Carol Meyers offers a completely revised version of her study *Discovering Eve*, published in 1988. She combines a close reading of the biblical texts with an interpretation of the archaeological sources and an anthropological approach. The revised edition integrates new research and an extended bibliography in the fields of biblical exegesis, social/cultural anthropology, archaeology, and gender studies. Meyers widens the time period of observation from Iron Age I (1200–1000 BCE) to the Iron Age as a whole (1200–586 BCE).

She distinguishes between the biblical women as narrative (and poetic) figures in the biblical texts and the Israelite women (“Everywoman Eve”) whose circumstances of life formed the background of the biblical texts. After reflecting on her “multifaceted, interdisciplinary, integrative approach” (14) in chapter 2, Meyers starts her investigation by describing the life circumstances of women and men in the ancient Near East in the Iron Age (ch. 3), as they can be reconstructed from archaeological data, social- anthropological studies, and biblical texts: living as farming people in highland settlements with special water, food, and health problems and labor demands. The agrarian environment meant hard work for both women and men in all areas of life: “The idea of work and motherhood as oppositional alternatives for women is a relatively recent
phenomenon, a product of industrialization and the separation of the workplace from the home. It is not normally found in preindustrial societies where the household was the workplace” (52).

As in the original Discovering Eve, Gen 2–3 serves as a central biblical text for Meyers’s reconstruction of the lives of Israelite women (chs. 4 and 5). Behind many misleading interpretations of Jewish and Christian tradition (e.g., “apple” and “sin,” which do not occur in the Hebrew text at all), Meyers tries to “rediscover” Eve in the Hebrew text. Summing up feminist Bible scholarship of the last three decades, both of others and her own, Meyers points out that there is more potential in the Hebrew text than traditional androcentric readings found in it. She hints at well-known aspects of the text (e.g., the inclusive meaning of ‘adam) as well as rather unattended themes of the text (e.g., the root ‘kl [eat/food] as a central Leitwort in the text and the special tasks of women in food supply). Meyers once again highlights the character of Gen 3:16–19 as an etiological tale about the difficulties of agrarian life, both for women and men. Her analysis of the different readings of Gen 3:16 results in her own translation of this verse:

I will make great your toil and many your pregnancies;  
With hardship shall you have children.  
Your turning is to your man/husband,  
And he shall rule/control you [sexually]. (102)

After reading the biblical texts Meyers returns to material culture and anthropological and ethnographic research about the Israelite household and women’s roles in it, from the narratives about Eve as prototype to daily life experiences of Israelite women during the Iron age period (ch. 6). The household as the “basic nuclear family unit” (110) and the smallest unit of Israelite society was part of a larger context: clan, tribe and people/nation/monarchy. Israelites—both men and women—always understood themselves as parts of these social unities; the individual identity did not exist separate from the collective identity. Once again Meyers underlines that the binary between “public” and “private” domains results from the industrialization but is not an appropriate category for ancient Israelite society: “Because the Israelite household was the workplace, that is, the fundamental economic unit, and because its activities entailed social relations beyond the household…, interactions with the larger community on matters of social and political import were part of the lived experience of both women and men” (123).

In her description of women’s work in household maintenance Meyers distinguishes between economic, reproductive, and sociopolitical activities (ch. 7) and religious activities (ch. 8). “Maintenance activities” (125) serves as an umbrella term for economic activities such as food-processing (e.g., grinding and baking), textile production, and the
making of implements and installations (producing ceramics, making of baskets, wall construction). Reproductive tasks comprise not only pregnancy and birth but also the education and teaching of children. Under the label “sociopolitical activities” Meyers investigates informal networks of women and inter-settlement connections: “Women’s household maintenance activities were simultaneously community maintenance activities” (143). In chapter 8 Meyers describes the religious activities of women besides the journeys to the temple and the “official” cult as part of household activities: in the contexts of health care, reproduction, rituals in the life circle around birth and death, festivals, and feasts. Meyers bases her thesis of the household as the “primary location for ritual activities in Iron Age Israel” (149) more on archaeological analysis than on biblical evidence. She admits that “many utilitarian objects were also used for rituals” and sometimes “served both ordinary and cultic purposes” (149). Meyers states that two conceptions of religious activities are misleading because they are often ascribed to men versus women, namely, the opposition between the national or “official” state cult and household or “popular” religious activities as well as the dichotomy between religion and “magic”: “Both are forms of communication with the divine and are used by both women and men to relate to supernatural powers in traditional societies” (150).

Chapter 9 is dedicated to the professional roles of women in ancient Israel: health-care specialists, prophets, sages, judges, musicians, royal women, and others. Meyers’s thesis is that professional women with special tasks and names are more visible in the Hebrew Bible than many anonymous women about whom we do not have any evidence.

Meyers questions the concept of the ancient patriarchal society in general. Instead, she draws a picture of many different women fulfilling multiple tasks in the agrarian culture like their male partners: “Everywoman Eve of the agrarian settlements of ancient Israel emerges … as a woman with considerable agency and power, a complement to her spouse in carrying out the myriad tasks of an agrarian household—hardly a subservient, passive, and inferior housewife” (203).

Sometimes the differences between texts from the Hebrew Bible from various periods are less visible than general lines of interpretation. Analyzing the biblical texts, Meyers does not distinguish between the different time periods of their origins. Nevertheless, the merits of her study lie in the combination of exegetical work on the biblical texts with archaeological and anthropological research. An important achievement of this book is the overview of research about the manifold tasks of women in ancient Israelite society. Being written in a clear and understandable language, it gives a valuable introduction to exegetical, anthropological, and ethnographic research about the role of Israelite women from the twelfth to the sixth century BCE.