



Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration (Oxford Theological Monographs)

Melissa Jackson

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Comedy is both *relative*, linked to a time and culture, and *universal*, found pervasively across time and culture. The Hebrew Bible contains comedy of this relative, yet universal nature. Melissa A. Jackson engages the Hebrew Bible via a comic reading and brings that reading into conversation with feminist-critical interpretation, in resistance to any lingering stereotype that comedy is fundamentally non-serious or that feminist critique is fundamentally unsmiling.

Dividing comic elements into categories of literary devices, psychological/social features, and psychological/social function, Jackson examines the narratives of a number of biblical characters for evidence of these comic elements. The characters include the trickster matriarchs, the women involved in the infancy of Moses, Rahab, Deborah and Jael, Delilah, three of David's wives (Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba), Jezebel, Ruth, and Esther. Nine particularly instructive points of contact between comedy and feminist interpretation emerge: both (1) resist definition, (2) exist amidst a self/other, subject/object dichotomy, (3) emphasise and utilise context, (4) promote creativity, (5) acknowledge the concept of distancing, (6) work towards revelation, (7) are subversive, (8) are concerned with containment and control, and (9) enable survival. The use of comedy as an interpretive lens for the Hebrew Bible is not without difficulties for feminist interpretation. While maintaining an uncomfortable, even painful, awareness of the hold patriarchy retains on the Hebrew Bible, feminist critics can still choose to allow comedy's revelatory, subversive, survivalist nature to do its work revealing, subverting, and surviving.

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