

# **The Conflict and Resolution between he and she: Re-reading the *Sotah* Text (Numbers 5:11-31)**

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**Abstract:** The *sotah* text, Numbers 5:11-31, is one of the most debated biblical text in Torah. Through centuries, scholars have tried to reconstruct the original layers of its sources through historical critical studies. More recently, literary criticism appears to triumph over the old source critical studies of this text among scholars. However, I reckon both approaches reveal important messages about the *sotah*. In this essay, I first examine the studies of source criticism and redaction criticism of the *sotah*, and conclude that the *sotah* is consisted of two strata: the water ordeal stratum and the ritual-oath stratum; and the intention of the redactor is to stress the possible innocence of the wife. Then I take the *sotah* as a coherent unity, read it from the perspective of literary criticism. This essay argues that the *sotah* is a text mainly about solving the jealousy of man, rather than the adultery of the woman. Under the canonical context of the book of Numbers, the *sotah* reflects the distrust of Israel toward God's promise. *Sotah*, the text which deals with "the woman suspected of adultery", should be reconsidered as the text which deals with the jealous husband.

**Keywords:** Sotah, Wife Suspected of Adultery, Source Criticism, Literary Criticism, Hebrew Bible Hermeneutics