

TEXT, IMAGE, AND OTHERNESS
IN CHILDREN'S BIBLES

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TEXT, IMAGE, AND OTHERNESS IN CHILDREN'S BIBLES

What Is in the Picture?

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WHAT IS IN THE PICTURE?

Edited by

Caroline Vander Stichele

and

Hugh S. Pyper

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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What Is in the Picture?

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For Athalya Brenner

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASBR	Amsterdam Studies in the Bible and Religion
BI	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEV	Contemporary English Version
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KJV	King James Version

LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck et al. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJV	New Jewish Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

Caroline Vander Stichele and Hugh S. Pyper

Children's Bibles are not only widely distributed; they are also often the first contact people have with the Bible, and as such they can shape their perception of its stories and characters at an early age. The pictures in such Bibles also play an important role in how certain characters and events are remembered later in life. Think, for instance, of Adam and Eve or Noah's ark, but also more disturbing events such as the Akedah. Such images not only illustrate the events narrated in the biblical text, sometimes they even have a story of their own to tell. The balance between text and image is not always the same either, but can shift in one or other direction, sometimes giving precedence to the text, sometimes to the image. The relationship and even tension between text and image is the main topic of this book, and it is discussed from different angles in the essays. The material under discussion not only includes children's Bibles in the more traditional sense, but also more recent phenomena such as manga Bibles and animated films for children.

This volume connects with research on the history of children's Bibles, such as Ruth Bottigheimer's *The Bible for Children* (1996), but in many respects offers new perspectives, which are intentionally diverse in both method and scope. The connection between the contributions is their shared focus on the representation of others in predominantly Hebrew Bible stories. As a whole this volume intends to give concrete examples of approaches to particular stories rather than making any claim to comprehensiveness as such. It also engages an array of different approaches and theoretical lenses through which to view the relationship between text and image in children's Bibles. This volume focuses on the interaction between text and image in Bibles for children up to age twelve. The theme discussed in the contributions to this volume is the way various others are represented in illustrations to Bible stories as retold or repackaged for this

age group of readers. The others in question may be women, foreigners, enemies, children, disabled people, poor people, "bad" people. This topic is dealt with from a variety of angles and/or ideology-critical approaches, including gender studies and postcolonial studies. Questions discussed in the contributions to this volume are: What stories are included and illustrated in children's Bibles? What interpretative choices are made in the process? How are characters represented in both text and image? What childhood reading is assumed in the text? What ideological implications are there in these choices and assumptions?

Although some work has already been done on the relationship between biblical texts and images in art, popular culture, and film from a more ideology-critical perspective, no such effort has as yet been made in the case of children's Bibles. As a whole this area is still a relatively unexplored and even neglected field of research within biblical studies that definitely needs more attention. The suggestion to put together a volume of *Semeia Studies* on this important topic came from Athalya Brenner. This book is also dedicated to her. It is a token of our appreciation for the many efforts she has made to push and transgress established boundaries in the academy, especially in the field of biblical studies. She has often been at the forefront of innovative approaches, including feminist and gendered, contextual and autobiographical readings of the Bible, as is made clear by both her own writings and her editorial work.

To dedicate a volume of *Semeia Studies* to Athalya is all the more appropriate because she herself served on the editorial board of its predecessor *Semeia* and in that capacity coedited volume 86 (*Food and Drink in the Biblical World*; 2001) and served as editorial board editor of volume 87 (*The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-Five Years of Social Sciences in the Academy*; 2001).

Brenner's interest in children's Bibles is not only long-standing; it also serves a political agenda. At the end of her article on Bible films for children, she recommends exposing children to a multiplicity of images rather than showing them the same material again and again. Not only are children very well able to deal with such representational diversity, but we should also "aspire to the appreciation of such diversity if we wish for the Bible to remain alive and kicking; and if we wish for future adults to read it for cultural heritage and pleasure, beyond religious doctrine or scholarly nitpicking" (Brenner: 33). Beyond this more practical concern, Brenner also strongly advocated the recognition of children's Bibles as a serious topic of scholarly investigation by submitting research projects to

the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) about Bibles for children. That these projects were not funded may signal that in this respect there is still a long way to go.

With the present volume we hope to put this issue on the scholarly map. We also hope this book will have wide appeal, from scholars with specific research interests in the area of children's Bibles and/or illustrated Bibles to those situated more generally within biblical studies, to seminary and doctoral students as well as pastors or religious professionals working with children. This volume also aims at fostering a dialogue for exploring points of contact among diverse approaches to the material in question. We hope that it will also be a significant volume for those interested in exploring similar issues in other illustrated Bibles and that more scholars will be encouraged to take children's Bibles seriously as objects of scholarly research.

The contents of this volume could be arranged in many ways, but three basic questions recur in the contributions: How is the child reader taught to identify the other? What models are offered of ways to engage with the other? And how is the issue of the other as potential enemy dealt with? In a time when children are being actively taught to be aware of "stranger danger," these issues are particularly fraught ones. When that wariness of the stranger meets biblical stories set in an Eastern Mediterranean context, the problems are compounded. How these stories relate to the people and places that appear daily on the news and in adult conversation becomes a complicating issue. How do the Israelites and Philistines of the children's Bibles map onto the Israelis and Palestinians of the present day? Stereotypes are unavoidable as children are taught to make distinctions between "us" and "them" and the "good" and the "bad." How conscious are the illustrators of children's Bibles of the stereotypes they are adopting, and do they reinforce or critique them? How far are they reproducing and therefore implicitly endorsing stereotypes that belong to the ideological framework of the biblical writers, and how far are they drawing on identifiable stereotypes from the modern world and introducing them anachronistically into the biblical stories? Is there a mutual reinforcement between ancient and modern views of the other or does one offer a critique of the other? It might well be objected that young children cannot be expected to deal with subtleties and need a clear black and white view of the world. This may be the case, but attitudes acquired in childhood may persist unquestioned in later years, especially if they are vested with some kind of biblical authority.

A clear instance of this stereotyping, moreover, is in the role of children themselves in the Bible and in its retellings. Children are categorically distinct from adults in modern cultures, but can that distinction be carried back into the ancient world? The Bible does contain references to children, but, along with women and servants, they are often invisible in stories where their presence can be inferred. How is the modern child reader to find him- or herself in the biblical text? How do biblical illustrators help the child both to identify with the story and to retain a critical and historical distance?

In the first section, "Identifying the Strange Other," the issues of identification are dealt with in a number of contexts. Laurel Koepf looks at the example of the unnamed servant girl in the story of Naaman in 2 Kings in order to question the assumptions that lead most commentators and children's Bible readers to overlook her existence and her point of view. Jaqueline du Toit examines retellings of the biblical stories of creation by exponents of creationism. She makes the point that this can be done only by taking a highly selective attitude to the biblical canon. The claim that this reading is *the* biblical account is thus contradictory. In setting itself against the wider society that is described as the unbiblical other, paradoxically this stance has to exclude aspects of the Bible itself. The story of Daniel in the lion's den is the subject of Hugh Pyper's contribution, which explores the way in which orientalizing stereotypes are used to signal the villains and heroes of the story in order to reinforce a moralistic reading of the story. On the other hand, illustrators, sometimes against the grain of a moralizing reading of the text, know that the lion, and the fascination with escaping what could devour one, is what children find in the story. The way in which children are subtly schooled in the politics of communal identity is demonstrated by Jeremy Punt in his survey of Afrikaans children's Bibles and the changing use of black characters in their illustrations. Issues of gender rather than race are Susanne Scholz's concern as she examines biblical films and DVDs directed at children and questions the absence of engagement with feminist scholarship in the depiction of biblical women. All of these contributions reveal how writers and illustrators of children's Bibles consciously and unconsciously draw on and reinforce the identity politics of the social groups within which they work, lending them the authority of the Bible.

The contributions in the second section, "Learning How to Deal with the Other," go further in looking at how some awkward aspects of the biblical texts have been dealt with by the illustrators of the children's Bibles.

Cynthia Rogers and Diana Nolan Fewell look at the story of David and Jonathan and how children's Bibles deal with the sexual undertones some contemporary critics find in their relationship. They argue that the story can be used with children of different ages to explore the complexity of friendship and the scope of relationships between people of the same sex, but only if the richness of the character of Jonathan is given full scope. A similar problem is identified in Melody Briggs's study of the way in which the rebellious boy Jesus in Luke's Gospel is reduced to the model obedient Western child in too many retellings for children, instead of being presented in all his complexity for children to encounter imaginatively. Such assimilation of biblical narratives and characters to the pedagogical interests of the culture that produces children's versions of the text is also starkly present in Archie Lee's study of the *Tai ping Trimetrical Classic*, an astonishing reworking of biblical stories in a Chinese context that is programmatically designed to indoctrinate the children of the followers of Hong Xiuquan into becoming faithful members of his Heavenly Kingdom movement. In Mark Roncace's study of the way in which the multiple creation accounts and the divergent stories of Jesus's birth are harmonized and simplified in children's Bibles, we see a less striking but equally potent way in which the Bible is made to support one story, rather than allowing children to have a sense of the continuing conversations over creation and the nature of Jesus that the Bible contains. In all these cases, the Bible is rewritten to reinforce conscious and unconscious assumptions that are then given the legitimacy of being "biblical." Other accounts and other characters are more or less quietly written out of the text, giving a deceptive familiarity and acceptability to difficult and disruptive narratives.

In the third section, "Destroying the Other," rather than this quiet erasure of otherness, the explicit violence to which the other is subjected in many biblical stories is brought to the fore. Should children be sheltered from this violence, at the risk of distorting the biblical text, or should they be exposed to it, at the risk either of making such violence acceptable or of traumatizing the child reader? Emma England looks at the way in which illustrators have glossed over this issue in the flood story, either by ignoring the violence or making it lighthearted, with some interesting and harrowing exceptions. Again, she argues not for a particular reading of the text but that adult readers should be prepared to answer and raise questions with the child rather than simply endorsing the "acceptable" version of the story. Another incident of mass violence that may implicitly involve the death of many children and explicitly involves one child char-

acter is Samson's destruction of the Philistine temple in the book of Judges. David Gunn traces the history of interpretations of this story and the way in which commentators and illustrators seek to defend Samson's actions while shying away from the full endorsement of the biblical implication that all Philistines, women and children included, deserve to die. The shifting ideas of what are acceptable theological and moral justifications for Samson's actions provide another reminder that the moral code of the readers is being imposed on the text while at the same time the rhetoric is that this moral code is biblically grounded. One counter to this is the *Brick Testament*, which uses a children's toy (Lego) to produce comic but graphic illustrations of the sex and violence of biblical stories. It forms an important part of Rubén Dupertuis's reflection on the understandable but misleading bowdlerization in the illustrations to most children's Bibles. Finally, Caroline Vander Stichele explains the treatment of Delilah in a number of animated films designed for children. She examines how cultural assumptions about the foreign woman both in the biblical text itself and in the response of the filmmakers are prevalent, but makes the point that later more culturally conscious adaptations that play down Delilah's exoticism may actually emphasize the role of her gender in her moral failure.

A common theme in these contributions is the risk that, in adapting the Bible for children, moral and cultural assumptions become the driver at the expense of the complexity and diversity that characterize the biblical canon. The biblical narratives are themselves narrowed in focus and reduced to a simple moral message, often one that is not borne out by the biblical text itself. The simple messages depend on stereotypes and reinforce the stereotypes they endorse. In order to instill in children what is claimed to be a biblical set of categories to distinguish us and them, good and bad, the biblical text and the range of its possible readings is also separated into what is suitable or unsuitable for children on the basis of a culturally determined sense of what children can cope with. All the authors of these essays point to this. The implications they would draw from this are not so uniform. How far children should or can be exposed to the Bible and how far they should be taught to accept or reject the ideology of any biblical text remains controversial, but all can agree that it is helpful to be as honest as we can about what is actually going on as we attempt to present these complex texts to children.

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