

As in Eden by R.S. Lamming. Faber and Faber 2005.

Feminist theologians, women rabbis and Christian clergy have remarked often over the years how few women's voices are heard in both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles; in response to this lack a number of studies have been done of these biblical women in an attempt to free them from the grip of the patriarchal authors who put them in the shadows.

In recent years there have also been several novels which have sought to bring such women to life through fiction: R.S. Lamming now makes a superb addition to books such as *The Red Tent*, *Only Human* and *After These Things* with *As In Eden*. Unlike the other works, however, this is a series of stories, only two of which are connected.

Lamming focuses on Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Pharaoh's daughter (who found Moses in the Nile), Martha (the sister of Lazarus) and Claudia Procula (wife of Pontius Pilate). Using the biblical narrative with great subtlety Lamming ameliorates it with a sensitivity for these women and their experience that is hugely powerful and feels immensely credible. In her approach she also brings an originality and freshness that enriches the biblical text in the style of rabbinic midrash (bible exegesis).

Each of the chapters has much to recommend it, but those on Sarah and Hagar, and their respective experiences of Abraham, and the divine, are especially fine and make points that demand further discussion and consideration.

This is a wonderful short book, and I would urge R.M. Lamming not to stop where she has but to produce a second volume considering Miriam, Hannah, Bathsheba, Deborah and Huldah the prophetess, among others!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh