**Women in Ancient Jewish Literature**

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Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob

**Pious Beauties**

a. Judith, The Pious Woman Who Uses Sexuality to Achieve Salvation

**Judith 8:**

4Judith remained as a widow for three years and four months at home where she set up a tent for herself on the roof of her house. She put sackcloth around her waist and dressed in widow’s clothing.  
5She fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the festivals and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel.  
6She was beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold. Her husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, men and women slaves, livestock, and fields; and she maintained this estate.  
7No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion.

9 When Judith heard the harsh words spoken by the people against the ruler, because they were faint for lack of water, and when she heard all that Uzziah said to them, and how he promised them under oath to surrender the town to the Assyrians after five days,  
10she sent her maid, who was in charge of all she possessed, to summon Uzziah and Chabris and Charmis, the elders of her town.  
11They came to her, and she said to them:  
12‘Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the town to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days.  
13Who are you to put God to the test today, and to set yourselves up in the place of God in human affairs?  
14You are putting the Lord Almighty to the test, but you will never learn anything! You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart or understand the workings of the human mind; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brothers, do not anger the Lord our God. (NRSV)

b. The Sexual Woman Who Uses Piety to Achieve Salvation

**Greek Esther, Chapter 14 (Addition C)**

14Then Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord.  
She took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body; every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair.  
She prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said:  
‘O my Lord, you only are our king; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, for my danger is in my hand.  
Ever since I was born I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations, and our ancestors from among all their forebears, for an everlasting inheritance, and that you did for them all that you promised.  
And now we have sinned before you, and you have handed us over to our enemies because we glorified their gods. You are righteous, O Lord!  
And now they are not satisfied that we are in bitter slavery, but they have covenanted with their idols to abolish what your mouth has ordained, and to destroy your inheritance, to stop the mouths of those who praise you and to quench your altar and the glory of your house,  
to open the mouths of the nations for the praise of vain idols, and to magnify for ever a mortal king.
11 ‘O Lord, do not surrender your sceptre to what has no being; and do not let them laugh at our downfall; but turn their plan against them, and make an example of him who began this against us. 12 Remember, O Lord; make yourself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O King of the gods and Master of all dominion! 13 Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him. 14 But save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, O Lord. 15 You have knowledge of all things, and you know that I hate the splendour of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien. 16 You know my necessity—that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head on days when I appear in public. I abhor it like a filthy rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. 17 And your servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honoured the king’s feast or drunk the wine of libations. 18 Your servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now, except in you, O Lord God of Abraham. 19 O God, whose might is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!' (NRSV)

Aseneth in Joseph and Aseneth

Joseph and Aseneth 1:4-9, 11:2-7:

1:4-9: [Pentephres] had a daughter, a virgin of eighteen years, (she was) very tall and handsome and beautiful to look at beyond all virgins on the earth. And this (girl) had nothing similar to the virgins of the Egyptians, but she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was as tall as Sarah and handsome as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel. And the name of that virgin was Aseneth. And the fame of her beauty spread all over that land and to the ends of the inhabited (world). And all the sons of the noblemen and the sons of the satraps and the sons of all kings, all of them young and powerful, asked for her hand in marriage, and there was much wrangling among them over Aseneth.

11:2-7: [Aseneth has fallen in love with Joseph and wants to convert:] Aseneth was tired and had become discouraged and her strength had gone. And he turned upward toward to the wall….she laid her head into her lap, clasping her fingers round her right knee, and her mouth was closed, and she (had) not opened it in the seven days and in the seven nights of her humiliation. And she said in her heart without opening her mouth….The Lord the God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High, hates all those who worship idols, because he is a jealous and terrible god toward all those who worship strange gods. Therefore he has come to hate me, too, because I worshipped dead and dumb idols…” (Trans. C. Burchard, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume Two [2nd ed; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011] 177-248)

Susanna in Susanna and the Three Elders

Susanna 1-42:

1 There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Joakim. 2 He married the daughter of Hilkiah, named Susanna, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord. 3 Her parents were righteous, and had trained their daughter according to the law of Moses. 4 Joakim was very rich,
and had a fine garden adjoining his house; the Jews used to come to him because he was the most
honoured of them all.

5 That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had
said: ‘Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to
govern the people.’ These men were frequently at Joakim’s house, and all who had a case to be
tried came to them there.

7 When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband’s garden to walk. Every
day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her.
They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering
their duty to administer justice. Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not
tell each other of their distress, for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce
her. Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.

13 One day they said to each other, ‘Let us go home, for it is time for lunch.’ So they both left
and parted from each other. But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other
for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could
find her alone.

15 Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two
maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. No one was there except the two
elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. She said to her maids, ‘Bring me
olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.’ They did as she told
them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had
been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding. When the maids had
gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. They said, ‘Look, the garden doors are shut, and
no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. If
you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent
your maids away.’

22 Susanna groaned and said, ‘I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for
me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands,
rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.’ Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two
elders shouted against her. And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. When the people
in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had
happened to her. And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for
nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.

28 The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders
came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they
said, ‘Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim.’ So they sent for her. And she
came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. Now Susanna was a woman of great
refinement and beautiful in appearance. As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be
unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. Those who were with her and all
who saw her were weeping.
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34 Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. Through her tears she looked up towards Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord. The elders said, ‘While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we are, and he opened the doors and got away. We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, but she would not tell us. These things we testify.’ Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.

42 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, ‘O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!’ (Trans. NRSV)

Mothers Who Control Their Children’s Destinies

a. 2 Maccabees 7: The Pious Mother

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine’s flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, ‘What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.’

3 The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and cauldrons heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, ‘The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, “And he will have compassion on his servants.”’

7 After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, ‘Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?’ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, ‘No.’ Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, ‘You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.’

10 After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, ‘I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.’ As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man’s spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. 13 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the
14 When he was near death, he said, ‘One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!’

15 Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. 16 But he looked at the king, and said, ‘Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people!’ 17 Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!’

18 After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, ‘Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. 19 But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!’ 20 The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. 21 She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage, and said to them, 22 ‘I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. 23 Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.’

24 Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. 25 Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. 26 After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. 27 But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: ‘My son, have pity on me. I carried you for nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. 28 I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being. 29 Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.’

30 While she was still speaking, the young man said, ‘What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses. 31 But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. 32 For we are suffering because of our own sins. 33 And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. 34 But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. 35 You have not yet escaped the judgement of the almighty, all-seeing God. 36 For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life, under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgement of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. 37 I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation
and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.’

39 The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn.

40 So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

41 Last of all, the mother died, after her sons. (Trans. NRSV)

b. Jubilees 35: Rebecca

And in the first year of the first week in this forty-fifth jubilee, Rebecca called to Jacob, her son. And she commanded him with regard to his father and brother that he should honor them all the days of Jacob’s life. And Jacob said, “I will do everything just as you have commanded me because this thing is an honor and a greatness for me and a righteousness for me before the LORD, that I should honor them…” [And Rebecca said.] “Behold, I have completed all of the days of my life which I will live,” And Jacob laughed about his mother’s words, because his mother said that he would die, but she was sitting opposite him, and her strength was in her. And she was not suffering loss of strength, because she was coming and going and seeing (clearly) and her teeth were sound and no disease had touched her all the days of her life…

And she went in to Isaac and she said to him, “One request I beg of you. Make Esau swear that he will nor harm Jacob and will not pursue him hostilely because you know Esau’s inclination, that it has been evil since his youth…” [Isaac answered.] “Esav will not escape from [Jacob’s] hand because he will fall into his hand…

And Rebecca sent and called Esau. And he came to her and she said to him, “I have a request, my son, which I will ask of you….I ask of you on the day when I die that you bring me and bury me near Sarah, your father’s mother, and that you and Jacob love one another, and that one will not seek evil for his brother, but only love him…

And she called Jacob in the sight of Esau, and she commanded him according to what she had spoken with Esau. And he said, “I will do your pleasure.” (Trans. O. S. Wintermute, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume Two [2nd ed; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011] 35-142)
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The Hasmonaeans and Herod

Hasmonean Dynasty

Mattathias (d. 166 B.C.)

Judas (d. 160)

Jonathan (d. 143)

Simon (d. 134)

Herodian Dynasty

John Hyrcanus I (134-104)

Subjugated Idumaea and compelled them to become Jews

Aristobulus I (103)

Alexander Jannaeus (102-76 B.C.)

Appointed Antipater I governor of Idumea (d. c. 70 B.C.)

Antipater II (d. 43 B.C.)

(Procurator of Judea)

Salome Alexandra (wife of both, 75-67)

Aristobulus II (poisoned 49)

Last Hasmonean king

Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.)

Joseph

Phasael

Antigonus (executed 37)

Alexandra (executed 28)

Hyrcanus II (executed 30)

Aristobulus III (murdered 34)

Doris (Idumean)

Mariamme (executed 29)

Mariamme II (dtr. Simon High Priest)

Maltachce (Samaritan)

Cleopatra (Jewess)

Antipater

Aristobulus

Berenice 1st

Philip (1)

2nd Antipas (2) Archelous (3) Philip (4)

(4 BC-39 AD) (4 BC-6 AD) (4 BC-33 AD)

Procurators (6)

(44-53 A.D.)

Agrippa I (37-44 A.D.)

(5) Herodias

Salome

Agrippa II (53-70 A.D.) d. 101 (7)

(Bible.Org)