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Amit, Yairah

Judges: Introduction and Commentary [in Hebrew]

Mikra Leyisra'el: A Bible Commentary for Israel

Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1999. Pp. 337.
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Amit, a professor of biblical studies at Tel-Aviv University, has offered an impressive addition to the significant Mikra Leyisra'el series. This series is aimed at the knowledgeable Israeli layperson, and attempts to blend the best of critical and literary study of the Bible with an awareness of the text's role in Jewish and world tradition. Amit is ideally suited to write the commentary on Judges. She completed a dissertation on Judges directed by Meir Sternberg in 1984; this was recently revised and published as *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Yet, her interests are not purely literary in the narrow sense of the word, but are combined with a clear awareness of the status of these texts as historiography. This may be seen in her recent work *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Seminar 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

The strength and weakness of this commentary lie in its scope—as a commentary aimed at a popular audience, it is moderate in size, and not overly technical. It thus cannot be compared to standard commentaries, such as the classic 1895 ICC commentary of George F. Moore, of over five hundred pages, or the more recent posthumous commentary *Judges 1-5* by Barnabas Lindars (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), which covers the first five chapters in over three hundred pages. Too many recent commentaries have confused the genre of commentary with that of scholarly article or monograph, and Amit, along with the editors of the series, are to be commended for their moderation, which results in a useful, readable book that does not bog down under detail.

The "Introduction" (pp. 3-22) deals with the expected issues such as the structure and editing of the book, its status as historiography, the versions, etc. It is rather mainstream in the positions it offers, with one significant exception. Based on the paucity of Dtr terminology, the existence of non-Dtr terminology, and the important place of stories concerning Northern judges, Amit suggests (pp. 14-15) that much of Judges reached its current form before the sixth century, and is largely a pre-Deuteronomistic Judean work. While this claim is not unique to her, it flies in the face of much recent work on biblical

historiography, which tends to date material to later and later periods of time.

A commentary should be judged by the extent to which it addresses issues that the text might raise for the average reader. With this in mind, I will analyze aspects of Amit's treatment of three sections, taken from three different parts of Judges: the story of the angel at Bochim (2:1-5), the Samson birth narrative (ch. 13), and the first chapter of the concubine of Gibeah pericope (ch. 19).

Judges 2:1-5 is strange, and it feels out of place. Amit, who is particularly attuned to issues of editing and literary placement, convincingly suggests that this pericope is directly connected to what precedes, and reflects a punishment of the northern tribes for not dispossessing the Canaanites. This is explained briefly in a narrative section (p. 47) which precedes the verse-by-verse commentary; this format, of preceding the detailed analysis with an overview that anticipates the conclusions and frames the unit for the reader, works very well. She follows the analysis (pp. 48-49) with a short appendix (pp. 49-50), one of fifteen in the book; this one succinctly examines the connection between traditions concerning Bochim and those about Bethel.

I finish these three and a half pages understanding the material better than when I had started, and several of my questions are answered. Yet, I do not know from the commentary how this separate unit came about. Though the commentary contains several references to earlier biblical material, I have no clue whether Amit believes that this is a late passage, if it is patterned after particular passages, and if the fact that it has certain phrases found in Deuteronomy makes it Dtr. The commentary relies too much on medieval commentary and not enough on comparative philology in explaining the difficult words such as צַדִּים in v. 3. I also find the very brief bibliography (containing only Hebrew and English versions of the same article by Amit) overly narrow.

The treatment of Judges 13 confirms these observations about the nature of the commentary. Difficult philological issues (e.g. v. 19 וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת) are not given adequate attention. The important essay by Adele Reinhartz ("Samson's Mother: An Unnamed Protagonist," *JSOT* 55 [1992], 25-37) is not cited, and its argument concerning why "Mrs. Manoah" is unnamed is not mentioned, nor does Amit here even allude to the possibility raised by Reinhartz and others that Samson's birth derived from angelic conception. Anyone writing a short commentary needs to make choices, and especially in this format, must exclude material; I feel that Amit has here excluded material that is crucial for understanding the story.

The format likewise limits Amit's discussion of the concubine of Gibeah passage. Given the current interests of biblical scholarship, it is surprising to see no reference to feminist treatments of the text, such as the classic exposition in Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT 13; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 64-91. Amit offers a very useful chart of the literary connections between Judges 19 and the Sodom pericope in Gen 19 (p. 288). However, she assumes rather than proves that the

Judges text builds on Genesis, rather than vice versa. I agree with her, but given that she cites on p. 284 the article by Niditch which argues otherwise, she might have explained her position more explicitly, especially for an Israeli audience which would likely automatically assume that Torah material must be earlier than Judges.

In sum, this is a useful commentary which is somewhat hamstrung by its size. Much of what it says is correct and insightful, but its bibliography is very limited, and it frequently does not answer important questions or engage alternate scholarly opinions. It does, however, conclude with a superb set of indices of various sorts, including an index of literary terms, and of grammatical terms; other commentaries should follow this example. This volume will not replace Moore's long commentary, Burney's textual notes, or the various German studies of the book's Deuteronomistic layering, but its level-headed approach and great literary sensitivity make it important for any serious scholar of Judges.