

“Judith” by Corrine Carvalho

Reviewed by Mark. K. George, Iliff School of Theology

Corrine Carvalho’s helpful commentary on the book of Judith is part of the volume *The Old Testament and Apocrypha* in the new the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*. In the course of eight brief sections, Carvalho leads the reader through both an overview of the story as a whole and its major sections (Judith 1:1–4:15; 5:1–6:21; 7:1–8:36; 9:1–10:10; 10:11–12:9; 12:10–13:10; 13:11–16:25), concluding with a “Works Cited” section containing twenty-one sources for readers wanting to pursue further research on Judith.

The Introduction quickly and succinctly addresses textual and historical questions, including date of writing, original languages, canonical status in various traditions, historical fiction in the book, and the book’s overall literary structure. Subsequent sections provide commentary on each block of text. Each section is organized according to the three levels established for the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*. “The Text in Its Ancient Context” asks about probable ancient meanings; “The Text in the Interpretive Tradition” considers subsequent interpretations; and “The Text in Contemporary Discussion” is concerned with important problems raised by the text for contemporary readers. Carvalho’s essay is strongest in terms of the first area, the ancient context. Not only does she provide a useful paraphrase of the text and note contributions of recent scholarship, she highlights additional matters of interest, such as connections with other biblical books, characters, and themes. Her work provides a good starting point for further exegetical explorations of Judith.

The “Interpretive Tradition” sections generally are very short, with the exception of Judith cutting off Holofernes’ head (Judith 13). Carvalho considers a range of contexts for interpretation of the Judith story, from theology to art, midrash to literature and opera, authors in

late antiquity to recent feminist interpretations. It is unfortunate that length limitations for the entry prevent more being said about these interpretations, especially given how frequently Judith and Holofernes appear in Western art.

The sections on “Contemporary Discussion” highlight ways in which issues, actions, and ideas from Judith engage current discussions, such as critical spatial studies, contemporary movies (e.g., *Abraham Lincoln*, *Vampire Hunter* [2012]), colonialism, and sexual violence. Carvalho identifies ways interpreters both attempt to enlist Judith for particular agendas as well as those parts of the story interpreters avoid or downplay. Such honesty about interpretive practices presents an opening for readers to consider their own biases and agendas for Judith.

Overall, Carvalho’s essay accomplishes the goals set forth for the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, both in terms of the three levels featured in each entry in the commentary, and as a brief commentary on Judith. These features help make it an appealing place to begin research on the book, appropriate for undergraduate students, seminary students, pastors, and lay readers alike.