

## Revelatory Experiences Attributed to Biblical Women in Early Jewish Literature

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For all their obvious differences, the midrashic works *Jubilees*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and the *Testament of Job*<sup>1</sup> share a striking common feature: each greatly expands the role of a woman or women known from the Bible. Rebekah, already a bold and resourceful character in Genesis, is elevated even further in *Jubilees*, where she overshadows her rather docile husband and achieves a significant role in salvation history. Aseneth<sup>2</sup> is mentioned only in passing in Gen 41:45, 50, and 46:20 as the wife of the patriarch Joseph, but in the apocryphal romance it is she — not the patriarch — who is the leading character. Women play almost no role in the biblical book of Job: Job's wife appears only long enough to suggest that he curse God and die (2:9); and nothing is mentioned concerning his daughters other than their names, their exceptional beauty, and their roles as coheirs with their brothers (42:13-15). In the *Testament of Job*, however, the women in Job's family appear regularly, and Job's daughters receive especially complimentary treatment. Moreover, each work attributes to the women some sort of revelatory experience which enhances their role in promoting the central ideals of the book.

To the extent that these portrayals represent post-biblical expansions, they provide important data for studying the varying perceptions of and roles assigned to Jewish women in the Hellenistic era. The purpose of this study is to examine how the revelatory experiences attributed to these women function within the respective writings, how they relate to other Jewish traditions of roughly

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<sup>1</sup>The overworked and imprecise word "midrashic" is used loosely with reference to these three works because they all adapt and retell biblical narratives in such a way as to address contemporary concerns. Other terms (romance, testament) are more appropriate for generic classifications of at least two of these texts, but it is the "midrashic" element in the sense mentioned above which is of primary interest here. Among the many attempts to qualify and refine the term, see G. G. Porton, "Defining Midrash," in J. Neusner (ed.), *The Study of Ancient Judaism*, Vol. I (New York: KTAV, 1981), 55-92; J. Neusner, *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and idem, *What is Midrash? Guides to Biblical Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>This spelling, used throughout the present study, transliterates the form found in the Greek text of *Joseph and Aseneth* (Ἀσενεθ) rather than that of the Masoretic text (אסנת). The Septuagint reads Ἀσεννεθ.

comparable date, and what they suggest about women's roles in the Judaisms of the Hellenistic age.

Although the three apocryphal works are difficult to date, they are considered here in the probable order of their composition. The generally acknowledged approximate dates are: *Jubilees*, mid-second century B.C.E.; *Joseph and Aseneth*, first century B.C.E. or C.E.; and *Testament of Job*, first century C.E.<sup>3</sup>

### Rebekah in *Jubilees*

In rewriting Israel's primeval and ancestral traditions, the author of *Jubilees* embellished the portrait of Rebekah more than that of any other character.<sup>4</sup> Although Isaac is treated sympathetically in this text, he is not presented as having any particular quality that makes him heroic or worthy of emulation. Rather, it is his wife who assumes the mantle of leadership in their marriage and provides the bridge from Abraham to Jacob. P. van Boxel is therefore correct in observing that Rebekah "plays such a central part in this salvation history that she can rightly be called a matriarch of Israel."<sup>5</sup>

The elevation of Rebekah in *Jubilees* is evident as early as the initial scene, which depicts her preference for Jacob over Esau. Genesis gives no reason for her partiality and leaves the reader to assume that it is arbitrary. However, in the pseudepigraphon no less a person than Abraham also favors Jacob; indeed, he commands Rebekah to do the same so that Jacob's advancement may be ensured and that God's purposes may be accomplished through him (19:15-31).<sup>6</sup> The author further justifies Rebekah's favoritism by adding an indication that Jacob was morally superior to Esau (19:13-14; cf. Gen 25:27) as well as by making Rebekah's blessing of Jacob divinely inspired (25:14-23). Rebekah's preference for Jacob is thus given patriarchal, ethical, and theological legitimation. Her culpability in deceiving Isaac to acquire the paternal blessing of the firstborn for Jacob is likewise mitigated by the added detail that a dispensation from heaven facilitated the ruse (26:18). These addi-

<sup>3</sup>See J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement*, SBLSCS 7S (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 134-40, 143-47, 291-95, and the works cited there.

<sup>4</sup>J. Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees*, CBQMS 18 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1987), 217. I am heavily indebted to Endres throughout this section on Rebekah.

<sup>5</sup>"The God of Rebekah," *Service international de documentation judéo-chrétienne* 9 (1976): 18.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Gen 25, where Abraham is already dead when Esau and Jacob are born.



tions exonerate Rebekah from any charge of ethical impropriety. Actions which in Genesis not only lack clear motivation but are in fact deceitful become in *Jubilees* commendable acts by which Rebekah furthers divine purposes and provides a crucial link in the drama of salvation history.

After Abraham's death Rebekah assumes an especially prominent leadership role. The strong admonition to Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman (25:1-3) and the lengthy parental blessing for Jacob (25:11-23) come not from Isaac, but from Rebekah. Isaac is in fact conspicuously absent from this chapter.<sup>7</sup> In the preceding generation it was Abraham who blessed Jacob (22:10-30) and warned him against exogamy (22:20). These parallel functions of Abraham and Rebekah are among the indications that Rebekah, not Isaac, is the bridge between Abraham's generation and Jacob's. In view of the author's conflict with the assimilationists of the day<sup>8</sup> and his vehement opposition to intermarriage with gentiles,<sup>9</sup> it is noteworthy that he allows a woman such a prominent role as a spokesperson for his ideal of endogamy.

Even more striking is Rebekah's blessing of Jacob. Not only is this matriarchal blessing without precedent in the biblical text, Rebekah is said to have been inspired to utter it by the descent of a "spirit of truth" upon her mouth (25:14).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is significant that in this blessing a woman — this time gifted with prophetic speech — again articulates one of the author's most cherished ideals, namely, the purification of the Jerusalem sanctuary (25:21).<sup>11</sup> Rebekah's expanded role as the more imperious partner in her marriage is highlighted still further in *Jubilees* 25 by her laying hands upon Jacob (25:14) — a gesture not performed by anyone else in the text — and by Jacob's unqualified submission to her wishes (25:9-10).

The revelatory experiences ascribed to Rebekah do not end

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Gen 28:1, where it is Isaac who forbids Jacob to marry a Canaanite. In *Jub.* 27:9-11, Isaac counsels and blesses Jacob not only much later than Rebekah does, but also much more briefly. He merely recapitulates what Rebekah has already done.

<sup>8</sup>See, *inter alia*, J. C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, HSM 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 241-46.

<sup>9</sup>See especially *Jub.* 30:11.

<sup>10</sup>Ethiopic manuscript C reads "holy spirit." Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the Pseudepigrapha are from Charlesworth, *OTP*.

<sup>11</sup>From 1:29 and 4:26 it is clear that the author equates this sanctuary with the Temple in Jerusalem. *Jub.* 23:21 describes the pollution of the Temple which renders it unfit to be the authentic holy place. See G. L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, SPB 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 15f., 29-31, and 85f.



with her inspired blessing of Jacob. According to 27:1 Esau's murderous intentions toward Jacob "were told to Rebekah in a dream."<sup>12</sup> On the basis of this revelation she orders Jacob to flee to Haran and seek refuge with her brother, Laban. Isaac later instructs Jacob to the same effect, but he does so only upon Rebekah's urging (27:7-11); this is yet another indication of who the leader is in this marriage. Rebekah's announcement to Jacob of her impending death and her testamentary speeches to her family are likewise prompted by a revelatory dream (35:6).

The author continues to highlight Rebekah's stature as familial leader and as a vital link in salvation history up to the account of her death in chapter 35. Even the fatherly actions attributed to Isaac replicate actions already taken by Rebekah. Thus, in *Jubilees* 31 Isaac follows Rebekah's lead in pronouncing a blessing upon Jacob, and in so doing he is influenced by a "spirit of prophecy" (31:12) just as Rebekah was earlier (25:14). Similarly, Isaac's testamentary speech and final joyous meal with his two sons in chapter 36 replicate Rebekah's final actions in chapter 35; this recapitulation suggests that Rebekah held sway over her husband even after her death. Since Rebekah's testamentary admonitions to familial harmony seem to reflect the internecine strife and the Jewish-Idumaeon hostilities of the mid-second century B.C.E.,<sup>13</sup> the author has once again employed a woman to address pressing contemporary problems.

Numerous other subtle alterations protecting Rebekah's reputation<sup>14</sup> combine with her advocacy of the author's most cherished ideals to establish her as an important example for the Jewish community of the author's day to emulate. Endres has called attention to the importance *Jubilees* assigns to the ancestors as examples of covenantal fidelity:<sup>15</sup>

Since human fidelity to the covenant greatly concerned this author, his redaction of the story downplays the role of divine gratuity. In the biblical tradition, God's love and favor shone the more highly because of, and not in spite of, human frailty. For this author, however, the frailty, peccadilloes, and sins of

<sup>12</sup>Gen 27:42 does not indicate the means by which she learned of Esau's scheme.

<sup>13</sup>Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 173-76; VanderKam, *Studies*, 230-38; G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 76.

<sup>14</sup>For example, all hints of the possible sexual violation of Rebekah by Abimelech of Gerar are carefully eliminated (*Jub.* 24:12f.; cf. Gen 26:6-11).

<sup>15</sup>*Biblical Interpretation*, 49.



the ancestors (especially of Jacob) proved an embarrassment; thus he deleted them whenever possible. As a result, the forebears play a significantly different role in *Jubilees*: they no longer function primarily as the recipients of divine favor, but as *exempla* for imitation by the Jewish community.

As a moral example, therefore, as well as a familial leader, Rebekah takes her place alongside the patriarchs of Israel. At the conclusion of her blessing of Jacob, her love is even cited as paradigmatic for God's love (25:23) — a striking indication of the esteem in which this author held Rebekah.

All these data combine to suggest that Rebekah is for the author of *Jubilees* "the matriarch *par excellence* of the Jewish people."<sup>16</sup> Taking the leadership role that her unassuming husband did not, she conveys the election from Abraham to Jacob and assures the continuity of salvation history. As a moral exemplar and outspoken opponent of exogamy, the contamination of the Temple, and familial discord, she embodies the ideals which the author considered indispensable for the survival of Judaism through the traumas of the second century B.C.E. Especially significant for our study is Rebekah's role as an agent of divine revelation. Although for *Jubilees* it is Levi and his priestly descendants who are primarily responsible for preserving and interpreting Israel's sacred traditions,<sup>17</sup> Levi is said to have received the bulk of these traditions from Jacob (45:15); and he in turn had received at least some of them from Rebekah as a result of her revelatory experiences.<sup>18</sup> Thus Rebekah functions as one of the mediators of the sacred traditions that, according to *Jubilees*, remain normative for God's people.

#### Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth*

Aseneth so dominates the apocryphon which narrates her conversion and marriage to Joseph that the title now commonly used for the work, *Joseph and Aseneth*, must be judged a misnomer. In the first part of this double novella, chapters 1-21, Joseph appears at the beginning and end but is absent throughout the heart of the story; there, Aseneth's conversion occupies center stage. In

<sup>16</sup>The language is that of *ibid.*, 217.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 120-54, 233f., *et passim*; and A. Hultgård, *L'eschatologie des Testaments des Douze Patriarchs*, Vol. I, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum 6, 7 (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1977-82), 15-45.

<sup>18</sup>Jacob's other sources include the testamentary speech of Abraham (25:5; 39:6), theophanic dreams and visions (32:20-26; 44:1-6), and especially the seven heavenly tablets which he saw in a night vision (32:20-26).



the the second novella, chapters 22-29, Aseneth again eclipses Joseph, not only by the frequency of her appearance in contrast to Joseph's usual absence, but also by her role alongside Levi as a prime example of and advocate for the ethical ideals which the text promotes.

In no way does this elevation of Aseneth imply that the author either denigrates Joseph or exalts Aseneth at his expense. Joseph is no less a paradigm of virtue here than he is in so many other early Jewish sources.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the very esteem in which Joseph was held furnished this author a primary means for extolling Aseneth. The terms describing Aseneth so closely parallel those used for Joseph as to betray a concern to elevate Aseneth to a status commensurate with that of the revered patriarch. Thus, just as Joseph is said to have been so handsome that he was the desire of all the women of Egypt (7:3), so Aseneth's beauty occasioned intense rivalry for her hand (1:4-6). Yet, just as Joseph rejected these advances and remained a virgin (παρθένος; 4:7; 8:1; see also 7:4f.), so Aseneth was "a virgin (παρθένος) hating every man" (7:8; see also 1:4-6; 2:1). Exalted attributes are ascribed to Joseph: he is "the Powerful One of God" (3:4; 4:7; 18:1f.; 21:21), "the son of God" (6:3, 5; 18:11; 21:4); but even these lofty epithets find counterparts in the description of Aseneth as one "adorned like a bride of God" (4:1) and as "a daughter of the Most High" (21:4). The portrait of Joseph in 6:2-6 comes close to ascribing angelic status to him, but the same can be said of the descriptions of Aseneth in 18:9-11 and 20:6f.: she is likened to the sun just as Joseph is; heavenly beauty is ascribed to both; each is said to radiate great light. Joseph is clad in an exquisite white tunic, wears a golden crown with precious stones, and carries a royal staff when he first arrives at the house of Pentephres (5:5); later Aseneth also dresses in a radiant white garment, wears a golden crown with costly stones, and bears a scepter (14:12-15; 18:5f.). When the plot against the couple is narrated in chapters 22-29, the Lord is said to guard Aseneth (26:2) as well as Joseph (25:5) "like an apple of the eye," and to fight for Aseneth (28:1) as well as Joseph (25:6) against the antagonists. As R. C. Douglas has observed, "Aseneth and Joseph are almost mirror images of each other."<sup>20</sup>

The most likely explanation for Aseneth's exaltation is that the Jewish community behind the apocryphon had experienced some

<sup>19</sup>See G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Joseph*, SCS 5 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975); H. W. Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); and M. Niehoff, "The Figure of Joseph in the Targums," *JJS* 39 (1988): 234-50.

<sup>20</sup>"Liminality and Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth," *JSP* 3 (1988): 31-42.



disharmony concerning the perception of gentile converts and especially the propriety of marriage between one born Jewish and a proselyte.<sup>21</sup> The exalted portrayal of Aseneth demonstrates that the true convert is deserving of full acceptance into the community of Israel and is indeed worthy to be the wife of one who is born a Jew.<sup>22</sup> Of the various means by which the author labors to establish this point, none is more fully developed or more important for our purposes than the extended narrative of Aseneth's epiphanic experience in chapters 14-17.

In chapter 14, a man from heaven, later identified as God's chief angel (15:12), appears amid great emanations of light to the penitent Aseneth; he commands her to replace her mourning garments with glorious clothing consonant with her new status as one of the people of God (14:12f.). Next, he informs Aseneth that her repentance has been duly acknowledged (15:2f.), that her name has been written irrevocably in the heavenly book of the living (15:4), that God has given her to Joseph as a bride (15:6), that her name will be changed to "City of Refuge" in view of her role as the prototypical proselyte (15:7), and that in converting she has eaten the same food as that eaten by the angels of God in paradise and so has become a participant in life, immortality, and incorruptibility (16:14-16). As D. Sanger has perceived, this angelic visitation is neither the cause nor the occasion of Aseneth's conversion; rather, it functions both to provide heavenly confirmation of a conversion that has already taken place and to articulate the benefits of belonging to the people of God.<sup>23</sup> That Aseneth was worthy to receive the heavenly visitor and the glorious blessings announced by him proves that her conversion and her marriage to Joseph have been divinely sanctioned and that she deserves full recognition as one of the people of God.

In addition to the general revelatory character of this heavenly visitation, the "man from heaven" indicates to Aseneth that "the ineffable mysteries of the Most High" have been revealed to her (16:14). The context suggests that the content of these "ineffable mysteries" is the source of the divine life in which Aseneth participates symbolically by eating from the honeycomb provided miraculously by the

<sup>21</sup>This understanding of the social world of Joseph and Aseneth is developed at length in R. D. Chesnutt, "The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth," *JSP* 2 (1988): 21-48.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-43.

<sup>23</sup>"Bekehrung und Exodus: Traditionshintergrund von 'Joseph und Aseneth,'" *JSJ* 10 (1979) 29f.; and *idem*, *Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, WUNT 2.5



angel. Eating the honey, in turn, is equated with eating the bread of life, drinking the cup of immortality, and being anointed with the ointment of incorruptibility (16:16; 19:5; cf. 8:5, 9; 15:5; 21:21). This formulaic language suggests that to live faithfully as a Jew and avoid the contamination of gentile food, drink, and oil — the staples of life most susceptible to gentile defilement — is to share the divine food and hence the immortality of angels in paradise.<sup>24</sup> These μυστήρια are revealed to Aseneth (16:14), and through her story, to all who follow in her steps of renouncing idols and turning to the Lord.

In the second novella, Aseneth receives yet other revelations from Levi, her brother-in-law (22:13). This text holds Levi in high esteem as a prophet gifted with unusual powers to read what is written in people's hearts (23:8; 28:15) and to perceive events happening at a distance (26:6; 28:15-17). As a prophet Levi also had insight into the heavenly mysteries, and he shares these secrets with Aseneth:

And Aseneth loved Levi exceedingly beyond all of Joseph's brethren, because he was one who attached himself to the Lord, and he was a prudent man and a prophet of the Most High and sharp-sighted with his eyes, and he used to see letters written in heaven by the finger of God and he knew the unspeakable (mysteries) of the Most High God and revealed them to Aseneth in secret, because he himself, Levi, would love Aseneth very much, and see her place of rest in the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven. (22:13)

The author of Joseph and Aseneth thus clearly values higher revelation. Not only Levi, but also Joseph, is said to have received revelations in some form (6:6; 19:9). However, since in this text it is Levi who serves the primary role of recipient and purveyor of re-

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(Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 156f., 182.

<sup>24</sup>On the problematic bread-cup-ointment triad, see C. Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth: Überlieferung-Ortsbestimmung*, WUNT 8 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965), 121-33; idem, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord's Supper," *NTS* 33 (1987): 109-17; B. Lindars, "'Joseph and Aseneth' and the Eucharist," *Scripture: Meaning and Method. Essays Presented to A. T. Hanson for His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. B. P. Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), 181-99; and R. D. Chesnutt, "Bread of Life in Joseph and Aseneth and in John 6," in J. E. Priest (ed.), *Johannine Studies in Honor of Frank Pack* (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University Press, 1989), 1-16. In a forthcoming study I argue more fully for the interpretation summarized above. Parallels to the triad in other Jewish sources confirm that gentile food, drink, and oil were considered so contaminated by association with idolatry that the Jewish avoidance of them served as a representative expression for the life *more judaico*.



vealed knowledge, it is significant both that Levi conveys supernatural knowledge to Aseneth and that Aseneth is carefully portrayed to resemble Levi closely. She has access to "the ineffable mysteries of the Most High" (16:14) as does Levi (22:13); she urges clemency toward enemies with the same magnanimous language used earlier by Levi for the same purpose (28:7, 10, 14; cf. 23:9-12; 29:3); she ranks among "those who attach themselves (οἱ προσκείμενοι) to the Most High God" (15:7; cf. 16:14) just as Levi is characterized as "one who attached himself (προσκέμενος) to the Lord" (22:13). Thus the convert to Judaism is placed on equal footing with another of the most revered members of the Jewish community, and a woman is assigned revelatory experiences comparable to those attributed to the leading male characters.

### Job's Wife and Daughters in the *Testament of Job*

The study of the role of women in this third ancient text is complicated by uncertainty concerning the relationship of chapters 46-53 to the rest of the book. Foremost among the factors which convince many of a separate origin for these concluding chapters is a markedly different image of women from that which emerges in chapters 1-45. Although women figure prominently in 1-45 as well as in 46-53, only in the latter are they depicted in a complimentary fashion. Whether chapters 46-53 represent (1) an interpolation into a work which originally ended after chapter 45 with the resolution of the major conflicts in the narrative,<sup>25</sup> (2) a part of the original designed to bring to a climax and resolve other elements in the book, including the inferior status to which women had been relegated,<sup>26</sup> or (3) a different source from which the author drew without ironing out the discrepancies with the material in chapters 1-45,<sup>27</sup> is beyond the scope of this study. Here it is sufficient to probe the exalted depiction of women in chapters 46-53 in order to inquire first how it differs from that in chapters 1-45, and second, how it

<sup>25</sup>This was argued in detail by M. R. James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, 2d Ser., Texts and Studies 5.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), xciv-xcvi. So also R. Spittler, "The Testament of Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes" (Unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1971), 58-69, summarized in idem, "Testament of Job," *OTP* I, 834; and E. von Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten I: Das Testament als Literaturgattung im Judentum der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit*, *ALGHJ* 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 131-32.

<sup>26</sup>So J. J. Collins, "Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Job," in G. MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 48; and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 246f.

<sup>27</sup>P. van der Horst, "The Role of Women in the Testament of Job," *Neder-*



relates to the elevated portrayals of women and especially the revelatory experiences attributed to them in the other documents here under consideration.

Throughout the *Testament of Job* a contrast is drawn between the transitory material world, which is the arena of Satan's activity, and the permanent realities of the heavenly realm. Job has insight into this distinction, and the plot revolves around his interaction with those who do not.<sup>28</sup> The first major section (chapters 2-27) depicts Job in direct conflict with Satan. By means of an angelophanic revelation, Job is made aware of supramundane reality; he is by this knowledge set apart from those who remain subject to Satan's deceptions. Job is able to penetrate, in four distinct episodes, the disguises with which Satan successfully deceives others. In two cases, those deceived by Satan's wiles are women: a servant girl and Job's wife, Sitidos.<sup>29</sup> Satan appears in chapter 7 in the guise of a beggar asking for bread. Job immediately recognizes him and tells his servant girl to give him a burnt loaf. However, not knowing that the beggar is Satan, she gives him her own good loaf instead. Far more developed is the episode in chapters 23-27 involving Job's wife. This time Satan has bread for sale and Sitidos is the beggar. Although Sitidos unselfishly sells her hair in order to buy bread for Job, she is deceived by Satan and becomes an accomplice in his effort to entice Job to sin. Job, on the other hand, readily unmasks the disguised Satan and reveals to Sitidos that she has been led astray. The function of these women, as Collins has suggested, is to provide "a foil to show off Job's superior handling of the situation."<sup>30</sup>

It is possible to exaggerate the negative light in which these women are cast. In one sense they are portrayed sympathetically: they are utterly loyal to Job, and even when they act improperly

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lands *Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986): 283.

<sup>28</sup>Collins, "Structure and Meaning," 40: "Throughout the book Job stands in opposition to some other party. In the first half of the book we have a conflict between Job and Satan, in the second half a confrontation between Job and his friends. These two oppositions may be said to form the core of the book." My understanding of the literary structure and purpose of the *Testament of Job* is heavily indebted to Collins's important article and to Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 241-48.

<sup>29</sup>This spelling of the name will be used throughout, although there is considerable variation in the manuscript tradition. Some scholars, assuming that "Sitidos" is the genitival form which came to be mistaken for the nominative, prefer the spelling "Sitis"; but cf. van der Horst, "Role of Women," 275f.

<sup>30</sup>"Structure and Meaning," 40. See also van der Horst, "Role of Women," 278: "She [Sitidos] is used in order to create a symmetry in the plot, so that two mirror images complement each other. Job and God are on the one side. ... The Satan and the wife are on the other side." Van der Horst cites private correspondence from A. Brenner as the source for this statement.



they are victims rather than willing agents of satanic illusions. For example, even though the servant girl fails to recognize Satan, she acts out of kind-hearted generosity in giving bread to a beggar (7:11).<sup>31</sup> And Sitidos is consistently depicted as a devoted wife: she even suffers the humiliation of cutting and selling her hair in order to buy food for her husband (23:6-11). Indeed, by her actions on behalf of Job she carries the plot along for a significant portion of the book.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of spiritual awareness she is conspicuously deficient; her lack of perception is contrasted with the superior insight of Job.

In the second major section of the book, chapters 28-45, Job's superior insight is again contrasted with others' lack of perception. The primary foils here are four visiting kings,<sup>33</sup> but Sitidos also demonstrates a failure to perceive parallel to that of the kings. In chapter 39, as she laments the death of her children, Sitidos requests that the kings' soldiers dig through the ruins of the fallen house and recover the bones of the children in order to give them a decent burial. The kings agree, but Job forbids them; he insists that the children have been taken up to heaven and therefore that the search for their bones would be futile. Although Sitidos and the kings think Job has gone mad, the superiority of his insight is proved when all see a vision of the children in heaven, "crowned with the splendor of the heavenly one" (40:3). The vision leads Sitidos and three of the four kings to acknowledge the heavenly reality to which Job is already attuned. Even though Sitidos finally receives this awareness of spiritual reality, it is clear that she does so only through Job's mediation: it was he who revealed to her that she was being led astray by Satan, and it is he who now discloses to her the glorious heavenly status of their deceased children. On her own she has no such insight; rather, she misperceives reality and errs repeatedly. In fact, for the short time that she lives following her vision, she resumes an earthbound existence by taking rest and refreshment and then continuing the duties of her servitude (40:4-6).

The portrayal of Job's wife is all the more uncomplimentary because she never intentionally takes Satan's side; she, like the servant girl earlier, is simply so spiritually imperceptive that she becomes Satan's unwitting accomplice. Although men as well as

<sup>31</sup>Her action parallels Job's acts of generosity (9-12; 53:2f.) and contrasts with the concern of Job's daughters for their own living (46:2; 47:1).

<sup>32</sup>I am indebted to A.-J. Levine for this insight.

<sup>33</sup>The identification of these friends as kings is found in the LXX (Job 42:17e).



women serve as foils for Job, the text leaves the strong impression that women — precisely because they are women — are spiritually unintelligent and therefore easy prey for Satan. That we are justified in deducing such a general estimate of women from the particular characters in the narrative is confirmed by 26:6, where Sitidos is ranked as "one of the senseless women who misguide their husbands' sincerity."<sup>34</sup>

The picture is radically different in chapters 46-53. A premium remains on insight into heavenly reality, but it is Job's three daughters, not his sons, who are heirs to this insight.<sup>35</sup> Job divides his earthly possessions among his seven sons, but to his daughters he bequeaths something better: three golden boxes containing the three strands of the therapeutic girdle by which his own health had been restored and by which the Lord had revealed to him "things present and things to come" (47:9). Each of the girls dons her cord as a sash and, to cite the first daughter's experience as typical, "she took on another heart — no longer minded toward earthly things — but she spoke ecstatically in the angelic dialect, sending up a hymn to God in accord with the hymnic style of the angels" (48:2-3). When Job dies three days later, only his daughters — not the sons — see his soul conveyed into heaven in gleaming chariots (52:1-11). As Job's body is taken to the tomb, the daughters, girded with their charismatic sashes and singing hymns to God, lead the way; in contrast, Job's seven sons and his brother can only weep and lament (52:12-53:4).

J. Collins maintains that the rather low view of women's spiritual abilities continues even into chapters 46-53, since here Job's daughters, like his first wife, gain insight into heavenly reality only through Job's mediation.<sup>36</sup> However, as P. van der Horst observes, the fact that Job plays some role in both cases does not justify such a conclusion.<sup>37</sup> The enlightenment of Job's doormaid

<sup>34</sup>See also the vivid translation in R. Thornhill, "The Testament of Job," *Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 633: "one of those brainless women who subvert their own husbands' integrity."

<sup>35</sup>These are Job's daughters by his second wife, Dinah, the daughter of the patriarch Jacob. Given the way Sitidos is portrayed, it is not surprising that she, unlike Job's wife in the biblical story, dies before Job's fortunes are restored. The tradition that Job married Dinah is also attested, *inter alia*, in *LAB* 8:7f.; *Gen. Rab.* 57:4; and *Tg. Job* 2:9.

<sup>36</sup>"Testaments," in M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, CRINT 2.2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 352f.; and idem, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 223.

<sup>37</sup>"Role of Women," 280f.



and his wife were *ad hoc* and temporary; they undergo no permanent transition from satanic deception to spiritual perception. Following her vision Sitidos requires rest and refreshment before returning to the duties of her earthly servitude (40:4-6).<sup>38</sup> This earthbound status contrasts sharply with that of Job's daughters; the language employed to describe them after their transforming revelatory experience comes close to an ascription of heavenly or angelic status. Each daughter is so radically transformed that she disregards earthly things and praises God in angelic languages. These women become the leading characters in chapters 46-53; the role of their father is minor, and that of their brothers and uncle unflattering. In a reversal of the stereotypes prominent in the earlier chapters, the "feminine" lack of perception attributed to Job's maidservant and his wife is here ascribed to the helpless male characters. The men are not only unaware of the glorious fate of Job's soul, they even assume the typically "female" role of expressing the lament.<sup>39</sup> The women, on the other hand, are now the knowledgeable ones who, like Job, do not become distraught over earthly afflictions but take comfort in heavenly reality.

Women thus play a remarkably positive role in chapters 46-53. The revelatory experiences of Job's daughters provide the climactic testimony for an order of reality which enables those aware of it to endure in a troubled and transient world of satanic illusions. Collins's statement that "womankind in *T. Job* symbolizes ... the human state of ignorance" is therefore valid for chapters 1-45, but hardly so for chapters 46-53. The revelations and ecstatic behavior attributed to the daughters in these chapters, *vis-à-vis* the rather dull male characters, project an image of women which contrasts sharply not only with that in chapters 1-45 but also with stereotypes of women in early Judaism.

### Patterns and Implications

What patterns emerge from the foregoing discussion of the revelatory experiences and otherwise exalted roles assigned to biblical women in the three works considered? What, if anything, can be

<sup>38</sup>In the immediately following narrative of her death, some witnesses indicate that she "died disheartened" while others read "died in good spirits" (40:6).

<sup>39</sup>Van der Horst, "Role of Women," 282; and see further M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 10-23 and 212 n. 107: "The prominence of women in funeral lamentation is attested from earliest times in archaeology, epigraphy, and literature."



inferred about the status of Jewish women in the Greco-Roman era? Two kinds of conclusions, both tentative, are appropriate. The first concerns the affinities between these apocryphal works and other early Jewish sources in which women are said to have received revelations, and the second concerns the implications of our study for the social position of women in early Judaism.

The variety of functions served by the revelations to women in the three works makes generalizations hazardous. Rebekah's revelations support her vital role in the salvation history of *Jubilees*: she represents the bridge from Abraham to Jacob and an early link in the all-important chain of levitical tradition. Her ethical admonitions and her role as a model of covenant faithfulness are also strengthened by references to her revealed knowledge. The revelations to Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth* amplify her role as the prototypical proselyte: through her experiences divine approval is assured, and social acceptance is sought, both for gentiles who sincerely convert to Judaism and for marriage between born Jews and such proselytes. The weight of Aseneth's exemplary conduct in the face of hostility, as well as her appeal for clemency and nonretaliation in such situations, is also augmented by her revelations. By means of the heavenly realities revealed to Job's daughters, the *Testament of Job* 46-53 emphasizes a heavenly order of reality which enables those sensitive to it to endure the satanic afflictions of the material world. As functionally and substantively different as these revelations are, it is nonetheless significant that in three discrete and diverse early Jewish texts, portraits of women known from the Bible are embellished with revelatory experiences which play a central part in the message of the book.

Moreover, the works considered here are not alone among Jewish texts in ascribing revelations to biblical women. Rebekah is a favorite subject of such traditions; the targums and rabbinic midrashim often refer to her as a prophetess. *Genesis Rabbah* 67:9 (cf. 67:2) and *Targum Onqelos* on Gen 27:13 attribute Rebekah's knowledge of Esau's plot to prophetic revelation, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 27:5 and 27:42 cites revelations by the Holy Spirit as the means by which Rebekah came to know both of Isaac's intention to bless Esau and later of Esau's plot against Jacob.<sup>40</sup> Even Josephus, who typically downplays assertiveness or

<sup>40</sup>See further P. Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom heiligen Geist in der rabbinischen Literatur*, SANT 28 (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1972), 55f.; and Ginzburg, *Legends* I, 341; V, 271 n. 15, 272 n. 18, 281 n. 72, and 287 n. 113.



initiative on the part of biblical women,<sup>41</sup> credits Rebekah with wisdom and foreknowledge and allows her a significant role as a divine agent.<sup>42</sup> The tenacity of such traditions is attested by late midrashim which report that Rebekah foresaw the destruction of the temple by Titus and the martyrdom of great Jewish scholars by the Romans.<sup>43</sup>

Jewish sources attribute revelations to other biblical women as well. Based on Gen 18:15, several rabbinic texts represent Sarah as having received direct communication from God.<sup>44</sup> *B. Megillah* 14a recognizes seven prophetesses in Scripture: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.<sup>45</sup> Some texts simply assume that all the matriarchs were prophetesses.<sup>46</sup> In Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 9:9f., Miriam receives the Spirit of God and has a revelatory dream in which an angelic being foretells the illustrious career of her yet unborn brother, Moses. The same work presents Deborah as one who "enlightens" Israel (30:2; 33:1), a visionary who sees the stars and lightning defeat the enemies of God's people (31:1).

Non-biblical women are also cast as recipients and purveyors of divine revelation in early Jewish and Jewish-Christian literature. In the very Jewish context of the Lucan infancy narratives, Anna is

<sup>41</sup>On the reduction of Rebekah's role, see T. W. Franxman, *Genesis and the 'Jewish Antiquities' of Flavius Josephus*, BibOr 35 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 176, 182, 184. See also B. H. Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," *JJS* 39 (1988): 143-70. Concerning Josephus's portrayal of Sarah, for example, Amaru writes (p. 145): "Sarah is most notable for her submissiveness and her chastity. Josephus effects the first quality by giving her no direct speech in his narrative, and by deleting the few acts of initiative attributed to her in the biblical text. Whatever her significance to the biblical story line, in every scene shared with her spouse her role is diminished and her presence made unobtrusive, consistently permitting Abraham to hold 'centre stage.'" Amaru (p. 146 n. 12) correctly relates this tendency of Josephus to the hellenistic notion that assertiveness and independence are undesirable qualities for women. With reference to hellenization in Josephus's portrayals of women generally, see L. H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Deborah," in A. Caquot, M. Hadas-Lebel, and J. Riaud (eds.), *Hellenica et Judaica* (Leuven and Paris, 1986), 115-28; and idem, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Version of Esther," *TAPA* 101 (1970): 143-70.

<sup>42</sup>*Ant.* 1.19.1-5. See further Amaru, "Portraits," 150f.; and J. L. Bailey, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs," in L. Feldman and G. Hata (eds.), *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State, 1987), 161-65.

<sup>43</sup>*Midrash ha-Gadol* to Gen 27; *Leket Midrashim* 22a. See Ginzburg, *Legends*, V, 271 n. 15, and 287 n. 113.

<sup>44</sup>*Gen. Rab.* 20:6; 45:10; 48:20; 63:7; and *j. Sotah* 21b; but cf. n. 48 below on the Sages' attempts to qualify this admission.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. the longer list of biblical characters designated "prophetesses" in Ginzburg, *Legends* VII (Index), 387f.

<sup>46</sup>*Gen. Rab.* 67:9; *S. 'Olam Rab.* 21.



called a prophetess (Lk 2:36), and the reference in Rev 2:20 to Jezebel's appropriation of the same title implies that prophetesses were accepted and respected in at least some early Christian circles. Other women who prophesied in the early church include the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9) and the worshipers envisioned in I Cor 11:5. One of the very signs of the messianic age according to Acts 2:17-21, with its quotation of Joel 2:28-32, is that women as well as men would receive outpourings of God's spirit and would prophesy. Lk 24:22f. reports that the women who visited Jesus' tomb saw a vision of angels. The genre of sibylline oracles in early Judaism and Christianity depends for its long-standing popularity upon the premise that women could receive and utter ecstatic prophecies. In the Egyptian Therapeutic community described by Philo, both men and women had ecstatic experiences.<sup>47</sup>

From these diverse revelatory experiences attributed to women in early Jewish tradition, sweeping generalizations are impossible. Certainly no linear development is discernible. Further, some strands of Jewish thought carefully suppress even the hint that women received divine revelations.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the three portrayals of women which form the subject of this study are significant tributaries to those streams of tradition from which emerge other currents with prominent roles for women. These diverse currents include the phenomenon of prophetesses in early Christianity, the rabbinic characterization of the matriarchs as prophetesses,

<sup>47</sup>*On the Contemplative Life* 1-11. See R. S. Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt: Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides," *Signs* 14 (1989): 342-70.

<sup>48</sup>For example, Josephus eliminates Rebekah's direct communication from God (Gen 25:23); instead he has Isaac receive the divine oracle regarding Jacob and Esau (*Ant* 1.18.1). Other examples of this tendency in Josephus are discussed in Amaru, "Portraits," 143-53. In a similar vein, rabbinic midrash on Gen 18:15 acknowledges that God spoke to Sarah but qualifies this admission carefully: some Sages insisted that Sarah was the only woman with whom God ever condescended to speak directly and that he did so only because of the peculiar circumstances of the case; others argue that God spoke to her through some intermediary such as an angel or Shem, the son of Noah (*Gen. Rab.* 20:6; 45:10; 48:20; 63:7; and *j. Sotah* 21b). Philo's pejorative use of feminine terminology to describe the irrational soul reflects a similar perception of women as lacking spiritual insight (e.g., *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 1:8). See R. A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 40-44, and the article by J. Romney Wegner in this volume. For a convenient if somewhat tendentious collection of Jewish texts evidencing the perception of women as ignorant and easily misled, as well as texts projecting a more positive image of women, see L. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976).



Merkabah mysticism,<sup>49</sup> Gnosticism,<sup>50</sup> and Montanism.<sup>51</sup>

To extrapolate information about the actual social status of women from literary embellishments of biblical characters is extremely difficult. What is feasible for women in literary fiction is not necessarily feasible in social reality; nor do women's roles in literary fiction necessarily represent an author's social ideal. In the case of *Joseph and Aseneth*, for example, it is extremely doubtful that one can infer from the singular case of Aseneth the initiatory patterns regularly followed in the author's community. Aseneth's conversion is by all estimates a special case; she is a larger-than-life figure whose unique characteristics and actions befit her prototypical status but may not reflect social reality or actual ritual practice.<sup>52</sup> Even so, if an exalted and influential position for a woman had simply been out of the question in the social environment from which the apocryphon came, Aseneth's story could not have been expected to serve the purposes the author intended. One might argue that misogyny typified the apocryphon's community and that one of the author's very purposes was to correct it, but there is little in *Joseph and Aseneth* itself to suggest that this was the axe the author wished to grind. An exemplary and influential role for a woman is assumed rather than argued; it is a premise from which the author proceeds to deal with other concerns.<sup>53</sup> The Jewish world of this

<sup>49</sup>The connection between Asen. and the Merkabah mystical tradition, however, is not as close as H. C. Kee suggests in "The Socio-Religious Setting and Aims of 'Joseph and Asenath,'" in G. MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1976 Seminar Papers* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 183-92; and idem, "The Socio-Cultural Setting of Joseph and Aseneth," *NTS* 29 (1983): 394-413. The alleged affinities are superficial and exaggerated, and fundamental differences are overlooked. Much closer, but still requiring extreme caution, are the affinities between *T. Job* and Merkabah mysticism. See H. C. Kee, "Satan, Magic, and Salvation in the Testament of Job," in G. MacRae (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 53-76.

<sup>50</sup>See K. L. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

<sup>51</sup>Jewish elements in Montanism are unmistakable even if J. M. Ford, "Was Montanism a Jewish-Christian Heresy?" *JEH* 17 (1966): 145-58, overstates the Jewish-Christian character of the sect. See W. H. C. Frend, "Montanism: Research and Problems," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 20 (1984): 521-37, esp. 533.

<sup>52</sup>See Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 261-263; and C. Burchard, "Der jüdische Asenethroman und seine Nachwirkung. Von Egeria zu Anna Katharina Emmerick oder von Moses aus Aggel zu Karl Kerényi," *ANRW* 2.20.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), 656.

<sup>53</sup>Significant in this connection is the very positive feminine imagery used in the description of Μετάνοια, the "exceedingly beautiful and good daughter of the Most High" (15:7). Other Jewish texts using feminine imagery for divine entities, such as personified Σοφία, are notoriously misogynistic; see especially the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach; see also n. 48 above on Philo's use



text was therefore likely one in which women served (or could serve) as leaders who exemplified and spoke out for the principles central to the life of community.

The same may be said concerning the portrayal of Rebekah in *Jubilees*. On the one hand, it would be naive to suppose that in the social world behind the narrative women typically enjoyed a status commensurate with that accorded Rebekah; on the other hand, had some semblance of proper familial and societal structures not been maintained in the *Jubilees*, the rewriting of Rebekah's story as a means of addressing problems in the Jewish community would have been self-defeating. *Jubilees* clearly does not throw social convention to the wind but shows great concern for proper relationships within family and society. For example, along with explicit appeals for familial love and unity, the text pictures Jacob dutifully caring for his aging parents (29:14-20); Esau becomes the archenemy of social order for failing to support his parents and respect their wishes.<sup>54</sup> Jacob's loving relationship with Leah is also emphasized (36:21-24), even though the biblical narrative implies that he was less than kind to her.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is within a context of respect for proper familial and social patterns that the author of *Jubilees* assigns Rebekah the dominant role of leadership in the home and a prominent position among the leaders of God's people, while Isaac is depicted as manifesting tenderness in the touching scene in which he consoles his grieving wife (27:13-18). Since these vignettes of the ideal family life of the forebears function as examples for the Jewish community to emulate,<sup>56</sup> we may conclude that in the author's social world it was both possible and desirable for a capable woman to assume an aggressive role of leadership as the situation demanded.

The person who composed *Testament of Job* 46-53 may have been more self-consciously attempting to counter the denigration of women than were the authors of the other two works considered here. Certainly the author of chapters 1-45 was aware of, and in some measure contributed to, such denigration. However, in chapters 46-53 this situation is reversed, whether by the same author or a redactor. Therefore, the book as it now stands offers an exceptionally positive portrayal of women: they embody the author's most

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of feminine imagery for the irrational soul.

<sup>54</sup>For example, see 29:18, where Esau apparently steals from his father's flocks and marries a third time in defiance of his parents' wishes. See further Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 118.

<sup>55</sup>On the upgrading of Leah in *Jubilees*, see further Endres, *Biblical Interpretation*, 179.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 49, 203, *et passim*.



cherished values. Moreover, to the extent that readers are expected to have revelatory experiences akin to those attributed to characters in the story, men and women are on equal footing. Since the spiritual knowledge so highly prized in the *Testament of Job* cannot come from natural human insight but only from divine revelation, men and women are dependent on the same means for attaining it.

This brief attempt to extrapolate social reality from three narrative sources highlights the need to take fully into account the indirect and problematic nature of the literary evidence concerning the status of women in antiquity. Justice is done to the literature neither by those who, obsessed with offsetting the sexism therein, focus on one issue and seek at all costs to discover evidence of dignified roles for women, nor by those who perpetuate such sexism by their insensitivity to the complimentary images of women which do appear. Careful treatment of narrative sources, with due regard for the context and function of stories about women, is likely to yield conclusions which are neither as sweeping and revolutionary as the former group would like nor as meager as the latter group might suppose. The revelatory experiences attributed to women in the three documents considered here not only reinforce the important functions those women serve on the literary level, but they also provide significant if indirect evidence for at least some elevation of women's position in the real world of early Judaism. This study therefore contributes to a growing body of evidence indicating that not all Jewish women in the Hellenistic age were as oppressed and repressed as some stereotypes, both ancient and modern, would suggest.