

Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne. By Wilda C. Gafney. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. v + 323 pages. \$35.00 (paper).
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In the introduction to her book, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, Wilda C. Gafney invites her reader to the “supper table” for meal sharing and conversation. She uses this “guiding metaphor” to situate her particular interpretive approach, which she identifies as womanist and feminist (2). Aiming to reconstruct the lives and meaning of those characters in the text that have been forgotten, silenced, and obscured in translation, Gafney forges a unique path within the growing body of work on the women of the Bible.

Gafney structures the book in short sections that deal with women characters from the Torah and monarchical period. Each section includes a translation and analysis. Gafney also intermittently offers a “midrash” inspired by both the rabbinical tradition and her “sanctified imagination,” a term taken from black preaching (3). Set off in italics, these midrashic explorations fill in the gaps of the biblical text and imagine backstories, interior lives, and even new characters. Such imaginative speculations also spill into Gafney’s nonitalicized and womanist analyses. For example, she raises questions about Bathsheba’s personal history, relationships, and motivations, even though the text leaves these character elements unstated (216).

Several features distinguish this book and serve to reveal biblical women in different ways. First, Gafney’s consistent attention to the possibilities and pitfalls of translation (appendix B deals with translation specifically) leads to her own illuminating translations while also uncovering the way that traditional translations often euphemistically veil the violence against women implied in the Hebrew text. Second, while Gafney treats the often-studied Torah matriarchs and royal women of Israel, she also includes sections about briefly mentioned and rarely noticed women characters such as Asenath (Gen 41:45), Serach (Num 26:46), Zeruah (1 Kgs 11:26), and Azubah (1 Kgs 22:42). This inclusion broadens the reader’s sense of women’s influence in ancient Israel while also showing the breadth of what the biblical text eclipses with respect to their stories. Finally, Gafney’s womanist approach can overturn traditional interpretations and open up new and important meanings in the biblical text. Her reading of Jezebel stands out in this regard. She notes that black women “have been regularly constructed as Jezebels and castigated for that construction” and then proceeds to reclaim the example of religious and marital fidelity expressed in Jezebel’s unwavering relationship with her gods and her husband (240).

Thus, Gafney's work is immensely valuable in its reinterpretation and reconstruction of biblical women; however, it is sometimes problematic in that those same midrashic interpretations can obscure the historical layering of complex texts. For example, in her midrash on Shiphrah and Puah, she wonders how Pharaoh discovered that these midwives were not killing the Hebrew infants, and how long it took for this discovery. These kinds of questions, found throughout Gafney's book, stand outside a historical-critical framework. While more sophisticated readers of this volume understand the methodological distinctions operative in Gafney's work, unversed students of the Bible may lose the historical-critical thread that remains foundational for any interpretative work of the Bible.

This caution, however, should not deter many kinds of readers from enjoying and learning from this lively book. Gafney intends this volume for "religious readers" of the Bible in a variety of contexts (2), and she provides easily accessible material on each individual text. Because Gafney engages a variety of exegetical practices, both preachers and teachers will find her book useful. Gafney's midrashic material, in turn, might inspire new thoughts on the text among these same audiences. Moreover, undergraduate students, with varying levels of familiarity with the Bible, might find in this seamless combination of interpretation and imagination the spark that leads them deeper into biblical studies.

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The Challenge of Evil: Grace and the Problem of Suffering. By William Greenway. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016. x + 148 pages. \$30.00 (paper).

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Early in his monograph, Greenway presents Charles Taylor's claim that the modern West's "greatest spiritual challenge" lies in maintaining a realism about the atrocities of evil and our moral complicity in them without surrendering to the nihilism that often results from condemnation of the world and ourselves (6–10). Greenway accepts Taylor's challenge and proceeds to offer a compelling neo-Levinasian, Dostoevskian, Christian-philosophical response.

Following Levinas, Greenway argues that our experience of being "seized by Faces"—that is, of passionate concern for others—discloses agape as the fundamental dimension of our ultimate reality. Attention to this reality exposes the falsity of the atomistic "I" that shapes the Enlightenment