MARKUS McDOWELL

Prayers of Jewish Women

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Prayers of Jewish Women

Studies of Patterns of Prayer in the Second Temple Period

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This book began as my doctoral dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary. The sections concerning the works of Josephus and Philo have been expanded and edited following further research. This also resulted in some necessary revisions in the last chapter that summarizes the material. Other sections of the final chapter have been rewritten in order to clarify the statistical summaries. Finally, references to important resources have been added that became available after the completion of the dissertation.

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive overview of the prayers of Jewish women found in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, especially in regard to patterns of content, form, and context. As such, it is a study of *Gattungen* at its core, but also explores the function of the prayers in each work and in the Second Temple period as a whole. This provides a context for other studies concerning the role of women and religious practices in the ancient world. Being a comprehensive overview, this book does not often delve as deeply into some of the interesting issues that appear in specific texts – that is left for other studies.

Overviews and summary statistics over a broad range of literature can sometimes be misleading if one is not careful: it is been my endeavor to be alert to such potential problems area. Still, it is my belief that we are well served by beginning with such comprehensive overviews before we move to more narrow analysis and research.

I offer my thanks to my Doktorvater, Dr. David M. Scholer, and my second reader, Dr. Marianne Meye Thompson, for their substantial guidance through the first version of this work as my Ph.D. dissertation. Thanks is also due to Dr. John Levison of Seattle Pacific University who offered final comments on the completed dissertation, and especially for his comments on my analysis of the works of Josephus, which led to further research, re-evaluation, and rewriting of the sections on the works of Josephus and Philo. I also thank Dr. Troy Martin of Saint Xavier University, who, at a café in Heidelberg, urged me to pursue publication of this work. I also offer my gratitude to all my colleagues and students at Pepperdine University, Heidelberg, and Westmont College for their encouragement, interest, and support as I prepared this manuscript for publication.

My appreciation goes to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki and the editorial staff of Mohr Siebeck Publishing House, and to Professor Jörg Frey for accepting this

work for publication in the *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament.*

This work is dedicated to my mother, Helen Marie Goolsby McDowell, whose love of history and unwavering belief in my abilities continue to encourage me even after her death.

Finally, I am grateful to my wife Michele, and our two children, Micah and Maya, for their love, patience, and encouragement.

Santa Barbara, March 2006 Markus H. McDowell

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations in this work follow the standards set forth in *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, James D. Ernest, Shirley A. Decker-Lucke, and David L. Petersen; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1999). Listed below are abbreviations of journals, series, encyclopedias, and collections in secondary literature that are cited in this study. They are provided for convenience or because they do not appear in the *SBL Handbook of Style*.

ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AHDC	Ancient History Documentary Research Centre. MacQuarie University
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
APOT	*The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Edited by R. H. Charles. 2 vols. Oxford, 1913
ASOR	American School of Oriental Research (now known as the Albright Institute)
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDAG^3	*A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition*. Revised and Edited by F.W. Danker. Chicago, 2000
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BRev	*Bible Review*
BVC	*Bible et vie chrétienne*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CIJ	*Corpus inscriptionum judaicarum*
CPJ	*Corpus papyrorum judaicorum*. Edited by V. Tcherikover. 3 vols. Cambridge, 1957–1964
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FCB	*Feminist Companion to the Bible*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSHRZ	*Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series

JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
MGWJ	*Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
NCB	New Century Bible
NedTT	*Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTP	*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.* Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
REJ	*Revue des études juives*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RivB	Rivista biblica italiana
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SC	Sources chrétiennes. Paris, 1943–
SPB	Studia postbiblica
TSK	*Theologische Studien und Kritiken*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Introduction

"O God, my God, hear me also, a widow."
Judith 9.4

These are the words of Judith, a Jewish widow. After hearing that her town is in imminent danger from enemy forces, she sends her maid to summon the elders of the town. Upon their arrival, Judith berates them for not trusting God enough. The elders then ask Judith to pray for them. She does so in one of the lengthiest prayers spoken by any character in all ancient Jewish narrative. At the end of the story, after she has personally delivered Israel from the enemy, Judith leads the entire town in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Along with the stories of Esther and Deborah, the book of Judith contains one of the best-known stories of a Jewish woman saving her people. While most primary characters in ancient Jewish literature are male, women play crucial roles in many of these same narratives, and, as is the case in the stories noted above, sometimes have a primary role. Prayer plays an important part in these narratives for both men and women. Do the prayers of women in these texts differ substantially from those of men? Do Jewish males in these narratives pray primarily in some venues and in certain roles distinct from the women? Do Jewish men and women pray about the same sorts of things? Do the prayers follow the same forms for both men and women? Is the language employed in the prayers the same for men and women? Analyzing the prayers found in the literature of the Second Temple period can provide answers to these and other questions, and in turn elucidate patterns of prayer as portrayed by the authors of the Second Temple period.[1]

Although the story of Judith – a woman who summons elders, prays for them upon request, and leads her community in prayer – may seem highly unusual among the sources from the Second Temple period, it is unusual only

[1] The definition of the term "Second Temple Judaism" is somewhat problematic. The term, as used by most, roughly refers to the time period from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Babylonians to the end of the second century CE, though technically the *terminus ad quem* should be 70 CE. I have made decisions of inclusion on a case-by-case basis for those sources that are problematic in terms of dating. See my discussion of the period I examine in this work and the criteria that I use beginning on p. 28.

in scope. This study surveys primary Jewish sources from the Second Temple period that portray or discuss women's prayers.[2] The texts are analyzed primarily in terms of the literary context and character of the prayer. The prayers are also compared and contrasted with men's prayers in the same sources. The analysis includes locating (as much as possible) the historical, literary, and cultic context of each document in which these prayers appear. These approaches are brought together to answer the questions asked above, and to elucidate patterns found among these prayers.

Numerous studies have appeared over the last few decades that address the subject of Jewish women and religion in the ancient world.)[3] Only a few of

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[2] This study does not examine prayer in later rabbinic writings, though this is also a rich area for study. See Heinemann, *Prayers in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (trans. R.S. Sarason; SJ, 9; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977); J.J. Petuchowski, "The Liturgy of the Synagogue: History, Structure, and Contents," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* (ed. W.S. Green; BJS, 27; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), IV, 1–64; Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993); idem, "Prayer in Early Judaism," in *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature, Yearbook 2004* (eds. Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 439–64. In general, rabbinic literature presents a more monolithic and restrictive view of women in religion than does the Hebrew Bible or the sources from the Second Temple period, though it may only be for specific women at a specific time (see note 16 on p. 5). For a few examples, see *m. Pesah* 8.7; *b. Megilla* 23a; *m. Megilla* 2.4, 11; *b. Rosh Hashanah* 32b; *b. Sukkah* 28a–b; *m. Rosh Hashanah* 3.8; *b. Sotah* 22b. For some studies on women and religion in rabbinic literature, see Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Judith Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 44; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); for some older studies on women's roles in rabbinic Judaism, see Joseph Derenbourg, *Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine, d'après les Thalmuds et les autres sources rabbiniques. Première partie: Histoire de la Palestine depuis Cyrus jusqu' à Adrien* (Paris, 1867; republished 1971); Hans Lichtenstein, "Die Fastenrolle," *HUCA* 8/9 (1931–1932): 257–371; see also Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70* (3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1971).

[3] For instance, see Léonie J. Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual, and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine" in *Images of Women in Antiquity,* edited by A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 273–287; B. J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (BJS 36; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); Judith Hauptman, "Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel Some Fallacies" *Judaism* 42 (1993): 94–103; Ross Kraemer, "Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Later Antiquity" in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective,* edited by J.R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 46–72; Richard E. Oster, Jr., "Women, Diaspora Synagogues (προσευχή) and Acts 16:13 (Philippi)" in *Faith in Practice, Studies in the Books of Acts* (Joplin, Mont.: College Press, 1995). For two volumes which include a number of essays on prayer in the Second Temple period, see *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature, Yearbook 2004: Prayer from Tobit to Qumran. Inaugural Conference of the ISDCL at Salzburg, Austria*

these studies have examined the prayers of women in the literature as a whole.[4] Most studies attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of women's participation and roles in Jewish religious life; others seek to note positive or negative portrayals of women within ancient Jewish literature. Yet, as many now affirm, the picture is more complex than has often been assumed, and researchers do not agree on what the sources tell us about women in the ancient world. Part of the difficulty lies in determining how one moves from the literary world to the historical world; some assume a closer connection between the literary and the historical than others.

The problems raised by the genre and historicity of narrative material add to this complexity. Some of the researchers noted in this study assume that a positive portrayal of a woman in a narrative translates to historical public roles; others assume that a negative portrayal of a woman in a narrative translates to restrictive religious practices for women. Yet a positive literary portrayal may say little about the actual historical world, and the reverse is true as well. In addition, the diversity that existed in Second Temple Judaism creates a problem for reconstructing a simple picture of the participation and role of women in Judaism. What follows is a brief synopsis of some varying views of scholars about women in the Second Temple period, a discussion of the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, the problem raised by questions of genre and historicity of texts, and the difficulty of moving from the literary world to the historical world.

Many studies conclude that women had little or no role or participation in religion of the Second Temple period. Swidler examines the images of

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5–9 July 2003 (eds. Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); and *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (eds. Mark Kiley et al.; London: Routledge, 1997). For specific works on women and prayer, see Jennifer Breger, "The Prayers of Jewish Women: Some Historical Perspectives" *Judaism* 42 (1993): 504–515; Randall D. Chesnutt, "Prayer of a Convert to Judaism (Joseph and Aseneth 12–13)," in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology,* edited by Mark Kiley, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 65–72; Joan E. Cook, "The Song of Hannah in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*" in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology,* edited by Mark Kiley, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 73–78; Toni Craven, "'From Where Will My Help Come?': Women and Prayer in the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books" in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of John T. Willis*, edited by M. Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs and Steven L. McKenzie (JSOT 284; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 95–109; idem, "Judith Prays for Help (Judith 9.1–14)" in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology,* edited by Mark Kiley, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 59–63; Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Things Too Wonderful: Prayers of Women in the Old Testament" in *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel*, edited by Georg Braulik, et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 237–251.

[4] For instance, see the articles and essays listed in note 3 above by Breger, Chesnutt, Cook, Craven, and Miller. Note that almost all of these studies deal with specific texts, passages, or collections, and not the Second Temple literature as a whole.

women in the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Philo of Alexandria, and Josephus, and concludes that ancient Judaism was extremely misogynistic.[5] Certainly there is no lack of fodder for one who wishes to find ancient texts that portray women's roles as secondary, non-existent, or in a negative light. The *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach*, the *Testament of Job*, and the writings of Philo and Josephus all portray, to varying degrees, women as naïve or inferior.[6] Some scholars examine the work of Jesus ben Sirach (early second century BCE) and label him a "misogynist," and then conclude that Judaism of the period was also misogynistic. Henry McKeating writes that Ben Sirach's male-dominated writings may be taken as "typical of his time,"[7] and that "[w]omen are carefully confined to their prescribed domestic sphere."[8] Philo of Alexandria and Josephus[9] make frequent mention of the intellectual and religious inferiority of women. Constance Parvey suggests that the writings of Philo of Alexandria are evidence that "first-century Judaism" emphasized the weakness of women.[10] What is known about the Essenes demonstrates little regard for or simply little interest in women.[11] Cheryl Brown writes that such androcentricity can be

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[5] See L. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 76; see also Ross Kraemer, "Women in the Religions of the Greco-Roman World," *Religious Studies Review* 9 (1983): 131.

[6] The *Testament of Job* contains a negative portrayal of Job's wife in contrast to Job, yet also contains very positive portrayals of Job's daughters, who are given the gift of spiritual insight in contrast to his sons. See my discussion of these texts beginning on p. 116.

[7] Henry McKeating, "Jesus ben Sira's Attitude Towards Women," *Expository Times* 85 (1973): 85; see also John R. Levison, "Is Eve to Blame? A Contextual Analysis of Sirach 25:24," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 617–23.

[8] McKeating, "Jesus ben Sira's Attitude Towards Women," 87.

[9] For some examples, see Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.31; see also Judith R. Wegner, "The Image of the Woman in Philo," in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1982* (ed. K. Richards; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 551–63; idem, "Philo's Portrayal of Woman – Hebraic or Hellenic?" in *'Women Like This': New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. A.-J. Levine; Septuagint and Cognate Studies; Studies in Early Jewish Literature, 1. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 41–66; for some examples from Josephus, see *Ant.* 4.8.15; *Ag. Ap.* 24.

[10] Constance Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in *Religion and Sexism* (ed. R.R. Ruether; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 117–47.

[11] See *The Community Rule* (1QS); *Damascus Document* (CD-A); Philo, *Hypothetica* 11.14–17; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.2; *Ant.* 18.1.5; Pliny, *Natural History* 5.15. Likewise, rabbinic literature seems primarily to discuss women in light of their domestic roles and support of their husbands. See Jacob Neusner, "Thematic or Systematic Description: The Case of the Mishnah's Division of Women," in *Method and Learning in Ancient Judaism* (BJS 10; Missoula, MONT.; Scholar's Press, 1979), 93–100; idem, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women* (5 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1980); Judith Hauptman, "Images of Women in the Talmud," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. R. Reuther; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah*; idem, "The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Juda-

traced through post-biblical literature as views move from the negative to misogyny.[12] In other words, many have concluded that these ancient texts portray women in a negative light, and that this also is an indication of negative views and even misogyny in the social world.

Similarly, others conclude that, since there is no direct evidence that woman led prayers in the synagogue, women were restricted in the practice of religion in the Second Temple period.[13] Adding to this argument is the fact that there is also no explicit evidence of women reading Torah or preaching in the synagogue.[14] Archer suggests that women had little or no religious role in public – or even in the home – except for weeping in public at funerals ("keening").[15]

Yet other researchers find more nuances in many of these texts, and still others find plenty of evidence for public participation of women in cultic practices and positive portrayals of women in religion. Jacob Neusner points out that it is *only* the Essenes, the temple priests, and the later rabbis who deny women any significant roles in the religious or political realm in ancient Judaism.[16] In fact, Neusner believes that in the rabbinic material, most of the regulations regarding women are concerned mainly about women whose status is in flux: when they are eligible for marriage, when they are divorced or widowed, and in illicit sexual relationships. There are indications that prayer was one of the commandments women were to keep (though this comes from later sources).[17] Furthermore, there are examples of women participating in public religious activities in some manner, as evidenced in the Hebrew Bible and later rabbinic texts,[18] as well as in the New Testament.[19]

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ism," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (ed. J. R. Baskin; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 68–93.

[12] Cheryl Anne Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 13.

[13] But see the discussion of Brooten's work below.

[14] Hannah Safrai, "Women and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (eds. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 47.

[15] Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women," 283.

[16] See Jacob Neusner, "From Scripture to Mishnah: The Origins of Mishnah's Division of Women," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 138–53; see also Kraemer, "Women in the Religions of the Greco-Roman World," 130–31.

[17] *T. Berakot* 31a–b, for instance, uses Hannah as a model for the order of public prayer.

[18] See Gen 38; Exod 15.20–21; 35.1f; 38.8; Deut 29.9f; 31.12–13; Judg 4.4f; 13.6f; 21.21; 1 Sam 1.4–9, 19, 21–25; 2.19, 22; 2 Sam 20.16f; 2 Kgs 4.23f; 22.14f; 23.21; 2 Chr 25; Ps 68.12; Jer 31.4; Hos 4.13–14. See Baruch Litvin, *The Sanctity of the Synagogue* (3rd ed.; New York: KTAV, 1987), 115, 126; H.E. Yedidiah Ghatan, *The Invaluable Pearl: The Unique Status of Women in Judaism* (New York: Bloch, 1986), 148–50. The Babylonian Talmud (*Hag.* 16b) reports that women were seen laying their hands on sacrificial animals to perform *semikhah.* See Grossman, "Women and the Jerusalem Temple," 20; *Tg. Onk Exod* 38.8; LXX

Despite some of the more limiting views of women in religion described above, the literature from the Second Temple period does contain a number of stories about women who act in prominent, public roles, such as Judith, Esther, and Deborah, as well as women in supporting roles who have important religious, social, and political impact in some narratives, such as Jael, Hannah, and Susanna. Most of these roles were temporary: Deborah's is an exception. Judith, Deborah (*L.A.B.*), and Job's daughters (*T. Job*) portray women as assertive, self-determined, and as having a greater role than most or all of the men in the same narratives. Even the story of Susanna, which portrays a woman in a more submissive (or at least passive) role, presents the male elders of the city as corrupt, while Susanna and the young boy Daniel are faithful and pious. Judith is portrayed as a "beautiful and pious" widow, exemplifying the ideal widow in Judaism; yet, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, she also summons elders to her home, instructs them on proper faith, and takes control of the situation both religiously and militarily to save her people.

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 11 seemingly indicates that men and women not only sat together in worship, but that women were engaged in prayer and preaching. While the prayers took place in a home and not a synagogue, the setting is public because of who is present. It was also customary in the ancient world for women to mourn by keening and reciting laments at public funerals and burials, as mentioned above.[20] While we see examples of women in the Second Temple literature keening, we also see a reversal of that gender

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Exod 38.26; see also Mayer Gruber, "Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (eds. Jacob Neusner, Baruch Levine, and Ernst Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 36–37; I.J. Peritz, "Women in the Ancient Hebrew Cult," *JBL* 17 (1898): 145–46; S. Schecter, *Studies in Judaism* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1869), 313–14. Safrai cites a number of later Jewish sources from the Tannaitic halakah, the *Tosefta*, and the Mishnah. See also John Chrysostom in *Adv. Jud.* 2.4–6; 4.6 in which he mentions that women attend the synagogue on festival days for prayers and for blowing the *shofar*. See also Acts 16.10–15 in which women are participating in prayer service (this may or may not have been in a building). See Safrai, "Women in the Ancient Synagogue," 42–46.

[19] Mark 15.40–41; Luke 2.36–38; 23.49; Acts 2.17; 16.11–15; 18.2–3, 18–19; 21.9; Rom 16 passim; 1 Cor 11.2–16; 1 Tim 3.11; 5.3–16.

[20] See Judg 11.40; 2 Sam 14.2; 2 Chr 35.25; for other similar activities see 1 Sam 28.7f; Mark 16.1; Luke 23.55; 24.1; *Moed Katan* 3.8–9; *Ket.* 4.4. See also Kathleen Corley, "Women, Gender and Lament in Q," in *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge, 2002), 79–106; M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 22 (there is a second edition of this book available as of 2003; see bibliography); J.K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 193–94; R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985; repr. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001); see also Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 39, 82. See my discussion on the unusual role of Job's daughters in the *Testament of Job* in chapter 3 beginning on p. 120.

function in the *Testament of Job*. The Pseudepigrapha contains stories about women who are portrayed as major figures in religious dramas or prophecies, such as Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the prophetess of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Brooten has shown from archaeological, literary, and epigraphical evidence that women sometimes were given a number of apparently important public titles such as "elder"[21] and "priestess,"[22] though exactly what these titles meant and what functions they included is not always clear.[23] Brooten considers it unlikely that these titles imply that women played significant leadership roles in public worship. Yet she writes that it cannot be ruled out with certainty:

> ... although recitation by priestly women of the priestly blessing seems unlikely in light of the explicit "Aaron and his sons" in Num 6:22, it is not impossible that certain communities could have interpreted this to mean "Aaron and his children" and have asked both the priestly women and the priestly men present to bless them.[24]

Kraemer and Brooten suggest that women probably served on councils of elders in Hellenistic Jewish synagogues, which probably had oversight of the finances and possibly some involvement in the study of scripture.[25] Jewish women in Rome are mentioned as "leaders" in synagogues, though the evidence is unclear as to what functions this role entailed.[26] In Egypt, women appear to have been active in the social and economic life of the Jewish community. Kraemer, based on non-literary evidence,[27] notes that "it appears that Jewish women cannot be distinguished from their non-Jewish counterparts" in Egypt.[28] Jewish inscriptions from Asia Minor appear to show the same thing: women play an active role in the community and with families in public settings. Chesnutt concurs, writing: "Significant instances of active

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[21] See CII, nos. 400, 581, 597, 731c; and *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 27 (1977), no. 1201. For a discussion of these and other inscriptions, see Ross S. Kraemer, "A New Inscription from Malta and the Question of Women Elders in Diaspora Jewish Communities," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 431–38; see also Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 118, and note 76.

[22] These range from the first century BCE through about the fourth century CE. See CII 1514 (SEG 1 [1923] no. 574 at Tell el-Yahudiyyeh); CII 315 at Rome; CII 1007 at Beth She'arim.

[23] Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue,* 90–93; see also Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," 123–25.

[24] Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue,* 95.

[25] Kraemer, "A New Inscription from Malta and the Question of Women Elders in Diaspora Jewish Communities," 431. For Kraemer's inscription data, see pp. 431–38.

[26] Kraemer, "Non-Literary Evidence," 90.

[27] See the specifics of Kraemer's data in Kraemer, "Hellenistic Jewish Women," 194–99.

[28] Kraemer, "Hellenistic Jewish Women," 192.

and public involvement of Jewish women in social, economic, political, and religious life are known."[29]

This brief survey shows that the studies of women and religion in the Second Temple period have not produced a consensus, though most would now agree that the portrayal of the role of women varies (sometimes significantly) from source to source.[30] Geography may play some role: Diaspora women may have had more freedom in some ways than their counterparts in Palestine, though the evidence of such differences is not overwhelming. Since both literary and non-literary evidence shows that Second Temple Judaism was diverse, it is not surprising to find that same diversity in the roles and functions of women. This creates a problem for the researcher in that it becomes easy to "prove" most any pattern or reality, even unknowingly. The warning from the aging professor Sol Robeson to his brilliant but obsessed student Max Cohen in the film *Pi* is worth heeding:

> You want to find the number 216 in the world; you will be able to find it everywhere. Two hundred and sixteen steps from a mere street corner to your front door. Two hundred and sixteen seconds you spend riding on the elevator. When your mind becomes obsessed with anything, you will filter everything else out and find that thing everywhere.

As Max's drive to find meaning in the number 216 blinded him to other possibilities, so we can be blinded by our desire to find certain trends within the diversity of Judaism in the Second Temple period. This study attempts to avoid this difficulty, and add to our understanding, by attending to patterns of prayer found across all the texts that include women at prayer, instead of focusing on one particular document.

Another difficulty derives from the genre and purposes of the texts themselves. Some are presented as historical texts, yet are written as romances (e.g., LXX Esther). Others are written like ancient novels (e.g., *Joseph and Aseneth*), or collections of pseudonymously prophetic oracles (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles*), and still others are expansions of biblical texts (e.g., Pseudo-Philo's *L.A.B.*). Tal Ilan divides these texts into two types: historiographic and non-historiographic compositions. While this division might seem logical, the difficulty lies in determining what is historical and what is non-historical, and these categories do not take into account works that might be based on his-

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[29] Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," 130. For studies on women in general in the ancient world, see Grace H. McCurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire* (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Archaeology, No. 22; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1937); idem, *Hellenistic Queens* (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Archaeology, No. 14; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1932). For two overviews of the history of scholarship on women in ancient Judaism, see Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 1–21; and Griffin, "The Theology and Function of Prayer in the Book of Tobit," 24–38.

[30] Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 228.

torical figures or events but are expanded or edited to varying degrees for theological or other purposes.[31] At what point does one draw the line and suggest that a work is not "historical"? These difficulties also lead us to ask other related questions. Do these sources, portraying a seemingly mixed view of women in the religious sphere, tell us more about how the authors (and/or religious leaders) *wished* the world to be? Or do they simply vary depending on geographic origin, time of writing, and/or intent and purpose? Are the stories of exceptional women simply for entertainment, presenting women in roles or activities that were largely imagined or idealized? Do conflicting portrayals of women in the ancient world tell us more about the interpreters of the texts, the original authors, or the ancient social world? Or are these varying portrayals simply a testament to the diversity inherent in the ancient world? There is likely no single answer to these questions. One might argue that works such as *Joseph and Aseneth* and *Jubilees* are an ancient novel and an example of "rewritten Bible," respectively, and therefore are not examples of actual women who pray. As noted above, some studies, in order to determine the religious role of women in the ancient Jewish world, rely on the rabbinic restrictions of women and conclude that the participation of women in religion was highly restricted, while others focus on the positive statements about women from rabbis and conclude that women had more freedom in religion than has been assumed.[32] In other words, the same literature leads to different conclusions about the historical world. It is true that on occasion, women are portrayed in important religious roles in the literature (e.g., Deborah, Judith), but they are still portrayed differently from male characters. The books of Susanna and Esther portray women in a more "typical" domestic role, that is, subordinate and constrained to a certain social sphere, even though they are depicted as deliverers of their people.

On the other hand, characters such as Deborah and Judith are depicted in pious and faithful, but also in prophetic, political, and military roles, like many male characters. Randall Chesnutt points to the unusual depictions of the women in *Jubilees* and *Joseph and Aseneth* and argues that if such situations were not at least possible, the stories would not have served the purpose of the authors. He writes, "Moreover, these two authors [of *Jubilees* and *Joseph and Aseneth*] do not throw social convention to the wind, but demon-

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[31] For instance, Ilan places 1-2 Macc in the historiographic category, yet is it clear that these are modeled after the biblical books of 1-2 Kgs and ancient histories that allowed expansion and free composition. See Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine,* 28.

[32] See L. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976); Moshe Meiselman, *Jewish Women in Jewish Law* (New York: KTAV, 1978); Menehem Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature* I, II (New York: KTAV, 1986).

strate great concern for proper familial and social patterns."[33] G.W. Bowersock makes a similar point about ancient Greek and Roman fiction in a broader study, arguing that fiction *has* a historical setting, and therefore portrays actual social realities, even though it may not relate actual historical events.[34]

> In reading fiction we must be able to accept the historical context, even though we know it is not real. It must fall within the boundaries of the possible and represent what for the reader would be credible. That is why Sextus Empiricus describes fictions (πλάσματα) as describing things that resemble what really happens.[35]

Still, moving from texts to history is speculative at best. Despite Chesnutt's argument above that an event portrayed in an ancient text should be at least *possible*, he later correctly notes the difficulty of actually determining social reality: in order to move from texts to history, we must determine whether a given author wrote prescriptively or descriptively, and whether these authors wrote as things were or as they wished them to be.[36] Chesnutt writes:

> Even if social realities can be legitimately extrapolated from literary portrayals, one must not generalize across social class, geographic boundaries, and cultural settings. Reconstruction of women's roles from scattered literary representations is therefore hazardous.[37]

Ross Kraemer insists that there *is* a lot of evidence for women's participation in the religion of Hellenistic Judaism, but it is necessary to look at non-literary sources as well as literary sources to make this argument.[38] Yet the problems of the scarcity of sources, the lack of an even distribution of non-literary sources across geographic regions, and the difficulty of distinguishing Jewish sources from other sources raise doubts about conclusions can be drawn.[39] Richard Bauckham writes that while questions about the social world "are important questions...they can be answered only by attending as seriously as possible to what *is* in the texts..."[40]

As this introduction has shown, the study of women in ancient religions is a complex endeavor and the results do not lead everyone to the same conclu-

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[33] Randall Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," *Women in Earliest Christianity* (2 vols.; ed. Carroll D. Osburn; Joplin, Mont.: College Press, 1995), 1:116. Chesnutt cites *Jub.* 29.14–20, and the recurring formula found in *Jos. Asen.*, "[I]t is not proper for the man (woman) who worships God to . . ." (8.5, 7; 21.1; 23.9, 12; 29.3) as examples.

[34] See G.W. Bowersock, *Fiction As History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 52.

[35] Bowersock, *Fiction As History*, 51.

[36] Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," 94–95.

[37] Chesnutt, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," 95.

[38] Ross Kraemer, "Non-Literary Evidence for Jewish Women in Rome and Egypt," *Helios* 13.2 (1986): 85.

[39] As Kraemer notes (Kraemer, "Non-Literary Evidence," 86).

[40] Bauckham, *Gospel Women,* xiv.

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