

Henry McClure

MA Thesis Proposal Draft

4/2/2026

Proposed Title:

Expressions of God: An Examination of Gendered Imagery in Deuteronomy 32:10-18

Description of the Problem

With the rise of more critical approaches to gender, its expression, and its role in society, objections often arise in communities of faith. One of the prominent objections to a more gender-neutral vision of humanity has historically come from those with religious backgrounds. Basing their defense of gender-normativity and opposition to gender fluidity on the grounds of scripture, such opposition often leaves those who fall outside the bounds of that normativity feeling ostracized by the Church. It is important for the wellbeing of these individuals, and for the Church as a whole, that we begin to examine scripture through a more gender-neutral lens, finding ways in which images of the divine, and the imago dei by extent, can be read with a more fluid vision of gender. Examining ways in which ancient Israelite conceptions of gender differed from our own may be a significant point of departure.

Thesis Statement

The image of God in Deuteronomy 32:10-18 conveys a gender neutral understanding that would offer contemporary communities of faith in the United States not only a vision of God but a vision of humanity encompassing a broader spectrum of gender expression.

Summary of the Project

In order to explore the possibility of a more gender-fluid vision of God in ancient Israel, the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:10-18 will be examined through lenses of gendered readings in conversation with understandings of gender drawn from Near-Eastern Cultures.

Project Purpose

As discussions of gender and gender fluidity become more prominent, the contemporary church must examine its own approaches to expressions of gender and in particular, understandings of gender in relation to the divine. The idea of the *imago dei*, is a cornerstone in advocating for the inherent worth of all human beings. However, the singularly masculine image of God which has dominated U.S. American Christianity has more often been used as an argument in favor for the exclusion of those who do not fit that masculine image. Moreover, it has served to exclude those who do not see themselves as falling along the neat binary of the masculine/feminine dynamic at all. The purpose of this project is to highlight that such strict dynamics have not always been held, especially in regard to God's own portrayal in scripture. By examining the evidence for a more gender fluid depiction of God in the context of Near Eastern cultures and the Old Testament, this thesis will argue that the image of God in Deuteronomy 32:10-18 conveys a gender neutral understanding that has implications not only for theology, but also for the life and witness of local communities of faith.

Intended Audience

The intended audience of this thesis are leaders of the Episcopal Church in the United States who may wish to provide both a historical and biblical basis for gender-affirming theology. An examination on how gendered understandings of God have changed over time can serve as a

resource for those ostracized by the church because of their gender expression, and a resource for communities of faith committed to a more inclusive witness.

Learning Goals

- To examine understandings of gender within the Ancient Near Eastern context of the Deuteronomy 32.
- To explore the ways in which this Song of Moses has been viewed specifically through lenses of masculinity and femininity.
- To articulate the implications of applying gendered imagery to the divine on our understanding of human gender.
- To invite contemporary communities of the U.S. Episcopal Church into deeper witness that arises from appreciation for the breadth of gender expression.

Sample Bibliography:

Adasi, Grace Sintim, and Sanatu Fusheini. "Maternal Imagery in Bible Translation: A Comparative Analysis of Divine Nurturing Metaphors Across Indigenous Languages in Ghana." *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology* 7, no. 4 (2025): 91–100.
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Potgieter, Annette. "Images of God, the Song of Moses, and Metaphors." *Scriptura* 122, no. 1 (2023): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.7833/122-1-2087>.

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Thiessen, Matthew. "The Form and Function of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 3 (2004): 401–24. EBSCOhost.

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Preliminary Outline:

Introduction: The Cost of a Binary Approach to Gender in Local Communities of Faith

Chapter 1: An Examination of Gender and Divinity in the Ancient Near-East

Chapter 2: An Exploration of Masculine Imagery in the Song of Moses

Chapter 3: An Exploration of Feminine Imagery in the Song of Moses

Chapter 4: Implications and Application of Gender-Neutral Language for God

Conclusion: An Invitation for U.S. Episcopal Congregations

Proposed Schedule for the Work:

During the Summer of 2026, I plan on beginning my reading for the thesis. Over the Fall of 2026, while I continue research and begin structuring my thesis, I plan on taking WRRE 600 Advanced Theological Research and Writing. By the end of the semester, I will turn in my first chapter of the thesis. A first draft will be submitted to my advisor by the end of January, while a full draft will be submitted by the end of March. Final edits will be completed by the 15th of April.