

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer. *In Search of Jonathan: Jonathan between the Bible and Modern Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 392 pages. \$100.91.

Protesting the lack of scholarly attention paid to the biblical character Jonathan in his own right, *In Search of Jonathan: Jonathan between the Bible and Modern Fiction* represents Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer's exploration of Jonathan for Jonathan's sake. Tiemeyer clarifies at the outset that hers "is not a 'David and Jonathan' book" (3). Rather, her aim is to rescue Jonathan from the biblical and literary margins. Despite narrative gaps in 1–2 Samuel that leave Jonathan "a fractured and elusive character" (5), Tiemeyer argues that it is possible to establish him as a cohesive figure by putting the biblical text in conversation with modern fiction. Tiemeyer's method is two-pronged. First, she examines the biblical Jonathan through careful exegesis, exposing both the complexity of his characterization and the textual fractures that obscure him. Second, Tiemeyer endeavors to resolve those fractures with the help of modern fictional portrayals.

Chapter 1 explores questions of genre, literary criticism, and biblical exegesis before introducing the selection of fictional works (eleven novels, two poems, and one short story) with which the author will engage throughout the book. Tiemeyer acknowledges that the portrayal of David's rise in 1–2 Samuel is, at least in part, an attempt to justify his kingship over Israel. However, she disagrees with the notion that Jonathan's character exists solely for narrative reinforcement of David's legitimacy. Following Robert Alter (*The David Story*, 1999), she affirms the text as a literary creation whose authors employed imaginative approaches to historical writing, and she explores the possibility that the lack of a cohesive Jonathan narrative, rather than an accident of the editorial process, is an intentional storytelling strategy that invites the reader to fill in narrative gaps in the life of the character through creative interaction with the text. Tiemeyer's own creative interaction combines historical-critical exegesis of the final form of the Masoretic text, through which questions arise from within it, with reception exegesis (as distinct from reception history), whereby she draws on the midrash-like quality of certain modern depictions of Jonathan in order to answer her questions by highlighting aspects of the text that might otherwise remain hidden.

Although this study pursues a cohesive Jonathan, the question of his relationship with David remains significant to that task. Chapter 2 investigates the question of homoeroticism and discusses homosexuality and masculinity in the Bible and its ancient Near Eastern context. Tiemeyer contends that all three interpretations of David and Jonathan's relationship—as outlined by Markus Zehnder in his 2007 article, "Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality": the relationship as homosexual/homoerotic, the relationship as homosocial, and the relationship as an example of friendship and loyalty—are possible. She therefore considers the text ambiguous as to the question of homoeroticism. Given this persistent ambiguity, the question for Tiemeyer becomes which interpretation "is best suited to support a well-rounded and psychologically plausible literary persona" (37). She concludes that a more coherent version of Jonathan materializes "if the reader assumes that his feelings for David include erotic undercurrents" (63).

Chapters 3 through 8 constitute the study in earnest, discussing thematic units of 1 Samuel 13–2 Samuel 1 that confront the reader with contradictory aspects of Jonathan's character. For example, can one reconcile Jonathan the popular and brave military leader (1 Sam 13–14) with the Jonathan who willingly yields his throne to David (1 Sam 23)? Likewise, can the Jonathan who in 1 Samuel 20 rebels against the father who had been prepared to kill him in 1

Samuel 14 be reconciled with the Jonathan who remains loyal to his father even unto his own death in 1 Samuel 31? These are the Jonathans from which Tiemeyer attempts to draw a single, coherent personality, offering in Chapter Nine her “very personal, distinctly modern, rather female, yet also definitely biblical, retelling on Jonathan” (323).

Reception exegesis will, of course, not be the preferred method of every biblical scholar, yet Tiemeyer’s honesty about its potential shortcomings combined with her charming enthusiasm for the project go a long way in making a compelling case for its effectiveness. By employing insights from literature, this straightforward and well-paced monograph offers a creative interdisciplinary approach to questions that arise from robust critical engagement with the Bible. Scholarly through and through, the book assumes the reader’s background in critical biblical studies, if not literary theory. However, Tiemeyer’s clear explanation and artful demonstration of her methods would benefit any exegetical novice willing to settle in for a thorough reading. Preachers in particular will find in this volume a model for responsible scriptural engagement that inspires and encourages a vibrant theological imagination.

Warren Swenson
Ph.D. Student
University of Chester
Chester, UK