

J. CHERYL EXUM, *Samson and Delilah: Selected Essays* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2020). Pp. xii + 321. Hardback. £75/US\$95/€80.

The story of Samson covers just four chapters in the book of Judges (13–16); Delilah appears only in Chapter 16; however, their names are widely known and their stories have been re-told, dramatised and captured in art on multiple occasions. In this volume of collected essays Exum explores these characters from a literary, theological and cultural lens exploring different facets of the narrative, the central characters, including Samson's father and unnamed mother, and the understandings which are often read into the text. The essays are gathered from work Exum has done over forty years since her doctoral work into literary patterns and rhetoric in the Samson saga.

The book is divided into four main sections: Form and Meaning, comprising four close analyses of the biblical text; Literary and Feminist Readings, which consider Samson as comic or tragic hero and the portrayal of the four main women within this story; Cultural Afterlives, using depictions of Samson and Delilah in art, literature and film to consider the way the text has been popularly received; and a conclusion, which considers the breadth of possible readings of Samson's character including Samson as freedom fighter, terrorist, trickster and as symbolically Israel.

There are a number of repeated themes throughout the essays, including the fact that Samson did not choose to be a Nazirite, interesting because of the emphasis placed on this identity by many commentators. Exum also frequently refers to the fact that Delilah is assumed to be a Philistine, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the text. The idea of knowing and not knowing, that which is revealed and that which is assumed is echoed throughout the book, not the least in terms of each of the characters' motivations and feelings.

Given this is a collection of essays written for different purposes over many years, repetition is not unexpected. While each chapter is interesting and able to stand alone, reading the collection together brings a fuller understanding of the interplay and connected ideas that Exum has explored over her years of considering this text. Chapter 7 is particularly interesting because it reveals Exum's softened idea of the Samson character through her encounter with Lovis Corinth's painting *The Blinded Samson*. This and a number of other paintings portraying Samson and/or Delilah are reproduced in the book to allow the reader to fully understand the elements that are being considered. At one point, Exum also asks the reader to pause, find and listen to a recording of the love duet from Saint-Saëns's opera, *Samson et Dalila*, in order to appreciate the portrayal of Delilah in this work.

Exum's fine scholarship and accessible writing is on display in this work. She is able to traverse a wide variety of approaches that allow this short narrative to be considered from perspectives which illuminate the text, common readings,

interpretations and representations of the story, and the gaps between them. This text would make a fine addition to reading lists, as well as being a highly enjoyable read for the discerning reader.

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