

## BOOK REVIEW

*Women's Bible Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012). Reviewed by David J. Zucker.

As people who engage seriously with Tanakh, readers of *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* are well aware that the vast majority of the human figures named in the Bible are male. Women's voices too often are either completely silenced or simply not presented. Throughout history, men's voices totally dominated commentary, and then scholarship, on the Bible. It has only been in the last decades that women's voices, both Jewish and non-Jewish, have come of age, certainly in the field of scholarship. In the early 1990's, Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe edited *The Women's Bible Commentary*. That volume, written by women from a woman's or feminist perspective, became a bestseller. The audience was both women and men.

This is an updated and expanded version. Running to over 650 pages, it is about 50 percent larger than the original work. This present commentary features articles dealing with each book of the Tanakh, plus the Christian Scriptures, as well as those works known as the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books. Since the primary audience for this work is the Christian community, the order of books in the Hebrew Bible follows the Protestant tradition: the Pentateuch, followed by the historical books, the Wisdom/Poetry section, and the Prophets. Special articles are devoted, among others, to "Eve and Her Interpreters," "Sarah, Hagar, and Their Interpreters," "Miriam and Her Interpreters," and "Jephtha's Daughter and Her Interpreters." There are also special articles in the sections dealing with the Apocrypha and Christian Scriptures. Other articles of note include "When Women Interpret the Bible."

The editors address some of the profound changes in feminist biblical criticism in the past two decades. "Issues that were just beginning to be explored the hermeneutical significance of sexual identity, analysis of masculinity, and postcolonial positioning" are now part of feminist criticism. Further, there

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has been an explosion of feminist biblical critics. Many authors featured in the original volume appear here, but they have revised their chapters, sometimes significantly. There also are the works of younger scholars. While recognizing that feminist biblical studies are a worldwide phenomenon, this volume focuses on North American feminist scholarship. Many chapters are but a half-dozen pages in length, others that are of particular interest in terms of feminist studies receive ten to twenty. Chapters addressing each of the biblical books, as well as those devoted to the literature of the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical writings, feature three sections: Introduction, Content, and Bibliography.

In the chapter entitled "When Women Interpret the Bible," the author notes what sets this volume apart from others. It is "its authors' acknowledged commitment to read the biblical texts through the varied lenses of women's experiences in ancient and modern religious and cultural contexts." She notes that for women no less than men "the Bible bears a variety of kinds of religious authority: guide for conduct, rule of faith, inerrant source of truth (factual and/or moral), and revelation of God." Yet at the same time, for many, but not all within "these communities, the authority of the Bible is explicit, as well as implicit, but often ambiguous and finally ambivalent, especially for women." In fact, "women reading the Bible have found themselves on alien and even hostile turf." For many women readers, "the silence of women and their silencing – the contempt in which they are held and the violence with which they are treated – in the Bible mirror the realities of many women's lives. For them, the Bible is experienced as giving a divine stamp of approval to their suffering." Furthermore, the author of this article addresses "the problem of language and gender . . . [the] so-called generic use of words like 'man,' 'brother,' and 'mankind,' . . . [that] obscures or even negates the participation of women," as well as the problematic use of the male pronouns referring to God (He, Him) and how to convey the idea that "God is beyond human categories of gender."

This book will appeal to some readers of *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, who may gain a new perspective, learn from these essays, and also draw upon the bibliographical sources for further study.