furthermore, ANT has been criticized for neglecting social structures in favor of focusing on the interaction between individual actants ([Elder-Vass 2008](#)). However, for the present endeavor, the focus on individual actants is the main methodological premise. As will become clear, motives emerge due to the webs of actants and circumstances in which the person pursuing a partner is embedded.⁵ Motives are thus not necessarily individuals' inner motives but a result of complex relations and entangled actants. In the end, the methodological process of ANT encourages careful descriptions of each actant, which can tease out fascinating facets of why someone ends up pursuing a partner. With these initial thoughts on ANT, I will clarify the intersec-

tions of individual actants as I traverse three biblical narratives to tease out the entangled agencies that make persons move for companionship in the Hebrew Bible.

3. Pursuing Known Partners

The first category of traveling concerns the pursuit of known partners, and these pursuits appear in different variations. For example, the narratives of the Hebrew Bible frequently involve families crossing distant lands as a unit with a patriarch in front. In these situations, the partners already know each other and move together. This practice is noticed on the initial pages of Genesis, where Tera brings his family from Ur to Haran (Gen 11:31) and where Abram moves Sarah and his family from Haran to Canaan (Gen 12:4–5). In these and similar cases, pursuing a partner in a distant land is absent. Instead, the ancestral narratives describe a collective move that keeps the patriarchal family unit of the father's house intact (cf. [Hardin 2022](#)). A father's house can also fracture, which results in traveling for a known partner. This is noticed in the horror story in Judges 19, where a Levite pursues his lost concubine (פילגש). The initial motive for the Levite's travel to Bethlehem is a pull to “talk to her heart” (לדבר עליה; Judg 19:3).⁶ However, the Levite's move creates massive reverberations and entangled agencies that ultimately lead to the death of the concubine, her parted limbs, the destruction of Jabesh and its (mainly adult female) inhabitants, and some detestable Benjaminites traveling to Shiloh to steal anonymous young women for themselves (Judg 20–21; cf. [Southwood 2017](#)). I will leave this fascinating but horrendous story to other studies (e.g., [Fischer 2021](#), pp. 154–57; [Uusimäki 2022](#)) and turn to another story in Judges that involves Samson and his intense pursuit of a nameless Philistine.

Samson and the Unnamed Philistine

In Judges 14, the reader finds a story about traveling to find a known companion. In this chapter, the Nazirite Samson falls for a Philistine woman as he wanders around Timnah. This story involves several motives and actants since Yhwh and the divine רוּחַ, empowering “spirit”, play important roles. While some motives are explicitly known for the characters, others are implicit, which reveals an entangled network of agencies as Samson sets out for a partner.

The story begins with Samson traveling to Timnah. According to the previous narrative, he sets out from Mahaneh-dan that is not too far removed from his home in Zorah, where he has been stirred, or troubled (פָּעַם), by Yhwh's רוּחַ (Judg 13:25). For unknown reasons, Samson walks to Timnah and encounters a Philistine woman by accident. Samson's motives for walking around the foreign neighborhood are unclear, but the reader can sense that the motives are entangled with the divine רוּחַ that stirs him. It is almost as if Samson is divinely blown into Philistine borderlands. The story continues rapidly since the protagonist swiftly returns to his parents in Zorah after seeing the unnamed woman. The situation between Samson and the woman appears to be love, or rather a one-sided sexual desire at first sight.⁷ In Zorah, he commands his parents to procure the Philistine woman as his wife, bringing his parents into the network of actants. Although the parents eventually will have no say in Samson's decisions, they partake in the network since they are supposed to arrange the marriage on behalf of Samson. As will be clear, this arrangement does not begin smoothly. Samson's few words burst out as an imperative, and there is a strong sense of urgency as the command begins with the particle “Now!” (עַתָּה; Judg 14:3). Furthermore, the entire speech is a first-person monologue, and Samson describes how the woman is pleasing in his eyes (יִשְׂרָה בְעֵינַי; Judg 14:3). Samson's own motive to procure her as a partner is a personal one since judging something in one's own eyes is a common expression of individual evaluation in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isa 5:21; [Lorenzen and Gudme 2023](#), pp. 106–7).⁸ Individual evaluation is, however, also frequently perceived to be harmful. Samson's rather one-sided visual evaluation of the woman is a critical motif in the story, and it is repeated three times (Judg 14:3.7). In short, Samson is pulled to travel for a foreign woman.

Samson's pull is powerful, but his parents answer him with a traditional question about endogamy. They ask if Samson would reconsider and locate a wife among his circumcised relatives far from Philistia (Judg 14:3). Not only does Samson's engagement with his parents include them as actants, but they also become mediators of a reified concept of endogamy that actively enters the network.⁹ Marriage is not solely endogamic in the Hebrew Bible, and Israelites often marry foreigners (e.g., Gen 16:3; 41:45; Exod 2:21). However, exogamy is occasionally banned and condemned (Ex. 34:15–16; Deut. 7:1–4).¹⁰ In Samson's case, his motives are not affected by the parent's deflective urging as he pursues the love of his eyes despite his parents' hopes and reified customs. The parents' more traditionally correct point of view is easily flattened by the impatient protagonist.¹¹

Given the traditional family structures presented in the Hebrew Bible, then there is an odd dynamic between Samson and his parents. For example, when Isaac tells Jacob to avoid the Canaanites and travel to pursue a suitable partner elsewhere, it is a patriarchal command (Gen 28:1–2), not a timid suggestion hidden in the language of a question. Samson surely has the upper hand in this topsy-turvy relationship with his parents. Yhwh's *רוח* might have equipped Samson with a more intimidating aura, and there is no doubt that the *רוח* enables him to utilize his heroically empowered muscles (e.g., Judg 14:6). The empowering *רוח* thus affects the network of actants since it equips Samson to push the traditional social identities within the father's house and refuse his parents' endogamy-influenced biddings.

A short break in the narrative reveals a covert, divine motivation (Judg 14:4). Samson's pull toward Timnah is thus urged on by something utterly different than lust and refusal of parents' wishes. Furthermore, the motive does not concern marriage or endogamy at all. Instead, Yhwh looks for a reason to violently engage the Philistines because, as noted in Judges 14:4, they were ruling Israel (Miller 2011, p. 137). Suddenly, the network of actants receives a significantly larger temporal span as it reaches back in time to include a political dilemma.¹² The Philistines' rule over Israel is thus absorbed into the network of actants since the political rule affects Yhwh's motives, which in turn is linked to Samson pursuing a partner.

The narrative explicitly communicates that Samson's parents are unaware of Yhwh's motivations, and there is no indication that the enchanted lover knowingly partakes in the divine plans. Irmtraud Fischer argues that Samson has a political motive from the beginning, but the narrative does not mention Samson's knowledge of Yhwh's violent aims (Fischer 2021, pp. 118–19). It seems more likely that Yhwh withholds information from everyone purposefully to let Samson run his course. Nevertheless, while Samson and his parents experience events locally in time and space, Yhwh's motives have a considerably more extensive scope. Still, they are all actants entangled in the same network reverberating across time and space.

As the narrative continues, the small family travels to Timnah, and Samson kills a lion on the way. The dead lion does not affect the motives to pursue a partner, but it does have lethal effects on thirty unfortunate men in Ashkelon later in the narrative. In this way, the dead lion plays into Yhwh's motives for engaging the Philistines, which, in turn, is tied to Samson's traveling love adventures.

After the lion-wrestling, Samson speaks (*דבר*) to the Timnite and confirms his eyes' evaluation (Judg 14:7). At this point, the woman enters the story and the network of actants. She is a foreign woman with no say in the possible marriage. Her father is absent but presumably agreed to an arranged marriage with Samson and his parents. In this way, the network does not reverberate significantly with her presence as an actant. The woman silently submits, and Samson leaves Timnah only to return some days later to take her as a wife. Her actions, however, become a pivotal factor in the events leading to the death of the thirty men in Ashkelon. The woman is first given a reverberating role in the network when she speaks on the fourth day of the seven-day wedding party. Here, she pleads with Samson to reveal his riddling secrets (Judg 14:16). This action is, however, only a reaction to the Philistines' own doings. With her father as leverage, the invited wedding guests

threaten to burn her and her family if she does not tease out the answer to the riddle about the dead lion that Samson gave at the party (Judg 14:14; cf. [Niditch 2008](#), p. 157). They are not interested in losing thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes, something that only can be avoided if they answer the impossible riddle correctly (Judg 14:13). Instead, they are interested in more material wealth since answering the riddle correctly would result in Samson owing them clothes. The Philistines and Samson have thus bound themselves to a prize and a reified agreement that take on agency as either part cannot waive the deal. In this way, a riddle, several changes of clothes, a threat, and a prize join the carcass of a dead lion killed by Samson and reverberate in the network of actants that pushes the woman to beg Samson for an answer.

She cries continuously for days and speaks plainly to Samson: “You only hate me, you do not love me!” (Judg 14:16). Her judgment seems correct since Samson is now occupied with the possibility of gaining or losing costly clothing. As she begs for the answer to the riddle, Samson clarifies the woman’s social position as he cherishes his parents more than her by rejectingly stating: “I have not told my father nor my mother, and shall I tell you?” (Judg 14:16). Samson’s loyalty lies with his parents, not some female foreigner. Being entangled in networks can lead to a horrible situation, and the unnamed woman is caught in webs of violence and rejection. She is placed as a disposable pawn between angry Philistines and an indifferent husband, primarily because of a riddle and an expensive prize. She is not simply a woman in a father’s house but a foreign woman who plays no significant role for any of the male actants.

At this point in the narrative, the initial travel for a known partner has receded far into the background. However, a more complicated network of human and non-human actants has emerged, revealing entangled motives. Samson’s initial lustful motives are tied to Yhwh’s ferocious ones, but both aims are only achieved through several actants. The story ends with Samson revealing the riddle’s solution to his wife, which initially saves her and her father from the fire (Judg 14:17). This results in the death of thirty well-dressed people in Ashkelon since Samson has to release himself from his agreement made with the Philistines (Judg 14:19). At this point, it is clear how the actants and their motives are entangled since Yhwh’s *רוח* empowers Samson to kill the Philistines in Ashkelon. Yhwh’s plan succeeds as he piggybacks on Samson’s riddling actions in Timnah. Finally, Samson leaves Timnah, and his wife is given to another man (Judg 14:20). These actions set up the following story in which Samson, equipped with a young goat as barter, repeats his travel for a known partner as he attempts to get (or buy) his estranged wife back (Judg 15:1).

Samson’s pursuit of a partner in Timnah can be simplified as a one-sided, lustful endeavor ([Fischer 2021](#), pp. 23–24). However, the motives and circumstances that led Samson to his sojourn in the Philistine borderlands are complicated when more actants and events are identified. Samson is pulled toward Timnah by his eyes, but Yhwh covertly pushes him. Samson’s motives of lust are thus joined with Yhwh’s political motives of war. This joining of motives is noticed in the events where Yhwh’s *רוח* appears in the narrative. The *רוח* might have pushed Samson in the direction of Timnah (Judg 13:25), it empowers Samson to kill a lion (Judg 14:6), and it gives him the strength to kill thirty Philistines (Judg 14:19). Through twists, turns, and several actants, the dead Philistines are a result of a dead lion that plays no initial role in Samson’s motive to travel for a partner. Nevertheless, Samson’s double pursuit of the unnamed Philistine is entangled with several other actants. Furthermore, no actant can meaningfully be sorted out of the network since they all play a role in Samson’s travel for companionship and Yhwh’s hunt for Philistines.

4. Pursuing Unknown Partners

Pursuing unknown partners is the most common practice in the Hebrew Bible when it comes to traveling for companionship. In these cases, it is pursuing an undefined individual in a more defined group with qualities worth pursuing. This pursuit is recognized in several historical sources across the Mediterranean world since marriages were utilized to form political alliances between two unrelated families ([Broodbank 2018](#), pp. 699–701). In

the Hebrew Bible, this practice is exemplified with Solomon's many foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:1–8), Ahab's marriage to the Phoenician Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31; cf. Ps 45), or the more locally sourced wives of David (2 Sam 3:2–5; cf. Frevel 2018, p. 228). In these royal cases, it is not the person that is pursued but the influential families that are. It is, however, not political alliances through marriage that are most frequently sought in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, it is a pursuit of endogamous marriage that leads people, that is, men, on longer journeys. However, it is a double journey. Men travel to find an eligible partner, and without much say, the woman returns to the land of the man's origin. Just as Samson's motives were entangled with others, a pursuit for an unknown partner can result from various actants. For example, Jacob leaves for Paddan-aram to find a wife because Isaac tells him to (Gen 28:1–2). However, Isaac only commands him to go because Rebekah will lose her desire to live (Gen 27:46) if Jacob would imitate Esau and marry a Hittite that brings "bitter wind" in the household (מרת רוח, Gen 26:34–35). Finally, Jacob also leaves his home because of his brother's anger after he is warned by their mother (Gen 27:42–44). An extensive network of agencies thus pushes Jacob out of Canaan, and his own motives are unclear. To explore the entanglement of actants pursuing unknown partners in more detail, I will turn to Jacob's parents and the narrative of Isaac meeting Rebekah.

Isaac and Rebekah

In Genesis 24, one finds an extensive story about the initial phase of Isaac and Rebekah's relationship. The story mainly revolves around an anonymous servant¹³ traveling from Canaan to Mesopotamia. Still, it also adds Isaac, Abraham, an oath, Yhwh's messenger, Rebekah, her family members, a servant, jewelry, and riches to the mix, which reveals an extensive network of motives, actions, and circumstances when pursuing an unknown partner.

The story begins when an aging Abraham decides to arrange a wife for his son (Gen 24:1–3). The initial motives are thus anchored to the patriarch, who is adamant that his son should not marry one of the Canaanites. As a result, Abraham urgently forces his nameless servant to swear by his patriarchal genitals that the servant should travel to Abraham's country of origin to procure an undefined woman as a daughter-in-law (Gen 24:2–4).¹⁴ For this reason, three actants are already explicitly mentioned: Abraham, the servant, and an oath. Parallel to the deal in the narrative about Samson, a reified agreement becomes an actant that binds Abraham and the servant to each other.

Abraham's motivation dabbles in endogamous themes although it is not explicitly stated why the Canaanites are discarded as potential partners. Nevertheless, Abraham urges the servant to leave Canaan to avoid the local candidates. At this point in the narrative, Isaac is left out of any decision to find a partner for himself. Traveling for a partner is an arrangement conducted by his father. Furthermore, Isaac does not seem to have a partner on his radar or even the desire to find one. Judging from the final parts of the narrative, Isaac appears to be lost in mourning over the death of his mother (Gen 24:67).

A third party does the actual travel for a partner because Abraham insists that Isaac does not leave Canaan. Neither does Abraham want to leave Canaan. This reasoning for immobility is based on Yhwh's promise of land to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 24:7–8). Moving the divinely elected family away from the promised land is counter-intuitive to Yhwh's promise, but the move also jeopardizes the ownership of the already possessed area. For this reason, Yhwh's promise binds Abraham and Isaac to the locality in Canaan. The traveling is thus outsourced to a less valuable servant, who is sent in the direction of Nahor in Mesopotamia (Gen 24:10). Right before the servant's hand reaches Abraham's genitals and seals the oath, Abraham assures that Yhwh's messenger will go before the servant so that the travel will not be in vain (Gen 24:6). A divine agent is thus paving the way for the servant to find a suitable wife for his son. Abraham's final words to his servant are important for the network of actants because he leaves the door open for the not-yet-identified woman to decline the servant's offer of marriage. Although the narrative is primarily a patriarchal story about marriages arranged by authoritative males,

Abraham accentuates the woman's agency. This is valuable information for the servant because her rejection will release him from the oath (Gen 24:8). This reveals the servant's motive to pursue a partner on behalf of his master's son because he wants to make sure that he can be released from this oath, no matter if he procures a woman or not.

As the servant reaches Nahor's city, he asks for Yhwh's help to identify a suitable woman (Gen 24:22). In prayer, the servant asks for success in his quest for a woman and provides a detailed outline of how he should encounter this woman serendipitously (Gen 24:13–14). The servant explicitly states that Yhwh is Abraham's God and connects his own success with Yhwh, showing steadfast love (חסד) to Abraham. In this way, Yhwh is more explicitly entangled in the network of actants, that already includes Abraham's motives, the servant's agency, and the looming pressure of keeping an oath. Luckily for the servant, everything he asks comes true when Rebekah provides water for him and his camels (24:15–21). Rebekah's hospitable actions follow Yhwh's playbook, and the servant can identify the right person. In the meantime, the reader is informed that Rebekah is related to Abraham and that she is beautiful and a virgin (Gen 24:15–16).

As the camels' drinking feast unfolds in front of the servant's eyes, he remains quiet and notices how Yhwh's latent doings aid his quest for fulfilling his oath (Gen 24:21). The servant's reaction to Rebekah's hospitality is to give her a golden nose ring and attach two bracelets on her arms.¹⁵ Then he asks about her family (Gen 24:22). According to ANT, objects are actants because they can make something happen. This is the case for jewelry given to Rebekah since they will play a significant role in convincing her family, especially Laban, about letting her go to Canaan. But before Rebekah returns to Nahor's house, the servant thanks Yhwh for the divine steadfast love shown to Abraham, a steadfastness that the servant experiences vicariously.

Rebekah runs home, tells her family about the encounter, and opens the door for the servant to stay at their house. Laban hears his sister's story but notices the newly acquired jewelry before he listens (Gen 24:30). In this sense, the jewelry makes something happen; they act and arouse Laban's interest and urge him out the door to invite a stranger home. Laban returns with the servant to the house (Gen 24:31), and the guest presents his lengthy case for the male members of Rebekah's family (24:34–49). He introduces himself as Abraham's servant and retells what Abraham told him. But not quite. The servant alters Abraham's words about letting the woman decide. In this context, surrounded by gifts about to be bestowed on the hosting family, the servant tells Rebekah's brother, Laban, and her father, Bethuel, that the collective clan can refuse to let her go (Gen 24:41). Rebekah's choice disappears. She is reduced to a bartering object in the hands of her male family members. Here, it is necessary to state that actants are not simply *intermediaries* where the input is identical to the output. Instead, actants are *mediators* that can alter the input (Latour 2007, p. 39). In other words, an input affecting an actant can crystallize into several other effects not originally intended by a previous effect. This mediating effect occurs when the servant alters Abraham's input and dissolves Rebekah's choice. In any case, the servant is close to being released from the oath, which means his initial motive for vicariously pursuing an unknown partner is about to be resolved. In the end, the male family members quickly judge that Yhwh has planned this arrangement all along (Gen 24:50–51). They decide that Rebekah needs to join the servant, go to Canaan, and be given to Isaac as a bride. In this way, Rebekah is pushed away from home.

Toward the end of the narrative, Rebekah's brother and mother request that Rebekah should stay for another ten days, but here, Rebekah is allowed to have her say (Gen 24:57–58). The servant desires to return quickly, but the decision to return now or later is in the hands of Rebekah. She decides against her family's wishes, receives a blessing, and travels to Canaan with the servant (Gen 24:61). As they arrive in Canaan, a wandering Isaac is identified as the servant's master, and Rebekah joins Isaac in his mother's tent for lovemaking. This act leads Isaac through his grieving process and concludes the narrative.

Several actants are involved in this pursuit of a partner, and it is clear how larger narratives with more actants create more complicated networks. Initially, Abraham wants

to avoid the Canaanites by sending an emissary to find a wife from his homeland. Abraham's motives to find a partner for his son thus linger between a push away from Canaan and a pull toward Mesopotamia. Abraham's agency is, however, entangled with a larger network of actants. He and his son are unable to travel because of Yhwh's promises. In this way, they are tied to a place due to the agency of a promise. This situation introduces the servant into the network, thus revealing a larger network of motives, agencies, and circumstances. The servant wants to keep an oath, Yhwh has implicit intentions for Abraham's descendants, and Rebekah's family desires riches. Along the way, the gold and gifts play a significant role in the pursuit of a partner. As a result of the various intersections of multiple actants, Isaac ends up with Rebekah.

The pursuit of an unknown partner can involve a myriad of motives. Although the partner is intended for Abraham's son, Isaac is almost absent from the story. Everyone around him plays a much larger role. Rebekah also travels for a partner but mostly as a reaction to effects from other actants. Rebekah oscillates between having explicit agency and having none. Although a possibility for agency is highlighted at the beginning of the narrative, she is caught in the web of a patriarchal society where the male members ultimately decide on her future. Abraham's initial idea of the woman's decision is thus trumped by a new context in which males decide over women. Depending on the site of the network and the actants entangled in them, Rebekah's unfolding of her own agency changes. Her only choice in Mesopotamia is whether she wants to leave immediately or ten days later with a foreign servant. This choice is no choice at all.¹⁶ Not only is her agency altered between the two geographical sites, but she is also enacted as two different persons by Abraham and her male family members. The Canaanite-dominated network enacts her as a capable agent, whereas the Mesopotamian network enacts her as a bartering object (cf. Mol 2019, p. 260).

5. Unknowingly Pursuing Partners

The final category involves people who find a partner while away from home for other reasons. In these cases, lust or endogamy recedes to the background, and the events leading to the initial move differ from the motive and intentions of a person pursuing a known or unknown partner. There can be necessary moves away from one's locality, such as Moses, who flees to Midian and marries Zipporah (Exod 2). It can also result from involuntary travel, such as Joseph, who is sold by his brothers. The events bring the unlucky dreamer to Egypt, where he eventually marries Asenath (Gen 41:37–45).¹⁷ There are also more complicated stories of widows traveling out of necessity. The hospitable Abigail leaves her home for David after her foolish husband has died (1 Sam 25). Ruth is initially found in Moab by a family fleeing draught, but Ruth leaves her homeland with Naomi out of loyalty (Fischer 2021, p. 61) and eventually ends up with Boaz in a (for her) foreign land (Ruth). Ending up with a partner because of expatriate experiences is not a phenomenon limited to time and space. For example, in Mesopotamia, traveling male merchants often had several wives in different cities, and the wives often knew about each other.¹⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, such merchants are not prominently portrayed, but finding oneself in a foreign land with a partner is not uncommon.¹⁹

Tobias and Sara

Much of the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit can be categorized as a travelogue (cf. Schlüngel-Straumann 2000, pp. 38–39).²⁰ The travel-related core of the narrative (Tob 4–14, cf. Dietrich 2017, p. 156) mainly concerns Tobias, the son of Tobit, who sets out on a travel to Ragas in Midian from Nineveh to procure money (Tob 4:1–4). Along the way, however, it is revealed to Tobias how God has had some hidden, endogamous marriage plans for the young bachelor in Ecbatana. The story involves an extensive network of entangled actants: Tobias, Tobit, Raphael, Raguel, Gabael, God, fish entrails, a demon, Sara, money, and, perhaps the most important of all, Moses' law.

The initial puzzle pieces for Tobias' travelogue appear in the third chapter when Sarah, the daughter of Raguel, desires to take her own life because of her unfortunate experiences with the demon Asmodeus and because these events challenge the honor of her father's house (Dietrich 2017, pp. 155–59). The demon keeps killing her husbands on wedding nights and this reverberates in her entire family (Tob 3:10). Far from Sarah's locality in Ecbatana, troubles also befall Tobit in Nineveh since he is blinded by bird droppings and poor medical treatment (Tob 2:10). In a beautiful narrative composition, Sarah and Tobit pray in different corners of the world (Tob 3:11), and God hears their prayers at the same time (καίρως; Tob 3:16; cf. Schlügel-Straumann 2000, p. 91). Here, it is revealed to the reader that God has a plan to heal Tobit and join Sarah and Tobias in an endogamous marriage (Tob 3:17; cf. Schlügel-Straumann 2000, p. 103). This plan, however, is not known by any of the characters except for the angel Raphael, who is subsequently and secretly sent to nudge the events along. Nevertheless, on the same day as the fateful prayers, Tobit remembers that he has money stored at Gabael's place in Ragas and wants his son Tobias to pick it up before he dies (Tob 4:1).

At this point in the narrative (Tob 4:1), the only explicit motive for traveling known by the characters is Tobias' motive for money. The idea of pursuing partners is absent. However, Tobias' motive is entangled with many events and actants known to the reader, e.g., God's endogamous marriage plans for Tobias. These dual motives, however, only bloom due to a long line of events and actants; Tobit has left money to Gabael in the past, bird droppings have left him blind, Asmodeus haunts Sarah, and both Sarah and Tobit extend their deepest desires in prayer to God. All these events comprise an extended network that coalesces at the end of the third chapter of the book. Here, following Sarah and Tobit's prayer, a *καίρως* moment occurs where God ties the previous events together and sends an ignorant Tobias on his way to Ecbatana via Tobit suddenly remembering a stored treasure in Ragas. The father clarifies the destination, but Tobias has no clue how to travel there (Tob 5:2). Several more actants thus have time to join the network before Tobias takes his first step.

A significant actant for Tobias is Moses' law. Tobit illustrates this reified collection of ethical rules as he summons his son before sending him to Ragas. The very first things Tobit mentions concern honoring one's parents, an honor practiced by providing a beautiful funeral for the dead parents and by not forsaking the living ones (Tob 4:3; cf. Dietrich 2009). This honorable relation to one's parents plays an important role in Tobias' motives for traveling to Midian since he wants to do right by his father and thus by Moses' law (Tob 5:1). The list of pious acts continues, and tucked between commandments of giving to the poor (Tob 4:8), paying people at the right time (Tob 4:14), and praising God (Tob 4:19), Tobit lists reasons for endogamous marriage (Tob 4:12–13). Several reasons are given for endogamous marriage, and they all play an important role in the actants and events that lead to Tobias unknowingly pursuing a partner.

Tobit begins his marriage talk by stating that Tobias should avoid sexual immorality (πορνεία) and thus marry someone from his father's kin, not a foreigner (Tob 4:12). The main reason provided is that Tobit and Tobias are descendants of named prophets; Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who all practiced endogamous marriages.²¹ The fathers were blessed, and they inherited the land. In this way, the motive to marry within the family is double since Tobias should imitate the ancestors and aim for riches linked to the land they were promised. Tobit subsequently contrasts the love of brothers with acting arrogantly (ὑπερηφανεύω) in one's heart and links this contrast to endogamous marriage. In Tobit's reasoning, acting arrogantly is to marry a foreigner while neglecting one's kin, and acting arrogantly leads to destruction (ἀπώλεια) and confusion (ἀκαταστασία). Ultimately, it leads to severe poverty (Tob 4:13). While the reasons for endogamous marriage are far from explicit in the narratives about Samson and Isaac, it is clear why such a marriage arrangement is sought in Tobit. In this book, endogamy concerns piety, leading to blessing and wealth.

The speech ends with an exhortation to fear God (Tob 4:21), which prompts Tobias to act on his father's wishes (Tob 5:1). As noted above, Tobias does not know how to travel to Midian (Tob 5:2), which introduces Raphael into the network of actants. The covert angel can help Tobias because he knows precisely where Gabael lives (Tob 5:3–6). With Raphael as a traveling partner, his father pushes Tobias out of his locality to procure riches. Tobit's motives to regain what is lost are clear, but they are entangled with Tobias' motives to be an obedient son and a pious believer. None of these motives, however, concern God's goals of pairing Tobias with Sarah and healing Tobit, goals that Raphael is instrumental in achieving.

As the traveling partners close in on Ecbatana, Raphael turns to Tobias and states that he has the right to marry, or take, Sarah, who lives in the city (Δεδικαίωταί σοι λαβεῖν αὐτήν; Tob 6:13). A detour from the travel to the money in Ragas is inevitable. At this point, it is duly noted that Sarah will have no say in the marriage matters. She is Tobias' to take and her father's to give. Raphael mentions that they will not talk to Sarah herself but her father "about" (περὶ) taking her as a wife. This talk is a formality because her father, Raguel, must give her up. If he does not act according to the law of Moses, Raphael states that he will be deathly guilty (Tob 6:13). The arrangement of Tobias marrying Sarah begins to be untangled, and it is intricately tied to keeping the law, both for Tobias and Raguel.

Before arriving in Ecbatana, however, Raphael praises Sarah by stating that she is wise (φρόνιμος), brave, that is, manly (ἀνδρεῖος), and exceedingly beautiful (καλός; Tob 6:12). Tobias already knows about her, and is afraid to die like all the other candidates that courted her (Tob 6:14). Tobias' worries do not primarily concern his own death. Instead, it is his parents' possible sorrow of their son's death that worries him because it might lead to their death and consequently to a burial that a deceased son cannot provide (Tob 6:15). And a proper burial, of course, was the very first thing Tobit demanded from his son (cf. Tob 4:3). If he leaves for Ecbatana and Sarah, Tobias' main aim of parental obedience is in danger of being void. However, Raphael quickly mentions that Tobit also commanded Tobias to marry a wife from his own kin. A potential conflict of interest appears since Tobias has to decide which commandments to follow. However, a long ethical consideration is abated since Raphael helps out with the choice. The covert angel promises that Tobias and Sarah will be safe throughout the wedding night if Tobias simply burns part of a fish's liver and heart, a fish he luckily caught on the way to Ragas (Tob 6:1–7). In this way, the material agency of fish entrails plays an important role in the network of actants (cf. [Askin 2022](#)). First, the objects are an important element in convincing Tobias to turn from his initial route. Second, the objects themselves become instrumental in him ending up with Sarah for more than a single night (cf. Tob 8:1).

Before concluding his speech with comforting words, Raphael states that Sarah was intended for Tobias since eternity (αἰών; Tob 6:18). Here, the divine motives trump any other motive. God initiated the travel since he had their coupling in mind from ancient times. But Tobias is not left entirely to God's eternal doings since Raphael's words make Tobias fall exceedingly in love (ἀγαπάω) with Sarah. The revelation of God's motives sends emotional reverberations through Tobias' body as his ψυχή clings to his coming partner (cf. [Schlüngel-Straumann 2000](#), p. 122). After the angelic speech, the pursuit for a partner transforms as Tobias now urgently pursues a known partner.

Tobias and Raphael arrive at Raguel's house in Ecbatana, and the marriage arrangements go smoothly since Raguel quickly acknowledges the law of Moses (Tob 7:12; cf. [Schlüngel-Straumann 2000](#), pp. 120–22). Sarah is utterly silent as Raguel gives her away to Tobias, and Raguel signs a contract that states that he gave Sarah to Tobias (Tob 7:13). During the wedding night, Tobias prays with Sarah and says that he did not marry Sarah due to sexual immorality (πορνεία) but in truth (ἀλήθεια), thus fulfilling his father's wishes (Tob 8:7; cf. Tob 4:12). Furthermore, in a unique situation in the biblical texts, Tobias prays in a peculiar romantic way that he would like to grow old together with Sarah (Tob 8:1; [Miller 2011](#), p. 143). They survive the night, Raphael chases down Asmodeus, and a fortnight-long party is planned. When the party is over, and Raphael has collected the

money in Ragas on behalf of Tobias (Tob 9:5), a silent Sarah leaves with her time-worrying husband, and they return to Nineveh to celebrate once more (Tob 10:9–13; Tob 12:1). For Tobias, the motive to return is piety once again. He hopes to honor his parents-in-law just as he honors his own (Tob 10:13). Furthermore, he wants to reach his parents before their worries become too much for them to bear. Sarah's motives, however, are left in the dark as she silently follows her husband, just as Sarah follows Abram (Gen 12:4–5).

The story of Tobias reveals an extended network of actants. Tobias goes from unknowingly pursuing a partner to pursuing a known partner but never falters in his own motives for traveling. He remains a pious believer since he honors his parents and joins Sarah in an endogamous marriage. Although love suddenly becomes a factor in his pursuit of Sarah, God's plans and Tobias' pious motives significantly affect the network of actants.

6. Conclusions: Pursuing Partners

In the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, the motives to pursue a partner in distant lands are multifaceted. Just as contemporary motives to leave one's locality can result from several events and actants, the characters of the Hebrew Bible are entangled in webs of happenings and actants that lead to traveling for companionship. The three categories, or typologies, utilized in this contribution, that is, pursuing known partners, pursuing unknown partners, and unknowingly pursuing partners, have served as placeholders for framing various motives in the texts. When engaging the individual actants, however, multiple motives were identified. The motives can originate from oneself (Samson; cf. Tobias), one's parents (Isaac, Tobias), or God (Samson, Isaac, and Tobias), but there is never one single motive at play. The travels are more complicated than a single motive allows, and the actant often finds oneself nudged by other actants' reverberations in the network. While Samson lustfully travels for an unnamed Philistine, he is entangled in a political scheme thought out by Yhwh. Isaac never travels but ends up with a bejeweled Rebekah after a servant keeps an oath. Finally, Tobias wants to live by the Mosaic law but falls in love due to God's eternal plans. It should be noted that the women are left without much choice in leaving for a partner. However, it does seem that different networks enact agency differently, e.g., when Rebekah severs her ties from Mesopotamia to join Isaac in Canaan. Abraham gives her a choice, but Laban does not. For Abraham in Canaan, she is a different kind of actant than she is for Laban in Mesopotamia.

By identifying various actants, it is possible to trace a more extensive network of happenings of pushes and pulls that foster motives, alter motives, and entangle motives. The networks created in the narratives reveal that no biblical text is exactly like the other, just as no couple has an identical story. One overarching explanation, e.g., endogamy, does not fully catch the nuances of traveling for companionship in the Hebrew Bible. Instead of being tied to a single individual, agency is distributed, contextual, and entangled with human and non-human actants. Agency and causality are difficult to harness, and if the shortly presented narrative examples above are extended to the texts' larger macro contexts, then it becomes even more bewildering where causalities have their center of origin (cf. Bennett 2010, p. 33). While ANT can be an elusive theory to work with (cf. Latour 2007, pp. 141–56), and it can go into the most meticulous details when actants are identified (cf. Bennett 2010, pp. 120–21), the process of identifying networks of people, events, and vibrant things reveals various facets of what it entails to pursue a partner in the biblical texts.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For some excellent ethnographic examples of contemporary challenges and motives for transnational marriages, see [Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau \(2017\)](#).
- ² The lack of eligible partners can also lead to an import of partners ([Denyer and Gowen 2018](#)).
- ³ It is frequently reiterated that ANT is not a theory (e.g., [Mol 2019](#)). Instead, it resembles a method that sets out to identify effects of several entangled human and non-human actants.
- ⁴ In this way, any actant should not be perceived as ontologically different from another ([López-Gómez 2020](#), p. 6). However, intentionality and the feeling of agency might differ between actants (cf. [Pickering 1995](#), pp. 15–20).
- ⁵ The entangled actants can also be perceived through the hermeneutical prism of intersectionality, where the intersections of race, gender, class, etc., are the subject of study. However, to keep the focus on the larger networks, not the individual person entangled in these, I will leave such an analytical endeavor to other writings. For a succinct introduction to intersectionality and biblical studies, see [Yee \(2020\)](#).
- ⁶ “Speaking to the heart” indicates a dual motif since the action appears in situations of intimacy (Gen 50:21) and in situations where the speaker wants to convince someone else (Hos 2:16) ([Lorenzen and Gudme 2023](#), pp. 36–37). Both motifs seem present in Judg 19:3.
- ⁷ Fischer labels Samson a horny man, a classical playboy who uses women for his own desires ([Fischer 2021](#), p. 121).
- ⁸ In general, Samson is good at using his eyes to find Philistine woman (Judg 16:1).
- ⁹ Endogamy is a theme in the narrative about the unnamed Philistine ([Niditch 2008](#), p. 154), but it is more subtle. The more prominent motif is Yhwh’s violent engagement with the Philistines.
- ¹⁰ Historically, it seems that exogamy was prominent among smaller settlements since it was used to create alliances between families and to avoid incest. Endogamy was more prominent in larger cities ([Frevel 2018](#), p. 91).
- ¹¹ The parents are “loving parents” that give laudable “advice and guidance” ([Niditch 2008](#), p. 155).
- ¹² According to Niditch, the fight against political overlords is a key motif of the Samson narratives, and it can appeal to most times in Ancient Israelite history ([Niditch 2008](#), pp. 154–55).
- ¹³ The servant is frequently identified as Eliezer, but the name never appears in the narrative ([Sarna 1989](#), p. 162).
- ¹⁴ The imperative is followed by the precativ particle, נָּ , often translated as a more urgent “please”. Although this function of the particle is discussed, it still implies a “logical consequence” of a command that leaves no room for the servant’s decision ([Waltke and O’Connor 1990](#), p. 578). For דָּד as a euphemism for penis, see [Lorenzen and Gudme \(2023, p. 166\)](#); cf. [Quick \(2022\)](#).
- ¹⁵ On the jewelry involved in the narrative, see [Quick \(2021, pp. 136–37\)](#).
- ¹⁶ Miryam [Brand \(2023\)](#) has recently argued that Rebekah shows a remarkable form of agency and a “genuine desire” to meet with Isaac by identifying the active verbs linked to her in some verses (e.g., Gen 24:61; cf. [Sarna 1989](#), p. 165). However, it was custom that the woman would leave her family to join her husband’s family, which points to a traditional, automatic reaction from Rebekah ([Fischer 2021](#), p. 24). Perhaps the changing of sites, or at least the severance from the Mesopotamian threads marked by a parting blessing in Gen 24:60, enacts Rebecca in a different way that increases her agency.
- ¹⁷ It is worth noticing that Asenath is given to Joseph by Pharaoh, although Asenath is not the regent’s daughter. In this way, Pharaoh’s power exceeds the father’s power which shows how Asenath is not only entangled in a father’s house, but in a larger political network, in which a more powerful person decides over her fate.
- ¹⁸ When merchants took wives in foreign places, e.g., in Anatolia, it was carefully clarified which legal status the various wives had, and the wives in distant lands were mostly conceived as concubines with a lower status ([Radner 2017](#), p. 61).
- ¹⁹ For example, in Num 25:1, the traveling Israelites find wives from Moab that results in much death. On a more positive note, Jer 29:6–7 exhorts the exiled people in Babylon to mix and match daughters and sons.
- ²⁰ The references to verses in Tobit correspond to the longer Greek version of the book found in Codex Sinaiticus, G^{II} (cf. [Pietersma and Wright 2007](#), pp. 456–58). On the similarities between Gen 24 and the Book of Tobit, see [Miller \(2011, pp. 145–47\)](#).
- ²¹ The name of Noah’s wife, Emzara, is, e.g., found in Jubilees 4:33, and here, it is clarified that they are related.

References

- Arlinghaus, Katherine R., and Craig A. Johnston. 2019. The Importance of Creating Habits and Routine. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 13: 142–44. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Askin, Lindsey A. 2022. Binding Asmodeus: A Lexical Analysis of the Ritual and Medical Use of Fish in Tobit. In *New Perspectives on Ritual in the Biblical World*. Edited by Laura Quick and Melissa Ramos. London: T&T Clark, pp. 116–37.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berlejung, Angelika, and Marianne Grohmann, eds. 2019. *Foreign Women—Women in Foreign Lands: Studies on Foreignness and Gender in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. ORA 25. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Brand, Miryam. 2023. Rebecca: A Woman of Agency. Available online: <https://www.thetorah.com/article/rebecca-a-woman-of-agency> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

- Brenner, Athalya. 1994. *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Broodbank, Cyprian. 2018. *Die Geburt der Mediterranen Welt: Von den Anfängen bis zum klassischen Zeitalter*. Translated by Klaus Binder, and Bernd Leineweber. München: C.H. Beck.
- Denyer, Simon, and Annie Gowen. 2018. Too Many Men. *Washington Post*. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/too-many-men/> (accessed on 5 January 2024).
- Dietrich, Jan. 2009. Über Ehre und Ehrgefühl im Alten Testament. In *Der Mensch im alten Israel. Neue Forschungen zur Alttestamentlichen Anthropologie*. Edited by Kathrin Liess and Bernd Janowski. HBS 59. Freiburg: Herder, pp. 419–52.
- Dietrich, Jan. 2017. *Der Tod von eigener Hand: Studien zum Suizid im Alten Testament, Alten Ägypten und Alten Orient*. ORA 19. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Elder-Vass, Dave. 2008. Searching for Realism, Structure and Agency in Actor Network Theory. *The British Journal of Sociology* 59: 455–73. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Fischer, Irmtraud. 2021. *Liebe, Laster, Lust und Leiden. Sexualität im Alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Fresnoza-Flot, Asuncion, and Gwénola Ricordeau, eds. 2017. *International Marriages and Marital Citizenship: Southeast Asian Women on the Move*. London: Routledge.
- Frevel, Christian, ed. 2011. *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*. LHBOTS 547. London: T&T Clark.
- Frevel, Christian. 2018. *Geschichte Israels*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Hardin, James W. 2022. Houses, Households, and Social Structure. In *T&T Clark Handbook of Food in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*. Edited by Janling Fu, Cynthia Shafer-Elliott and Carol Meyers. London: T&T Clark, pp. 37–57.
- Jackson, Bernhard S. 2011. The ‘Institutions’ of Marriage and Divorce in the Hebrew Bible. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56: 221–51. [CrossRef]
- Latour, Bruno. 2007. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- López-Gómez, Daniel. 2020. What if ANT Wouldn’t Pursue Agnosticism but Care. In *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory*. Edited by Anders Blok, Ignacio Fariás and Celia Roberts. London: Routledge, pp. 4–13.
- Lorenzen, Søren, and Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme. 2023. *Kroppen i Det Gamle Testamente*. Copenhagen: Eksistensen.
- Malifouris, Lambros. 2016. *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Miller, Geoffrey David. 2011. *Marriage in the Book of Tobit*. Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 10. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Moffat, Donald P. 2014. *Ezra’s Social Drama: Identity Formation, Marriage and Social Conflict in Ezra 9 and 10*. London: T&T Clark.
- Mol, Annemarie. 2019. Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie. Sonderheft* 50: 253–69.
- Neal, David T., Wendy Wood, and Jeffrey M. Quinn. 2006. Habits: A Repeat Performance. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15: 198–202. [CrossRef]
- Niditch, Susan. 2008. *Judges*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Nolsoe, Eir. 2020. How Do People Find Love? Available online: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/society/articles-reports/2020/02/13/how-do-brits-find-love> (accessed on 12 December 2023).
- Pickering, Andrew. 1995. *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pietersma, Albert, and Benjamin G. Wright. 2007. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Quick, Laura. 2021. *Dress, Adornment, and the Body in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quick, Laura. 2022. Behemoth’s Penis, Yahweh’s Might: Competing Bodies in the Book of Job. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46: 339–57. [CrossRef]
- Radner, Karen. 2017. *Mesopotamien. Die Frühen Hochkulturen an Euphrat und Tigris*. Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Sarna, Nahum M. 1989. *Genesis*. The JPS Torah Commentary. New York: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Schlüngel-Straumann, Helen. 2000. *Tobit*. Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder.
- Southwood, Katherine E. 2017. *Marriage by Capture in the Book of Judges: An Anthropological Approach*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- Uusimäki, Elisa. 2022. An Intersectional Perspective on Female Mobility in the Hebrew Bible. *Vetus Testamentum* 72: 745–68. [CrossRef]
- Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael Patrick O’Connor. 1990. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Yee, Gale A. 2020. Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139: 7–26.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.