Raised from Obscurity


Forbes and Harrower’s Raised from Obscurity: A Narratival and Theological Study of the Characterization of Women in Luke-Acts is an insightful and purposeful work that allows their readers to understand the story of women in Luke and Acts as never before. They give life to the women as they seek to express insight based on the women’s experiences and actions, drawing out narratival and theological propositions.

Following an informative chapter, “Women in Judaism and the Greco-Roman World,” Forbes and Harrower put their methodology to work, beginning with Elizabeth, continuing with named and unnamed women whom Jesus encounters or speaks of in parables, moving on to the women whose stories are in the book of Acts, and concluding with the daughters of Philip who prophesy. They locate each woman within the broader narrative, note how they are introduced and described, and then identify narratival propositions derived from the text. These propositions help form bigger-picture theological propositions, especially when the narratival propositions are related or repeat in several narratives.

For example, Luke’s mention of the Queen of the South (Sheba; Luke 11:31) seems rather obscure to the reader, but Forbes and Harrower identify three narratival propositions about her, including that she makes right theological judgments about the Lord (110) and that God includes her, a Gentile woman in God’s inversion of socio-religious expectations (112). Put together with other narratival propositions, Forbes and Harrower conclude with several theological propositions, including “God’s mission includes women through whom he speaks and works to establish his kingdom despite socio-cultural adversity” (122).

A more common example would be Elizabeth, for whom Forbes and Harrower draw eight narratival propositions, including that she is faithful and obedient (42) and filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies (40). One of the four theological propositions from her story is, “Being a mouthpiece for God is neither determined nor inhibited by gender or age” (43).

Forbes and Harrower’s work is meticulous and complete. While an academic work, it remains fairly accessible to most readers, and will awaken every reader to a new way of seeing the women in Luke and Acts. In fact, the methodology used may be broadened to other narratives to raise other biblical women’s stories from adversity. Raised from Obscurity is a must-read for those who desire to rightly understand Luke’s theology of women as expressed in his narrative.