

Genesis. Edited by Athalya Brenner, Archie Chi Chung Lee, and Gale A. Yee. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. Pp. xvi + 344.

This volume on Genesis brings together readings from contributors situated in diverse contexts (geographically, socially, culturally, religiously, and so forth) and/or concerned with a variety of issues (gender, class, family). Following the direction set by previous works on contextual biblical interpretation (like *Reading from This Place* [in two volumes] and the *Global Bible Commentary*), the Texts@Contexts series—of which *Genesis* is the first volume—attempts to offer more by providing (according to the editors) volumes that are not overridden by readings from communities of faith, and theme selections that are not dictated by the editors.

This volume has three major parts with seventeen chapters divided amongst them. Part One, “Beginnings: The Creation Revisited,” has nine chapters that focus largely on texts from Genesis 1-11. In Chapter 1, Amadi Ahiamadu offers a critical assessment of the creation mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 from the context of Nigeria. He argues that the text has been interpreted (or misinterpreted) in superlative terms to serve the interests of Westerners; this has resulted in the loss of Nigerian lands and in various ecological/environmental crises. At the heart of these crises lies the corrosion of human rights culture, which, according to Ahiamadu, needs to be restored and enhanced. Chapter 2 provides an African reading of the Genesis creation accounts by David Tuesday Adamo. Using comparative analysis, Adamo seeks to draw implications from the similarities and differences between the Genesis creation accounts and African creation myths, including stories from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Congo, and Sudan.

In Chapter 3, Athalya Brenner, based on her reading of Mary B. Kelly’s book, *Goddess Embroideries of the Balkan Lands and the Greek Islands*, reconsiders the identification of the trees in the garden with gender, especially the Tree of Life as a female symbol. While there are instances and traces of this association in the Hebrew Bible, there is no need to force this reading onto other texts where such associations are not present. In Chapter 4, Philip Venter reads Genesis 1:1-2:4a from the context of South Africa and focuses on investigating the category of gender as it features the ideology of the body. Though Venter offers a reading that differs from the current trend of interpretation, there is no clear link between his reading and his own context. His interest in evolutionary epistemology somehow blurs the meaning of the text. In Chapter 5, Edwin Zulu reads Genesis 3 from a Ngoni Christian context. Zulu acknowledges the incorporation of cultural elements into the Ngoni brand of Christianity, and directs his attention to the division of responsibilities in Ngoni society according to gender. The main aim of his reading of Genesis 3 is to provide an interpretation that would elevate women from their subjugated status in his community.

Chapter 6 moves from the predominantly African perspectives of the previous chapters to readings from Asia. Yan Lin, a Chinese biblical scholar, does a cross-textual reading of Genesis 1-3 with ancient Chinese creation myths. Her key category of analysis is what she calls “the remoteness complex,” which is how she describes her experience of disorientation in different situations. Along that methodological route,

Archie C. C. Lee, in Chapter 7, cross-reads the flood narratives of Genesis with a Chinese myth from the minority Naxi people. His focus is on the conception of the divine-human relationship in the religious world of the biblical flood narrative and that of the Naxis. Lee notes that union between the divine and human has never been condemned in Chinese literature and mythology. Instead, it is taken as a special religious experience.

Mark Rathbone, in Chapter 8, continues the African reading of texts by focusing on Genesis 11:1-9. He sets the pro-apartheid, neo-colonial reading of the text found in a document compiled by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1976 against an anti-colonial interpretation of the same text by Desmond Tutu in 1983. He then adds to these readings what he calls “nonscholarly” readings, or interpretations of texts by readers who have not received formal education. The latter is informed by a holistic cultural matrix that fosters unity. Rathbone concludes by discussing the methodological implications of his essay. Chapter 9 closes Part One with Yael Shemesh’s study of vegetarian ideology in Talmudic literature and traditional biblical exegesis. As a vegan and a religious person, she seeks to find texts that support vegetarian ideology.

Part Two, “Redreaming with Joseph and Others,” has four chapters that enter the Joseph story from various angles. In Chapter 10, Carol R. Fontaine opens this second section by “reading around” Joseph the slave in multicultural and interfaith contexts. The key issue she brings into her reading is human trafficking. In Chapter 11, Meira Polliack interprets the story of Joseph based on personal experience of trauma vis-à-vis theories of trauma and trauma resolution. In Chapter 12, Gerald West and Thulani Ndlazi read the Joseph story (Genesis 37-50) from the context of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. They explain the positive impact of contextual Bible study in their context, and the need for biblical interpretation to move from merely reading texts to positive actions. Chapter 13 closes this part with an Asian take on Joseph by Angela Wong from the context of Hong Kong. Employing a cross-textual reading like Lin and Lee did in Part I, she focuses on dream stories within and outside the Joseph narrative in Genesis over against dream stories from her culture. In both cases, she pays particular attention to women’s dreams and exposes a gap in the biblical narratives.

Part Three, “Issues of Gender, Family, and Class,” is comprised of four chapters that tackle texts based on social issues such as gender, family, and class. Chapter 14 begins with a new look at the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) by Yairah Amit from an Israeli context. Because this story is located within the Joseph story, Amit argues that it is an interpolation that provides two viewpoints for the origin of the clan of Judah. It also serves as a platform for two subjects: marriage with non-Jews and levirate marriage. In Chapter 15, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, an African-American, brings a multidimensional way of reading stories found in Genesis 1-9 from her womanist interdisciplinary context as a scholar, musician, pedagogue, ordained minister, athlete, quilter, and lover of God, rose gardens, and life. Her reading opens up for her insights that expose different forms of injustice at various levels. Kari Latvus, from Finland, does an intercontextual analysis of the Hagar story (Genesis 16 and 21) in Chapter 16. His reading aims to offer a tool to connect the text with ancient and present realities

in order to read the Hagar story in both contexts. Latvus views Hagar as a forerunner and companion of all immigrant women who live and work in forced reality. Finally, in Chapter 17, the volume returns to the context of Africa with yet another reading of Genesis 16 and 21 by David Tuesday Adamo and Eriwierho Francis Eghubare. They begin by faulting Euro-American Old Testament scholars for de-Africanizing African influence upon Scripture. In contrast, they claim that works of Afrocentric scholars re-establish this connection in some ways. This reconnection is necessary to make sure that African biblical women (like Hagar) are lifted out of the footnotes of history and placed in the mainstream of the salvation plan.

This volume is a significant contribution to biblical scholarship, particularly contextual biblical interpretation. It underlines the fact that there is more to biblical interpretation than Western perspectives, and that interpretation is always contextual. However, as an Oceanic islander, I have read the volume from the context of Oceania and my general impression of the chapters in the volume is influenced by Oceanic perspectives. I must say that the volume gives me a blend of excitement and disappointment. On the one hand, I am excited that it contributes to the balancing of “a longstanding and grave imbalance” in biblical scholarship. On the other hand, I am disappointed that the volume seems to tolerate other imbalances. First, there are methodological gaps. Despite the best efforts of contributors to read texts from their respective contexts, the majority of them still subscribe to using Western methodologies. Contextual biblical interpretation in my opinion needs more than just reading texts in contexts. It requires constructing new contextual methods for interpretation using indigenous ways of knowing and ways of being. Emphasis should shift from contextualizing texts to contextualizing methods. Second, if volumes on contextual interpretation are serious about contextual matters, there has to be some kind of representational balance rather than, as is the case with this volume, over-representing contexts from Africa and Asia. Third, most, if not all, contributors to this volume bring into their readings “issues” from their various contexts. As a Pacific islander, celebration is an integral part of our cultures. We have problems, but we do not dwell so much on pains; we also celebrate our success. Contextual interpretation would be a more positive approach if it attempted to celebrate the richness of diverse cultures and to use them in formulating new approaches. Last, though not least, I finished reading this volume saddened by the fact that it is very much continental; all contributors are from continents. As an islander, I think there is a need to “de-continentalize” contextual biblical interpretation and allow more space for non-continental readers like those from the Caribbean and Oceania.

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