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Alice Bach (ed). *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999. Pp. xxvi + 539. No Price Listed.

[1] In this single volume Alice Bach has brought together 33 previous published essays (and one essay published here for the first time), demonstrating the best of feminist interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Each of the essays challenges its reader to read the text of the Hebrew Bible with attention beyond its dominant (male) interests, and so examine the text's attitudes toward women and their status in Israelite society. "Any time any reader reads against the grain of the text, reads with a suspicious eye towards how the narrator wants you to read, you are performing a feminist reading" (xxvi). Although many of the essays are widely and easily accessible in their original publication, and thus the scholar of feminist biblical interpretation might find this collection superfluous, their collection in this single volume Reader provides a splendid introduction to the approaches and insights of feminist interpretation especially for students and those new to the academic field.

[2] Although all Readers inevitably omit what some regard as significant or even essential essays, Bach has collected a fair cross-section of current feminist scholarship. All the essays are by prominent scholars in the field. Most of the essays were originally published in the 1990s. Both social-historical and literary approaches are well-represented. To compensate for the necessarily limited selection of essays, two extensive bibliographies - on feminist interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and on feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies - are included at the end of the volume.

[3] Bach provides the essays with an introduction that places feminist biblical interpretation within its hermeneutical context. Particularly helpful for the student and the newcomer, Bach includes a series of questions and guidelines for "jump-starting" a feminist reading of the biblical texts. Bach has attempted to arrange the essays into groups focusing on a similar approach or theme. Although heuristically useful, the groupings are not completely successful for several of the essays defy a simple classification. One group of essays that deserves note is the final group in which Bach has assembled five essays to form a "case history" on the interpretation of Numbers 5:11-31. Each of the essays provides a different

(not always feminist) reading of the passage, and together they provide an example of what is gained and lost through feminist interpretation.

[4] Because all but one of the essays have been previously published, and many are well-known among biblical scholars, a list of the essays is sufficient:

The Social World of Women in Ancient Israel

The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus (Phillis Bird)

"And the Women Knead Dough": The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah" (Susan Ackerman)

Women in the Domestic Economy of Early Israel (Carol Meyers)

Structure and Patriarchal Functions in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene: Some Preliminary Notes (Esther Fuchs)

The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book (Howard Eilberg-Schwartz)

Reading Women into the Bible

Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative (Esther Fuchs)

Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9 (Carol A. Newsom)

The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts (Phillis Bird)

His Story Versus Her Story: Male Genealogy and Female Strategy in the Jacob Cycle (Nelly Furman)

The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible (Esther Fuchs)

Who's Afraid of "The Endangered Ancestress"? (J. Cheryl Exum)

Goddess and Women of Magic

A Heifer from Thy Stable: On Goddesses and the Status of Women in the Ancient Near East (Carole R. Fontaine)

The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel (Susan Ackerman)

The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel? (Claudia V. Camp)

Rereading Women in the Bible

Reading Strategies and the Story of Ruth (Edward L. Greenstein)

"A Son is Born to Naomi!": Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth (Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn)

The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender (Reuven Kimelman) Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah (Phyllis Tribble)

Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible

Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible (Tikva Frymer-Kensky)

Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael (Susan Niditch)

Dealing/With/Women: Daughters in the Book of Judges (Mieke Bal)

Adultery in the House of David: The Metanarrative of Biblical Scholarship and the Narratives of the Bible (Regina M. Schwartz)

Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible (Alice Bach)

Sacrifice and Salvation: Otherness and Domestication in the Book of Judith: Amy-Jill Levine)

Judith, Holding the Tale of Herodotus (Mark Stephen Caponigro)

Feminist Identities in Biblical Interpretation

Rereading the Body Politic: Women and Violence in Judges 21 (Alice Bach)

Transforming the Nature of Community: Toward a Feminist People of Israel (Judith Plaskow)

With a Song in Her Heart: Listening to Scholars Listening for Miriam (Alice Bach)

Roundtable Discussion: Women with Disabilities - A Challenge to Feminist Theology (Elly Elshout, facilitator)

A Case History: Numbers 5:11-31

The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31) (Tikva Frymer-Kensky)

The Case of the Suspected Adulteress, Numbers 5:11-31: Redaction and Meaning (Jacob Milgrom)

Numbers 5 and the "Waters of Judgment" (Jack Sasson)

Accusations of Adultery: A Study of Law and Scribal Practice in Numbers 5:11-31 (Michael Fishbane)

Good to the Last Drop: Viewing the Sotah (Numbers 5:11-31) as the Glass is Half Empty and Wondering How to View It Half Full (Alice Bach)

[5] This Reader would make an excellent supplementary textbook for undergraduate (upper class) and graduate courses on the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, or courses specifically on the role of women in the Hebrew Bible. The Reader also provides a good introduction for those who want an overview of feminist biblical interpretation.

Reviewed by Ronald A. Simkins, Creighton University