

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Using insights about ancient and modern tragedy, this study offers challenging and provocative new readings of selected biblical narratives: the story of Israel's first king, Saul, rejected for his disobedience to God and driven to despair and madness by an evil spirit from the Lord; the story of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter in fulfillment of his vow to offer God a sacrifice in return for military victory; the stories of the members of Saul's house, each of whom comes to a tragic end; and the story of Israel's most famous king, David, whose tragedy lies in the burden of divine judgment that falls upon his house as a consequence of his sins. The book discusses how these narratives handle such perennial tragic issues as guilt, suffering, and evil.

Cambridge University Press
0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty
J. Cheryl Exum
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

TRAGEDY AND BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TRAGEDY AND BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Arrows of the Almighty

J. CHERYL EXUM

Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty
 J. Cheryl Exum
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521410731

© Cambridge University Press 1992

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1992
 First paperback edition 1996

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Exum, J. Cheryl
 Tragedy and biblical narrative: arrows of the Almighty / J. Cheryl Exum.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 41073 8

1. Tragic, The, in the Bible. 2. Narration in the Bible. 3. Bible. O.T. – History of Biblical events. I. Title

BS1199.T69E98 1992

221.6'6 – dc20 91-28325 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-41073-1 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-41073-8 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-56506-6 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-56506-5 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For friends who saw me through tragedy, especially,

Alice

Bill

Jim

Pat

and

Richard

כפלגי מים בציון
כצל סלע כבד בארץ עיפה

Isa. 32:2

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.
Job 6:4

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> xii
<i>About translations and transliterations</i>	xiv
1 Biblical narrative and the tragic vision	1
2 Saul: the hostility of God	16
Excursus: hostile transcendence in the Samson story	42
3 Jephthah: the absence of God	45
Excursus 1: the awful and sustaining power of words	60
Excursus 2: Jephthah and his daughter: a feminist reading	65
4 The fate of the house of Saul	70
Michal and Jonathan	71
Jonathan	74
Michal	81
Abner and Ishbosheth	95
Rizpah's vigil and the tragic end of the house of Saul	109
5 David: the judgment of God	120
Afterword	150
<i>Notes</i>	153
<i>Bibliography</i>	182
<i>Index of authors</i>	195
<i>Index of proper names</i>	198
<i>Index of citations</i>	200

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

This book has been many years in the writing. Though all my debts could never be fully recognized, it is a pleasure, finally, to acknowledge some of them. I began work on the topic of biblical tragedy, among other projects, in Jerusalem in 1981, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, administered by the American Schools of Oriental Research. A grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society helped support further research in Jerusalem in 1983–4. I am grateful to the American Schools of Oriental Research for appointing me as Honorary Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, and to the members of the Bible Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for an appointment as a Visiting Research Associate in the Department and for the warm welcome I received there. A fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation enabled me to spend the 1984–5 academic year conducting research in Germany; special thanks are due to my sponsors, Rudolf Smend of the University of Göttingen, and Rolf Rendtorff (now emeritus) of the University of Heidelberg, for making available the facilities of their universities and for their hospitality. Over the years, Boston College has been generous in granting released time and financial support; I am especially indebted to William B. Neenan, S.J., Academic Vice President and Dean of Faculties, and J. Robert Barth, S.J., Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, for the personal interest and support they showed me.

Some sections of this book were presented as papers at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Catholic Biblical Association, the Bible Symposium at the Hebrew University, and the Kolloquium-Altes Testament, Göttingen. In addition, I wish to express my appreciation to Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., of Loyola University of Chicago, Edward L. Greenstein, of the Jewish Theological Sem-

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xiii

inary, New York, and Alan Cooper, of Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, for invitations to present some of this material at their institutions. I profited considerably from the responses I received from the audiences who listened, challenged, and encouraged my developing ideas about biblical tragedy.

I have been particularly fortunate in having friends upon whom I could always depend for intellectual stimulation and sage counsel. Francis Landy, of the University of Alberta, and Edwin M. Good, of Stanford University, read portions of the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions. Alice Bach, of Stanford University, has been an indispensable conversation partner, whose advice, encouragement, and confidence in me saw me through when my vision flagged. David J. A. Clines, of the University of Sheffield, read the entire manuscript and gave generously of ideas and criticism. I am profoundly grateful for his careful attention to my text, and for his help during a difficult time. William Carl Ready was a gracious, if not always willing, listener and critic, and an unfailing source of support since the inception of this book; without him I could not have persevered. Heartfelt thanks go to Detlev Grohn for help in the preparation of the final manuscript, and for almost twenty years of friendship, and to James Michael Weiss, Patricia DeLeeuw, and Richard Jenson for sustaining me through the completion of this project.

Portions of Chapter 2 appeared in “Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions,” co-authored with J. William Whedbee (*Semeia* 32 [1984]). An earlier version of Chapter 3 was published in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (Scholars Press, 1989). In Chapters 3 and 4, I have used material from my essay, “Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative,” in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). I thank Scholars Press and Trinity Press International for permission to use this material.

Cambridge University Press

0521565065 - Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty

J. Cheryl Exum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

About translations and transliterations

Translations from the Hebrew are mine. In many cases, often unintentionally, they are close to the RSV. I have kept reference to Hebrew words at a minimum; transliterations from the Hebrew are not scientific. Throughout this book I use the proper name Yhwh to refer to the deity, since I believe the use of a personal name, even if unvocalized, helps underscore the status of the deity as a character in the biblical narrative. For the same reason I use “he” as a pronoun for the deity.