unfaithful, and gullible, in the latter she was devoted, compassionate, loving, and nurturing. Not surprisingly, the woman in the marriage metaphor is always Israel, whereas in the parent metaphor God can be male or female.[21] We find in these two metaphors contradictory constructions of womanhood. In real life, Hebrew women undoubtedly made important contributions to their society as mothers and wives, but in the hands of Israel's poets and demagogues, women as mothers were idealized and women as wives were problematized.[22] In both roles women were sexual beings, but their sexuality posed serious threats to society if it was not in the service of procreating legitimate heirs for their husbands.

It is important to point out that symbolizing Israel's fortunes and fate with images taken from the experiences of women was not an effort on the prophets' part to challenge, supplant, or compensate for the overwhelming masculine imagery (e.g., son, king, warrior) used throughout the Bible to symbolize God and Israel. Metaphors from the public and

private worlds of androcentric activities were firmly established in patriarchal biblical thinking. With the marriage metaphor, however, the prophets "perceived a thread of similarity" between the unique roles and experiences of ancient Israelite women and certain deplorable aspects of Israel's behavior. They perceived parallels between the measures husbands took to chastise wives and the measures God took to correct Israel. They signified Israel's disgrace and reproach by drawing parallels with the horror and shame attached to women who committed adultery and women who were ritually impure. Indeed, the experiences of married women allowed the prophets to organize Israel's history along the lines of women's sexual life cycles (e.g., marriage, menstruation, childbirth, widowhood) and according to the strict mores governing their sexual appetite (adultery and fornication). It follows, then, that the three major recurring motifs of the female-identified metaphors found in the prophetic writings are marriage/adultery, giving birth, and prostitution.[23]

On the matter of the unique bond that exists between God and Israel, the marriage metaphor (like the parent–child metaphor) conveyed the notion that the covenant relationship between God and Israel created a quasi-familial bond between the two where love and trust undergirded the relationship. But at times the love was a menacing sort, one that drove a husband (God) to plead, cajole, stalk, and threaten his wife (Israel). In this image, divine love was as uncompromising and jealous as it was compassionate and tender.[24] The husband's love was fueled by some very definite notions about the rights and privileges of the husband. Having as he did the power to divorce his wife, the authority to haul her before the cult on charges of infidelity, and the right to his wife's exclusive sexuality, the husband clearly had the upper hand in the relationship. In fact, the metaphor is comprehensible only if one concedes that indeed the husband was fully within his rights to retaliate physically against his wife for her

offenses against him.

But metaphors can also shock us with their reversals. They do not simply nor always imitate real life. They sometimes, for effect, deviate from reality and from our expectations. As we have already seen, although God, according to the metaphor, was within God's right to destroy Israel fully or to banish Israel forever for the nation's idolatry, in the end, according to all three prophets, God stood ready to be reconciled with God's servant, child, or bride Israel. Obviously, in each instance God's forgiveness would prove to be as shocking to the prophets' audiences as Israel's depravity was sure to have been. The betrayed husband forgave his depraved wife, proving himself to be the superior one in the relationship. Not only did he have social and economic power over his wife; he was also morally superior to her in that he forgave her when it was fully within his rights and power to have her stoned to death.

Finally, the prophets saw in Hebrew men's

fear of women's sexuality and bodily functions just the sort of anxiety and fears that would allow the metaphor of the promiscuous wife to convey the danger and threat that the prophets believed certain contemptible religious and social practices symbolized for Israel. Sexual imagery proved especially suitable to express the inevitability of the chaos and dishonor that were sure to descend upon Israel, just as chaos and dishonor would follow socially if one's wife failed to conduct herself properly.[25]

In the hands of Israel's poets, the marriage metaphor was not simply one of a number of metaphors innocently representing one of a number of unique aspects of divine–human relations. Instead, the marriage metaphor, with its unavoidable commentary on appropriate and inappropriate behavior for wives, permitted audiences in ancient Israelite circles to contemplate the repulsive, dishonorable side of their religious, social, and political history. The metaphor was not interested, as some have supposed, in stressing romance, intimacy, and mutuality. Rather, the metaphor focused on

belittling female judgment and condemning the wife as fickle, untrustworthy, loose, and stubborn. At the same time, the metaphor elevated the husband to the position of noble benefactor, innocent of any semblance of wrongdoing. Compared to the other four recurring metaphors, then, only the marriage metaphor lifted God's retaliations out of the realm of senseless violence and made sure that God's pardon would not be viewed as weakness on God's part. According to this metaphor in particular, in the world of love and intimacy—and given all the complexities that sex and sexuality introduce into relationships —the heart is not only unpredictable. It is downright irrational.

Conclusion

Metaphorical language is at the center of how ancient prophets conceived of and understood the world, themselves, and God. Whether relationships were personified as like that of shepherd and sheep, judge and defendant/plaintiff, king and vassal, master and slave, father and son, or husband and wife, the task was to impress upon one's audience that God can be known only through an intimate, meaningful relationship, and not through abstract contemplation devoid of commitment. Metaphors such as parent–child and more specifically the marriage metaphor envisioned a relationship that was quasi-familial. More specifically, each of the popular metaphors of the day asserted in its own way (1) that the relationship between God and humankind was a relation of unequals; (2) that that relationship was one of mutual expectations and responsibility; (3) that the burden of the relationship fell upon the subordinate partner, whose responsibility it was not to offend or

bring dishonor upon the dominant patron; and (4) that God, as the dominant partner in the relationship, had the power to punish and direct the relationship in ways that ensured the relationship's conformity to social standards.

But metaphors are products of human speech, and speech in order to be effective and capable of being understood takes place within concrete social contexts. Metaphors originate in social contexts and reinforce social contexts. This means, then, that in order to grasp how the marriage metaphor impacts a culture, one must situate the metaphor of the promiscuous wife, for example, within its social, institutional, and historical context. Audiences accept, reject, esteem, and forget metaphors in proportion to the metaphors' ability or inability to square with a web of emotional, social, political, historical, institutional data. We now turn to the matter of examining the social systems and contexts of audiences that, upon hearing God described as a raging, betrayed husband who batters and humiliates his

promiscuous wife (Israel) into subjection, would perceive some similarities with their reality.