

CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Danna Nolan Fewell. *Children of Israel* (Abingdon Press, 2003),

READING THE BIBLE FOR THE SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN (P. 19-41)

Children in Crisis ([Effect of war on children](#)) [Chapter I 에다 볼을 것](#)

There are approximately twenty armed conflicts going on around the world, mostly in poorer countries. Eighty to ninety percent of the casualties are civilians, mainly women and children. In the past decade, armed conflict have killed two million children, disabled four million to five million, and left twelve million homeless. Over a million children have been either orphaned or separated from their families. And one cant' even imagine the extend of the psychological damage- the official estimates are that at least ten million children have experienced some sort of war-related trauma. The U.N., in the figures released for the 2002 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Rights of the Child, estimates some three hundred thousand children are presently fighting in wars where they face not only the violence of combat, but also possible torture and rape. Millions of children have become refugees, and millions more are dying from war-damaged infrastructures and economic sanctions (Fewell P. 19).

Children's Mortality due to malnutrition and disease: One hundred fifty million children in developing countries are suffering from malnutrition. This year eleven million children will die before their fifth birthday. Most of these will be from nonindustrialized countries where infant mortality soars as high as one hundred seventy-five deaths for one thousand children. (In Industrialized countries, the infant mortality rate is as low as six deaths per one thousand births). A child is dying from malaria every forty seconds – nearly six hundred thousand children a year – in countries where a few cents' worth of mosquito netting could prevent at least 35 percent of these fatalities. Two thousand children will die today, as every day, from the measles. Six hundred thousand children, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are dying this year from diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT), diseases easily prevented with vaccines. In Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Ethiopia (combined), more than four million children under the age of fifteen are now orphaned, having lost their mother or both parents, due to AIDS (Fewell P. 20).

Child labor and abuse of children: Over one hundred twenty-five million children are not in school. A quarter of a billion work as child laborers in situations where they are enslaved, malnourished, and forced to perform labor that is physically and mentally debilitating. Millions are being sold as commodities, as a means of meeting the demands of the commercial adoption market, the global market, or the prostitution and pornography industries. Forty million children around the world are suffering from abuse and neglect. Recent international studies report that the prevalence of sexual abuse of children ranges from 7 percent to 34 percent among girls, and from 3 percent to 29 percent among boys (Fewell P. 20).

Refugee children: In 1995, fifty-three million people – 1 out of every 115 people on earth – were uprooted from their homes, either displaced within their countries or became refugees across borders. Eighty three percent of refugees and displaced persons are usually women and children. Up to 5 percent of refugee population - often more in case of panic evacuation – are children separated from their families (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2001. *UNICEF End Decade Database*.. New York: UNICEF).

Abuse of children in the U.S. Over 20 percent of children in the United States live in low-income, if not outright impoverished, families who have no health insurance. Twenty percent of the nation’s two-year-olds have not been immunized. One million children in the U.S. are presently homeless. A conservative estimate of child victimization indicates that over eight hundred twenty-five thousand children in the U.S. suffer each year from physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; neglect; or medical neglect. In the United States a child dies from a gunshot wound every two hours, and homicide has become the third leading cause of mortality of children between the ages of five and fourteen. Danna Nolan Fewell. *Children of Israel* (Abingdon Press, 2003), 20.

The U.S. opposes the addendum to the 1989 (U.N.) treaty. The Bush administration and conservatives in Congress are refusing to accept the terms of the document because, they claim, it impinges on parental control, it infringes upon our judicial systems’ right to execute or sentence to life-imprisonment children under the age of eighteen, and it encourages the provision of sexual and reproductive health education and services to minors. (Explain these objections to the millions of AIDS orphans for whom parental control is a moot point and where sexual and reproductive health education could have saved millions of lives). As it stands now, the United States will only agree to the document if the reference to reproductive health “services” is deleted (because it could be construed as a code word for providing abortion) and if a caveat is included that the U.S. is excluded from having to adhere to the directive that children under eighteen should be exempted from either life imprisonment or the death penalty. Our government, it seems, is more interested in preserving its own rights to control children – even to the point of killing them – than it is in protecting the rights, even the lives of children (Fewell P. 21).

Critique of Bush’s Policies that hurt children’s welfare; Moreover, this administration’s tax cuts (Bush) and vastly increased spending are further manifestations of its lack of care for children. Not only our children now be responsible for our national debt, but they are now hurt by this administration’s attempt to cut the low-income, welfare-to-work child care program, to cut state funding to prevent child abuse, to increase the interest rates of student loans, to eliminate the federal lead testing program for children in substandard housing, and to undermine the nation’s clean air and clean water laws that attempt to protect the environment for our children’s future. All the while, nothing is being done to check the rash of gun violence in our nation’s schools. Fewell. *Children*, 22.

What Difference Does Reading the Bible Make? (P. 22-25).

In a world where so many children are sick, hungry, dying, abandoned, displaced, and violated, in a world where politics take precedence over matters of life and death, what difference does reading the Bible make? (Fewell P. 22).

Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality – or the drifting – of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, and which spare the conquerors (Fewell P. 23).

Theological explanation why people suffer: Theodicies, or theological explanations for suffering, in the Bible abound. One can suffer on account of one's sin, one's parents' sins, "original sins," or one's infidelity to God. One can suffer as a trial or a test, or because God's not paying attention to what's going on. One can suffer for the sake of others or for some other greater good. One can suffer because a "large plan" allows the forces of evil to rule temporarily in this world, but such suffering calls for justice to be served in the world to come. In the second testament, one can suffer to become more like the Christ, who is depicted as the one who has ultimately suffered for the sake of all. However, at some point, such explanations for suffering fall absurdly short. As Emil Fackenheim asks, "*What are the sufferings of the cross compared to those of a mother whose child is slaughtered to the sound of laughter or the strains of a Viennese waltz?*" (Fewell P. 23).

Fewell's point is that there is no theodicy that makes sense of the suffering of children. She suggests that theodicy itself multiplies the pain and violence already being done to the innocent. As Emmanuel Levinas observes, "The justification of the neighbor's pain is certainly the source of all immorality (Fewell P. 24).

The Strangeness of the Bible and the Presence of Children (P. 26-31)

Children in Flood story, Sodom; babies thrown into Nile; First born Egyptian children killed; Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac; (Fewell P. 26)

The first born Egyptian children all became collective scapegoat to illustrate the power of the God of the exodus. The male babies in the Gospel of Matthew were killed to emphasize Jesus' divine status. David and Bathsheba's first baby is sacrificed as God's punishment of David's sin. Job's children are forfeited in a wager between God and the Satan regarding Job's righteousness. (P. 27). It doesn't make sense to sacrifice children to prove something.

In the flood story or Sodom's story, God has responded to human violence with an overwhelming violence of his own in sacrificing innocent children; a violence so devastating that he, like a parent in a fit of uncontrollable rage, having resorted to the physical abuse of a child, comes to regret his action and to swear repeatedly that he will never respond in such a way again (Gen. 8:21; 9:11, 15) (Fewell P. 29).

Noah or Abraham didn't argue with God on behalf of the innocent.

Interrupting the Text (P. 32-36).

Stories we read, invite interruption. **Interruption** is a way of stopping and questioning the text – of recognizing that, ethically, something is amiss in what we are being told. Interruption provides another, more responsible, alternative. Therefore, Fewell claims that “To read a text means bearing some burden of responsibility, believing oneself addressed, and thus answerable – to the text itself, or to one’s reading of it” (Fewell P. 33) She gave an example of a boy who were involved in Christmas play at his church.

He played the role of inn keeper who said NO to Joseph and Mary who plead for help with a room for Mary to deliver her baby. After saying NO three times to their plea, he had to respond to the desperate situation of homeless couple by saying “you can have my room” The boy, Ralph interrupted the text when he entered into the story, found himself addressed and answerable. For him the human need presented in the story demanded response. The story presented him an ethical moment that addressed all who are capable of making room for the vulnerable, for the stranger. (Fewell P. 33).

This happens to me quite often when I read the scripture; I am demanded to interrupt the text and respond and this was the main reason I went into homeless ministry serving the homeless and helped Seattle Presbytery to submit overture to the General Assembly and helped GA to adopt the overture and responded to the call to travel around the whole nation to call for churches to open one room to welcome the homeless.

Interruption is a strategy for both reading and living. To interrupt means to question the story being told, to imagine the story being told differently, and likewise, to question one’s life and to imagine life being lived differently. This presupposes a different kind of relationship to the biblical text than many of us had in the past (Fewell P. 34).

Interruption: In the language of Peter Brooks, “The reader is solicited not only to understand the story but to complete it; to make it fuller, richer, more powerfully ordered and therefore more hermeneutic.” In other words, there are some stories we are called upon to imitate; there are many others we are called to upon to complete and, in the living of our lives, there are some we are called upon to retell, some we are called upon to rewrite, if they are to mean anything significant to us in today’s world (Fewell P. 35).

Interruption occurs when particular innocent children disrupt the power biblical texts exercise in shaping our perceptions and informing our world. By attending to these children’s faces and other innocents whose deaths rupture our critical strategies and our memory, we open ourselves to the possibility of saying “NO” to all texts, biblical or otherwise, that kill children, biblical or otherwise. Short of a shaken conscience nothing is credible (Fewell P. 36).

Retellings and Textual Mosaics, or What you’ll Find in This Book (P. 36-41).

Midrash, as an ancient, traditional hermeneutical practice that asks questions (from Hebrew root *drsh*, “to make inquiry”) or the biblical text, *midrash* assumes that the text has multiple meanings and is open to rereading. For the midrashic interpreter, “the

multiple dimensions of the Hebrew Bible become not merely interesting, or disturbing, they provide the key for endless self-critique and renewal. *Midrash* also constructs an intricate web of selected interrelated texts, allowing, inviting, forcing them into conversation and debate with one another, creating a kind of inner-biblical “endless self-critique and renewal. *Midrash* retells biblical stories in ways that address issues current in the interpreter’s culture (Fewell P. 37).

As we come to recognize the cultural, gendered, ethnic biases of the Bible, we can assert that retelling often require revisions, revisions that take seriously those who are marginalized both within and by the text. But this is a process necessary to the text’s own survival (Fewell P. 38).

CHAPTER ONE: THE OTHER WOMAN and THE OTHER CHILD (43). (Genesis 16 and 21)

Story of Hagar : Where have you come from and where are you going? (43-53)
Her running away from abusive situation and her returning to the same situation is found in the homeless or domestic victims/

I can relate homeless women and poor women to the “other woman” concept. There are many Hagers among this population. They are enslaved in poverty, illness, despair and life style of incarceration as their survival. Or they have to stay in abusive situation or must go back to it for nowhere else they could go. They, as their last resort, too leave the abusive situation just as Hagar did but then go back too.

Hagar’s experience of abuse as a slave woman.

Her running away

Her meeting God

God tells her to go back. This part needs to be interrupted to ask questions if God really cold tell her to go back or is it her own voice as many today’s women’s voice “to go back” because they have no other place to go and no other way to survive.

Abraham appears very irresponsible person here and how we treated him as the “father of faith” for the past thousands of years.

CHAPTER TWO: OTHER WOMEN AND OTHE CHILDREN REVISITED (EZRA 9-10; NEHEMIAH 12:23-31; GENESIS 12-34) (55-63)

The Context (P. 55) - Ezra 9:1-10

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way (Ezra 9: 1-2).

Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, we have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God [to send away all these wives and their children](#), according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law (Ezra 10: 2-3).

Only [Jonathan](#) son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them (Ezra 10: 15).

The Scene (P. 56)

Argument between Shecaniah and Jonathan on the matter of sending women Israelites married in Babylon and children born there back to Babylon. Shecaniah claimed that they cannot keep foreign women (the other) and their seeds in the land of Judah that was under the control of Persia at the time. Jonathan opposed to sending back because they have no way to make life going with their husband and fathers and claim that they are their families. It was a matter of rejecting “the other” or accepting “the other” into their community.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CHILDREN FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER (Judges 10:-11:)

All societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own intimitable way. If the strangers are people who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world –one of these maps, two or all three; if they, therefore, by their sheer presence, make obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying; if they pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring; if, in other words, they befog and eclipse the boundary liens which ought to be clearly seen; if, having done all this they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds the discomfort of feeling lost –then each society produces such strangers (Fewell P. 67).

In reality, murder is possible, but it is possible only when one has not looked the Other in the face (Fewell P. 68).

Is there no balm in Gilead (Jer. 8: 22).

I desire compassion and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offering (Hos. 6:6).

The story of Jephthah's daughter

Jephtha and his daughter lived across the River. They were treated as the "the Other."

Jephtha is claimed as an "Israelite" judge and touted as a great warrior but as a transjordanian, a son of a prostitute, an outlaw, and a child sacrificer, he is hardly being held up as exemplary. Rather, his story might have easily been preserved in postexilic Israelite society as propaganda against outsiders, and particularly against allowing outsiders to attain places of leadership in Israelite society (Fewell P. 68).

Jephtha grew up in Gilead – a place across the River, a place that is part of Israel and yet not part of Israel. He grew up during a time when the people among whom he lived had turned away from the face of their God. They turned away from God's face in the same way they turned away from the faces of their children. Jephtha's mother, more likely once a damaged child herself, had been forced to become a prostitute. It was the only way she could take care of herself, and then later, of her son. No man took responsibility for him. With no father to claim him, he had no property and no hope of inheritance. He and his mother lived in poverty. He was a nobody. He learned to take care of himself. He grew up though and, he had learned to fight his way. He wasn't afraid of anything because he had nothing to lose. People in Gilead were afraid of him. The very men who engaged the prostitute but who then turned the prostitute's son into an outcast. The whole town sired him and neglected him. They kicked him out of the community (Fewell, Children, 70).

In today's society we treat people in the same way. Many of those who sit in prison system might come from such background (quote information of prison system and incarcerated people). Many of them are homeless, who are also criminalized. Many parents do to their children what their parents did to them.

He sacrificed her own daughter (not intentionally but due to his reckless vow); he did to his daughter what the community had long ago done to him – he got rid of the child whose presence would threaten his security and position.

It is very heart-breaking story and nothing new to our story today for many women and children – homeless and incarcerate women and youth population. National statistics of child abuse might be reported here.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GIFT (2 Kings 4:8-37).

One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. She said to her husband, look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.