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By reading the present volume, one can see why it won the National Jewish Book award for its category (the Nahum M. Sarna Memorial Award in Scholarship). In the introduction, Klitsner notes how certain theological questions raised in one biblical text may be raised again in another text creating multiple perspectives and alternative possibilities. She calls these texts “subversive sequels” because like sequels, they continue earlier texts, but in ways that undermine the assumptions and conclusions of the earlier stories. Klitsner’s approach is literary, with close attention to textual details. Consequently, “earlier” and “later” narratives for Klitsner refer to their position in the canon rather than their supposed times of composition. She eschews diachronic questions and hopes that her literary approach will appeal to those who see the Bible as composed by one God as well as those who see it as authored by many writers. Klitsner’s close reading, balanced conclusions, and nuanced comparisons have wide appeal and explain why the work won an award.

In chapter 1, Klitsner explores how the several connections between the flood story and Jonah (e.g., water, boats, destruction) invite comparison between these two stories. The differences show how Jonah presents a deity with a different attitude toward human wickedness. Destruction is unavoidable in the flood story, but reversible in Jonah. In Genesis, God repents (*n-h-m*, Gen 6:7) making humans due to their violence (*hamas*, Gen 6:13), but in Jonah, God repents (*n-h-m*, Jon 3:10) of the planned destruction because the Ninevites turn from their violence (*hamas*, Jon 3:7). Klitsner pursues these and many other verbal and thematic connections between the stories to show how the book of Jonah...
questions the assumptions of the flood story that humans will not repent and God will not provide the opportunity to repent.

Chapter 2 views the story of Babel through the lens of Israelite enslavement in Egypt. Both stories involve the building of cities (Exodus 1:11) with bricks and mortar (Exodus 1:14) and the erasure of individual names in the face of totalitarian conformity. Klitsner indicates a variety of specific connections between the stories that draws them together while showing that the courage of the individual midwives in Exodus ultimately leads the narrative toward a different conclusion by refusing the succumb to conformity.

In her discussion of Babel and Exodus, Klitsner notes that both stories lead toward the emergence of individuals: Abraham and Moses. Chapter 3 compares these two leaders through their interactions with the priests Melchizedek and Jethro. Melchizedek and Jethro both offer blessing (b-r-k, Gen 14:19-20; Exod 18:10), bread (lehem, Gen 14:18; Exod 18:12), and lead Abraham and Moses to perceive God’s hand in their rescue (yad, Gen 14:20; Exod 18:10). In a wider discussion of Abraham and Moses, Klitsner argues that these two figures represent two different models of leadership. Abraham embraces his own path even at the expense of opposing convention and separating from loved ones. Klitsner sees Abraham as an archetype of the Jewish nation. As that nation develops, however, it requires another kind of leadership modeled by Moses. Moses is more engaged with the world and makes necessary compromises to succeed. Klitsner does not suggest that the story of Moses is a subversive sequel to the story of Abraham in the sense of a narrative that revises it predecessor. Rather, she holds the two stories in dialectical relationship since both models have value in different circumstances.

The last three chapters are more closely related to each other than the first three chapters. Chapter 4 discusses the story of the creation of humans with special focus on the woman because this foundational story is critical for subsequent narratives about women that offer alternatives to the vision of the alienated and subordinated Eve. Klitsner reads Eve’s transgression as an attempt to achieve an intimacy with God that has been denied to her since God has communicated only with the man. However, her choice to eat the fruit to
be more like God only increases her distance from God. The remaining chapters explore the subversive sequels to the story of Eve.

Chapter 5 focuses on the story of Sarah as a subversive sequel to Eve. Sarah herself becomes forbidden fruit in Egypt. Like the fruit, she is “seen” and “taken” (Gen 12:14-15), and Pharaoh asks Abraham the same question God puts to Adam and Eve: “What is this thing you have done to me?” (Gen 12:18; cf. 3:13). Rather than clinging to his wife (Gen 2:24), he twice relinquishes her (Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18). Although Klitsner sees Abraham and Sarah and separate and unequal with their alienation intensified due to infertility, she locates hope for improvement over Eve when God, who had punished Adam for listening to his wife, advises Abraham to listen to his wife (Gen 21:12).

Chapter 6 discusses several biblical women whose stories elaborate multiple possibilities for women and their relationships with men and God. Rebecca resembles Abraham in her willingness to leave her home for the promise of another life in a far off land. Also, like Abraham, she runs and hastens to show hospitality (r-v-ts, m-h-r, Gen 18:2, 6-8; 24:17-20, 28). Isaac shows greater closeness to his wife than Abraham had, since he prays for her (25:21). God also favors Rebecca with a direct answer to her prayer (25:22-23).

Klitsner turns next to Rachel, who highlights how a woman may be valued for her fertility only, which wrongly renders her life irrelevant if she is infertile. The stories of Deborah and Jael show that a woman may be a leader or prophet. The nameless wife of Manoah subverts the usual pattern of male privilege since Manoah is spiritually dependent on his wife. Hannah combines the God-caused infertility of the matriarchs with the proactive temperament of the women of Judges to achieve her own redemption through direct prayer.

Klitsner’s notion of the subversive sequel fits into the larger study of narrative analogy and traditional Jewish attention to intertextual connections, and Klitsner acknowledges her debts to both traditional Jewish sources and modern scholarship in the notes and bibliography. In the third chapter, Klitsner backs away from the notion of “subversive sequels” (p. 91) and allows both the models of Abraham and Moses to stand. In other contexts, she seems to think that later texts somehow abrogate or undermine earlier texts.
For example, the story of Eve has some unappealing contents for a modern person committed to gender equity, so she illustrates how later stories undermine the alienation and subjugation of woman exemplified in Eve and offer alternative visions of gender relations. Similarly, she seems to prefer the story of Jonah to that of Noah. But why can’t the earlier text also undermine the later one? In her brief conclusion to the book she sees analogous narratives as opening a conversation about common themes and questions and perceives that Scripture is more oriented to process than conclusions. Since texts within the Bible dialogue with each other, Klitsner says, interpreters should continue the conversation rather than ignore the dynamism of the text and seek a fixed dogmatic meaning that is not there. This attractive language appears to avoid any notion of abrogation, so one wonders why she identifies the stories of Abraham and Moses as exceptional in that the later story does not revise or undermine the earlier one. Klitsner’s study of narrative analogy is fascinating and illuminating, but the term “subversive sequel” might be distracting from her best insights about how biblical stories stand in dialectical relationship to each other.