

# SUSANNA

# Commentary

The story of Susanna is a companion story to the book of Daniel. In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, it is included as Chapter 13 of Daniel. Protestants, however, consider the story apocryphal as it does not appear in any Hebrew texts.

Though the story is set in Babylon during The Exile (587-538 BC), it, like Daniel, was likely written during the Hellenistic (Greek) Period (333-160 BC). It was a popular morality tale up through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and inspired several works of art beginning around 1470.

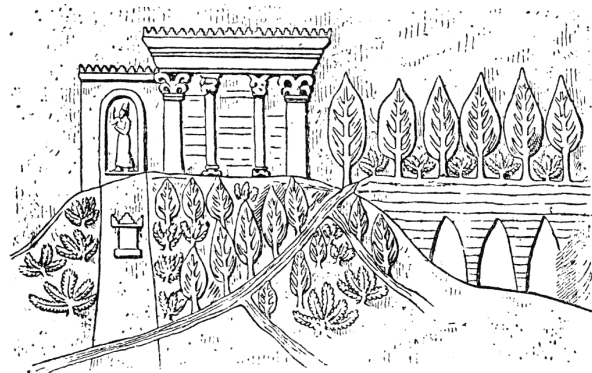
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*<sup>1</sup> There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Joakim. <sup>2</sup> He married the daughter of Hilkiyah, named Susanna, a very beautiful woman and one who feared the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Her parents were righteous, and had trained their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

In 587 BC, the Babylonians under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar, sacked Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's Temple. They deported the Jewish aristocracy and learned classes to Babylon in what came to be called "The Babylonian Exile."

Joakim is Jewish. His name means "lifted by Jehovah." That he is a wealthy Jew living in captivity in Babylon reinforces the idea that he has been elevated or blessed by God. His father-in-law is Hilkiyah, which means "my portion is Yah" or, in other words, "devoted to God." Hilkiyah's daughter's name is Susanna (or Shoshana), which means "lily" (likely a reference to her beauty). Her parents are identified as righteous and, as a result, Susanna is well-trained in the law of Moses.

Babylon was known for its lush and beautiful gardens. Though a desert city, its proximity to the Euphrates River allowed for cultivation of trees and other vegetation.



19<sup>th</sup> Century engraving (left) and a copy of a bas relief from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (right)

As a man of wealth, Joakim was popular with his fellow Jews in exile. The text suggests that his door was always open to them.

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*<sup>5</sup> That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: "Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people." <sup>6</sup> These men were frequently at Joakim's house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there.*

Among those who found a comfortable place within Joakim's walls were two elders. The age of adulthood for Jewish males is twelve, so these "elders" could have been as young as their thirties or forties. That they were appointed as judges suggests that they were well versed in the law of Moses and respected by the community.

The quote attributed to God regarding the character of these two judges (v.5) was likely an epitaph. Perhaps the reader is to intuit that it comes from the prophet Daniel.

The two judges are at Joakim's house so frequently that people just know to go there to find them if they have a case that needs to be decided.

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*<sup>7</sup> When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. <sup>8</sup> Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. <sup>9</sup> They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. <sup>10</sup> Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, <sup>11</sup> for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. <sup>12</sup> Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.*

The public activity at Joakim's house is suspended each day at lunchtime (the host's hospitality does not seem to extend to feeding the whole community every day!). The break in activity provides Joakim's wife a small window in which to enjoy her own house and garden.

The rules of Jewish modesty severely restricted the interaction of men and women, who were still considered "property" (either of their father or their husband). Women were often prescribed to be veiled in public and only allowed to speak to other women or to their husband.

By virtue of their position, it is easy to think that the elders had the authority to declare when everyone should leave for lunch. This also meant that they were often the last to leave. This put them in the position of being present whenever Susanna would arrive for her

daily walk in the garden. Though surely coincidental at first, it is not too much of a stretch to believe that these men eventually chose to delay their departure until her arrival.

The reader is not told the marital status of the two elders, though it would have been unusual for them not to have been married or widowers. The reader does however know that Susanna is married, and so the law of Moses and decorum dictated that she was unavailable to them. Yet they clearly lusted after her. And their lust was so strong that it began to affect both their prayer life and their ability to administer justice. One might surmise that their own lust began to make them sympathetic to adulterers and the like.

That they didn't speak of their feelings to one another out of shame, goes to show that they were aware that their thoughts were out of line with their faith and their pledge to administer justice and uphold the law. That they both desired to "seduce her," shows that at some point they had made the conscious choice to break the law.

Perhaps Jesus had this story in mind when he said, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:28-29, NRSV).

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*<sup>13</sup> One day they said to each other, "Let us go home, for it is time for lunch." So they both left and parted from each other. <sup>14</sup> But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone.*

These verses mark a turning point in the narrative. Up until this point the men had been silently lusting after Susanna in their hearts and in their minds. But on this day both men decide to act on their lust.

When they confront one another, they both confess. This should have been the moment that they talked each other out of acting on their impure impulses. Instead, they decide to collude with one another, believing that their advances will have a greater chance of succeeding if they approach her together.

Either man, if he had simply held to his principles, was in a position to stop the other man from acting immorally. Yet, as is all too common in instances of gang rape and sexual assault, the two men, desiring the same thing, embolden one another.

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*<sup>15</sup> Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. <sup>16</sup> No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. <sup>17</sup> She said to her maids, "Bring me olive oil and ointments,*

*and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.”<sup>18</sup> They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding.*

*<sup>19</sup> When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. <sup>20</sup> They said, “Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. <sup>21</sup> If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.”*

The text is very clear—Susanna did nothing to invite the two men to sexually assault her. She was accompanied by two maids and was within what she thought was the privacy of her own home. We are not privy to any conversations or interactions that take place prior to this between Susanna and the two men, but we should assume that within the confines of the Jewish context there were none. Up to this point, these two men have been watching Susanna from afar. She has done nothing to encourage their advances.

Their first act of immorality is voyeurism. The reader is not told how long it has been since the two elders conspired together. The passage might be read to suggest that starting on that day they decided to spend every lunch hour hiding in the bushes, watching and waiting for their opportunity. Regardless, their act of voyeurism is the first action that they take on their lustful impulse and, even by itself, is a crime against Susanna.

It could be that Susanna being accompanied by “*only* two maids” (v.15, emphasis added) was an indication to the two men that she intended to bathe. If this is how we are to read this note, then we are to understand that they seize upon what they see as an opportunity and quickly move into hiding amongst the foliage. Whether this was their first time or hundredth time in the bushes is of no consequence. They have crossed a line, and it puts them in the position to cross another one.

When the maids leave and Susanna begins bathing, the men act again on their impulse and reveal themselves. The text makes it clear that the maids did not knowingly leave Susanna vulnerable. The maids leave as instructed by their mistress and do not see the men who are concealed in the bushes. The blame for what is about to happen falls squarely on the two men, not Susanna and not her maids.

In their delusion, the men have convinced themselves that Susanna shares their affection. They begin by trying to convince her to consent to have intercourse with them. Then they threaten her. They say that they will report her being unfaithful to her husband.

Susanna is both literally and metaphorically in a compromised position. She is naked in the bath. And these two men, so driven by their lust that they have *run* out of the bushes to accost her, are telling her that she either has to be unfaithful to her husband, or they will accuse her of being unfaithful to her husband.

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*<sup>22</sup> Susanna groaned and said, “I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. <sup>23</sup> I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.”*

Susanna recognizes immediately the impossible position she has been placed in. These two men are men of power and influence in the community. They hold trusted positions. They are friends of her husband. There are two of them and only one of her. And to top it all off, she is naked in the bath.

She has to make a choice. Either she unwillingly consents to their unwanted advances or she screams. As a student of the law, she knows full well that adultery means death for her. Yet if she screams, she knows already that her side of the story will not be believed and she will still be facing the death penalty. Susanna is clearly the victim here, but she has been made out to be the wrongdoer.

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*<sup>24</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. <sup>25</sup> And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. <sup>26</sup> When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. <sup>27</sup> And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.*

Susanna has no control over what the men will say, but she does have control over what she will do next. She screams.

Immediately the two men try to cover up their own actions by flipping the script. They run and open the garden door and call for help, drowning out Susanna’s own cries for help. They had already concocted an out for themselves, one that made them out to be the heroes and Susanna the harlot.

When the servants and others in the house rush in, they find Susanna naked and the two judges standing over her in righteous indignation. And though the servants knew Susanna well, and knew that a secret liaison was completely out of character for her, they feel ashamed for their part in the alleged adulterous rendezvous.

In attempting to cover up their own sin, these two men have ruined the reputation of a righteous woman and called into question the reputation of her faithful attendants.

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*<sup>28</sup> The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, <sup>29</sup> “Send for*



*Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim.”<sup>30</sup> So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives.*

Ironically, the site of the assault also becomes the courthouse where the innocent victim is tried as the guilty perpetrator of a fictitious crime by the very persons who committed the real crime. (Thus is the case with many women who find themselves sexually assaulted by men in positions of authority above them.)

They summon her both by her name and by her relation. By doing so they show that they knew that she is the daughter of a righteous man and the husband of their host. Not only have they sinned against Susanna, but against her gracious husband, her righteous family, and God.

Susanna arrives with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. They have not abandoned her. We might even surmise that she has told them the truth of the incident and that they believe her and are willing to stand by her.

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*<sup>31</sup> Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. <sup>32</sup> As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. <sup>33</sup> Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping.*

*<sup>34</sup> Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. <sup>35</sup> Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.*

Even in what may be her last appearance before death, the men cannot help but flaunt their power over Susanna. She is veiled, as she would have been in a public appearance, and the judges order her to be unveiled—and for no other reason then for them to look upon her beauty and lust after her even now. Empowered by their position, they lay their hands on her head. And while to them the touch brought a sense of lustful satisfaction, to Susanna it must have felt like acid on her flesh. Even now she was being assaulted by these two men, and in plain view of her family and friends!

Her only appeal now is to God. And Susanna does what her two accusers stopped doing when they started down this path: she looks up to Heaven.

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*<sup>36</sup> The elders said, “While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. <sup>37</sup> Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. <sup>38</sup> We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. <sup>39</sup> Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than*

*we, and he opened the doors and got away. <sup>40</sup> We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, <sup>41</sup> but she would not tell us. These things we testify.”*

*Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.*

*<sup>42</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; <sup>43</sup> you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!”*

The men lay out their story just as they rehearsed, and in turn the crowd becomes unwitting co-conspirators in the matter. No one questions why the men were in the garden in the first place. No one asks them to describe the young man. They don’t ask Susanna to tell her side of the story. And they don’t question the integrity of the judges. Without asking a single question, they find Susanna guilty as charged.

Though she was innocent, the court of public opinion had already reached a verdict (probably before she even entered the room). As soon as word got out the day before that the wealthy and beautiful Susanna had been caught with another man, many people likely made up their mind that she was guilty. “Of course a beautiful, wealthy woman would have a secret young lover,” they probably said upon hearing the news. It may have even been as much of a stereotype then as it is today.

Having been found guilty and condemned to death, Susanna—who has been silent up to this point—appeals the verdict. “I am innocent! And these men are liars!” She yells this to God and not to the crowd (who overhears it nonetheless).

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*<sup>44</sup> The Lord heard her cry. <sup>45</sup> Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, <sup>46</sup> and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”*

*<sup>47</sup> All the people turned to him and asked, “What is this you are saying?” <sup>48</sup> Taking his stand among them he said, “Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? <sup>49</sup> Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.”*

*<sup>50</sup> So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.”*

Though her plea falls on deaf ears among the people in the crowd, God hears her cry. As God often does, the Almighty does not intervene directly, but instead prompts a young man in the crowd named Daniel to speak on God's behalf.

When this story appears within the context of the Book of Daniel, it is easy to recognize the young man's significance. When the story is orphaned from Daniel (as is the case with Protestant audiences), a brief reminder of Daniel's story may be in order.

Daniel was one of the young Jewish captives that was taken to Babylon during The Exile. He finds a place in the king's court where, despite threats to his life from the pagan priests, Daniel holds fast to his Jewish faith. He becomes known by both the Babylonians and the Jews for his righteousness, his unswerving faith, and his abilities as a soothsayer.

So as the crowd is escorting Susanna from the hall to take her to the place of her execution, Daniel speaks up. "Bull honkey!"

The lone voice of descent gets the crowd's immediate attention. "What did you say?"

"This trial was a farce," says Daniel. "Where was the cross-examination? Where was the earnest search for truth? Where was justice for this righteous woman? I agree with her. I think these men are liars."

One voice of reason speaking up against "mob mentality" is enough to give everyone pause. One voice calling for justice and calling the crowd to examine both sides of the matter reminds the crowd that they do in fact value justice.

It does not hurt that the voice who speaks up belongs to a person of righteousness and faith. The crowd, and especially the other elders in the crowd, recognize the character of the one who is speaking up and they take listen.

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<sup>51</sup> Daniel said to them, "Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them."

<sup>52</sup> When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, "You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, <sup>53</sup> pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, 'You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.' <sup>54</sup> Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under a mastic tree." <sup>55</sup> And Daniel said, "Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut you in two."

<sup>56</sup> Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, "You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. <sup>57</sup> This is how



*you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. <sup>58</sup> Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under an evergreen oak.” <sup>59</sup> Daniel said to him, “Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split you in two, so as to destroy you both.”*

Daniel employs a tactic that is a staple of good detective work—separate the witnesses and see if their story aligns.

Daniel now takes on the role of defense attorney. He begins his cross-examination by questioning the credibility of the men themselves. For the first man he points out his recent record as a judge, how he is known for pronouncing “unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty” (v.53). For the second man he begins by questioning his lineage, suggesting that he is really of Canaanite descent and not Israelite. He goes on to suggest that this man had a reputation for sexually assaulting young, socially vulnerable women (Israel had fallen 150 years prior to Judah, and so “the daughters of Israel” would have likely been those considered refugees).

Daniel cannot know how much the two men rehearsed their story before the trial. Reason suggests that they spent much of the afternoon and evening going over their fabrication in detail. They likely discussed what the fictitious young man looked like, what he was wearing, where they were standing when they witnessed the alleged encounter, which door he escaped out of when they tried to seize him, and perhaps even why they were in the garden in the first place. He surmises that the one detail they failed to discuss was under what type of tree they supposedly spied the couple, and so this is the question he asks.

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*<sup>60</sup> Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him. <sup>61</sup> And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. <sup>62</sup> Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day.*

The God of justice prevails. Yet the text does not say that the people repented for their rush to judgment. The two men show no remorse for their actions. They were fully prepared to let an innocent woman be executed to cover their own sin. And this is all too often the case. We see time-and-time again in media reports how the perpetrators of sexual assault are willing to lie, cover-up, deny, and suppress to hide their own guilt.

As allegations of sexual assault come to light, the people around the offender have a choice. Some, fearing “bad press” for their institution, organization, or corporation, become complicit in the sin by helping to cover-up or suppress the truth. Reports are downplayed or ignored, hush money is paid, settlements are reached, and perpetrators are shielded from the consequences of their actions. And in some of the most high profile cases of recent years (Olympic doctors, Catholic priests, media executives), it has been revealed that perpetrators of sexual assault who go unchallenged often go on to commit more crimes. In the story, it seems that Daniel knew that one of the two men was a repeat offender who had never been challenged before.

The other choice that people have when they hear of allegations of sexual assault is to report it immediately and act according. Just as the #MeToo Movement and the Clergy Abuse Scandals have brought to light bad examples, they have also allowed companies and institutions to demonstrate how to act responsibly. In the last year, high profile persons have been suspended, fired, or forced to resign upon the revelation of credible allegations against them. In those cases, the companies have been lauded for their response—that such behavior is counter to the culture and beliefs of their organization. Others have been pre-emptive by emphasizing a zero tolerance policy.

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*<sup>63</sup> Hilkiash and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joakim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. <sup>64</sup> And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.*

Happy ending, right? Unfortunately the “happy ending” of the Susanna story is not the norm. The reality of sexual assault is that the victim is often left with the shame of the event. Many are made to feel that they in some way invited the assault and therefore are partially to blame. Susanna will also likely face years of rumors about her, especially about her alleged infidelity.

This sense of shame is what sexual predators count on as a tool to silence their victims.

And while God and Daniel swoop in at the last minute to save the day, the real hero of the story is Susanna herself. When attacked, she does not stay silent. She does not let the threats against her force her to become an unwilling participant in the assault nor keep her from calling out for help. When wrongly accused (and convicted), she does not keep silent about her innocence.

This does not diminish Daniel's important contribution to the story (this chapter appears within a book about Daniel after all!). Daniel sees that the trial and its outcome is unjust. He sees that Susanna was neither given due process nor was there ever a presumption of innocence. And he has the courage to raise his voice and say so.

It certainly helps that Daniel is male (and as such has a voice within the norms of that time and culture). It also helps that he has a reputation for faithfulness and is well regarded in the community. Even though he is young, the elders listen to him. His voice carries weight.

Daniel's objections are enough to make the crowd realize their own folly. It allows the process to proceed the way that it should have in the first place. And in the midst of a proper investigation the lies of the two men unravel, and it becomes their undoing.

In the end Susanna is exonerated, the men are convicted, and Daniel gains a great reputation. But this is still not the happy ending it appears to be. The community has been shaken. The relationship of Susanna to her husband, her parents who raised her, and her children that she is raising has been harmed. The actions of these two judges has likely called into question all elders and judges in the community. The legal matters decided by these two dishonored judges may also (rightly) be called into question. And at the end of the day, two people have been executed. What is the fallout for their families?

And yet the whole thing might have gone differently if the two men had been able to live by their faith and the law that they had pledged to uphold, and if they had been able to convince themselves that lust is not love and women are not objects to be taken advantage of. Their last chance to change the course of events came when they confronted each other and revealed their feelings about Susanna. In this moment they should have talked each other out of acting on their lust. And yet, their inability to recognize the situation for what it was and take steps to correct their path (as in moving their courtroom someplace else), ultimately leads them to a point where sin compounds sin, and the consequence becomes nothing less than death itself.

# SUSANNA

# Men's Study

The following study presents the text of Susanna alongside questions for each passage. A complete copy of the text appears on the last page of the study and can be photocopied for use by the group.

Study leaders should read the entire text ahead of time. It is also recommended that they read the supplied Commentary as it provides additional insights into the text and can aid with discussion.

Please note: this study contains some very heavy topics (voyeurism, sexual assault, and the death penalty). While the study can be used with any group, having a group of men who already know each other and have a level of trust will likely produce the deepest and most insightful conversations. Conducting the study in one sitting is probably best, but if the group seriously engages each question, it may take two or more sessions to complete.

**Begin by reading or having someone read the entire story aloud. Then consider the text in these smaller pieces:**

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

If you are engaged, married, or have been seriously dating someone for a long time, share briefly with the group about how you met your significant other, what attracted you, and what happened when you met their family for the first time.

What qualities did you (or do you) look for in a mate? What role did (does) physical attractiveness, religious background, and upbringing play in your search and decision to commit? If you are a father, what qualities do (or did) you hope your own children would/won't take into account when dating or selecting a spouse?

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What are our cultural feelings about judges? Do they have a place of honor in our culture? Are they generally trusted? Do we consider their verdicts fair? Share examples from the news, TV and film, or from personal experience.

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*<sup>7</sup> When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. <sup>8</sup> Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. <sup>9</sup> They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. <sup>10</sup> Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, <sup>11</sup> for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. <sup>12</sup> Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.*

What does it mean to have a “crush” on someone? Who have been your crushes over the years? How many were from afar and how many did you reveal your feelings to? What were the results?

What is the difference between “having a crush” on someone and “lusting after” them?

What are the barriers that exist that keep us from being with the people we lust after? Why do those barriers exist?

Have you ever adjusted your routine so that you could intersect someone you lusted after or had a crush on? What did you hope to get out of it?

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*<sup>13</sup> One day they said to each other, “Let us go home, for it is time for lunch.” So they both left and parted from each other. <sup>14</sup> But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone.*

The passage says that the two men decided to act on their lust on the same day and that they encountered and then questioned each other. They both confessed.

Do you have a friend that you feel that you could confide in if you were having thoughts about acting on your feelings toward someone who was not available to you?

What do you think you would say if one of your friends came to you and shared that they were thinking about acting in this way?

Had the men been following their faith and not their impulses, how should the conversation between them gone? What could have/should have been said?

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<sup>15</sup> Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. <sup>16</sup> No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. <sup>17</sup> She said to her maids, “Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.” <sup>18</sup> They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding.

<sup>19</sup> When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. <sup>20</sup> They said, “Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. <sup>21</sup> If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.”

Define voyeurism. What are the ways that people can and do act as voyeurs today? What role has technology played? What role has the media or popular film played?

Define sexual assault. What is the difference between “flirting” and “assault?” What actions conducted by men toward or against women in previous decades (for example: catcalling) are now considered sexual harassment or assault? What constitutes “consent” in a “consensual relationship?”

Define intimidation. How does the power dynamic between the aggressor and the victim come into play?

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<sup>22</sup> Susanna groaned and said, “I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. <sup>23</sup> I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.”

What is the trap that they have laid for Susanna? Name all the ways that they have all the power in this situation and she has none.

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<sup>24</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. <sup>25</sup> And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. <sup>26</sup> When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. <sup>27</sup> And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.

How do you define “reputation”? What do you think is your reputation among your classmates or co-workers? Why?

What role does a person’s reputation have in the world today?

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Have you ever had your reputation unfairly tarnished or know someone who has? What was the outcome?

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*<sup>28</sup> The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, <sup>29</sup> “Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim.” <sup>30</sup> So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives.*

What effect does simply being charged with a crime have on a person’s psyche and self-esteem? If you were unjustly accused, who do you think would defend you without question? What relationships do you think would always be tarnished?

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*<sup>31</sup> Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. <sup>32</sup> As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. <sup>33</sup> Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping.*

*<sup>34</sup> Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. <sup>35</sup> Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.*

What do you think empowered these two men to demonstrate their power over Susanna publically at her trial (having her remove her veil and touching her head)? What do you think Susanna was thinking and feeling at this moment? What do you think her husband and family were thinking and feeling?

If you were in her place, do you think that you would still have any faith that God was watching out for you? What would your prayer to God sound like in that moment?

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*<sup>36</sup> The elders said, “While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. <sup>37</sup> Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. <sup>38</sup> We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. <sup>39</sup> Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we, and he opened the doors and got away. <sup>40</sup> We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, <sup>41</sup> but she would not tell us. These things we testify.”*

*Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.*

*<sup>42</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; <sup>43</sup> you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!”*

What is the power dynamic in the room? Why does the crowd so readily accept the story of the two men? Why do you think that no one asked Susanna her side of the story?

What role does the court of public opinion play in situations like this? When it is a he-said-she-said situation, what must the victim do to show that they are the victim? In other words, who has to be able to prove their side of the story and what “evidence” is generally required to convince people?

What role do stereotypes play in how we think about such matters? Is there a modern stereotype that includes beautiful wives of wealthy men? Is there a modern stereotype for judges? How is buying into stereotypes dangerous for how we act toward others?

Why does Susanna appeal the verdict to God directly and not to the crowd or the elders?

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*<sup>44</sup> The Lord heard her cry. <sup>45</sup> Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, <sup>46</sup> and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”*

*<sup>47</sup> All the people turned to him and asked, “What is this you are saying?” <sup>48</sup> Taking his stand among them he said, “Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? <sup>49</sup> Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.”*

*<sup>50</sup> So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.”*

What is “mob mentality?” When have you seen it played out to dangerous ends?

Who is Daniel and what is his significance in the larger story of the Exile in Babylon? What makes him a man that the crowd will listen to?

What does Daniel say that makes him “the voice of reason?”

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*<sup>51</sup> Daniel said to them, “Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.”*

*<sup>52</sup> When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, <sup>53</sup> pronouncing*

*unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, 'You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.'*<sup>54</sup> Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under a mastic tree."<sup>55</sup> And Daniel said, "Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut you in two."

<sup>56</sup> Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, "You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart."<sup>57</sup> This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness.<sup>58</sup> Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under an evergreen oak."<sup>59</sup> Daniel said to him, "Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split you in two, so as to destroy you both."

What in the judges' histories make them unreliable witnesses? How should past actions be viewed in a case like this?

What causes the men's story to fall apart?

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<sup>60</sup> Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him.<sup>61</sup> And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor.<sup>62</sup> Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day.

How far are people willing to go to cover their own sin? Why? What motivates them to go to those lengths?

How is not saying or doing anything when an allegation of sexual assault comes to light like becoming complicit in the sin? How do companies and institutions cover-up incidents of sexual harassment or assault? What is the appropriate response?

How might protecting a perpetrator from the consequences of their actions embolden them to commit similar acts again?

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*<sup>63</sup> Hilkiyah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joakim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. <sup>64</sup> And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.*

The biblical Susanna story has a happy ending, but what is the long-term damage to Susanna, her family, and the community?

Through the course of the story, what sins stemmed from the initial sin of lust? How was sin compounded throughout the narrative?

What is your take away from the Susanna story?

# SUSANNA

# Women's Study

The following study presents the text of Susanna alongside questions for each passage. A complete copy of the text appears on the last page of the study and can be photocopied for use by the group.

Study leaders should read the entire text ahead of time. It is also recommended that they read the supplied Commentary as it provides additional insights into the text and can aid with discussion.

Please note: this study contains some very heavy topics (voyeurism, sexual assault, and the death penalty). While the study can be used with any group, having a group of women who already know each other and have a level of trust will likely produce the deepest and most insightful conversations. Conducting the study in one sitting is probably best, but if the group seriously engages each question, it may take two or more sessions to complete.

**Begin by reading or having someone read the entire story aloud. If there are places where reading is difficult, allow space to stop and have a discussion of why participants are troubled by what takes place in the passage. Then consider these questions:**

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What are your first reactions to this story?

As you look through the passage, what are Susanna's words and actions?

Susanna's confrontation happens in her home. How have you or other women you know attempted to gain safety and security in your daily life? This can include in your home, your place of employment, your car, other places you live your life.

Rather than choose her own safety and reputation Susanna risks both by refusing the sexual advances of these men. Although we cannot be sure, it seems that this decision was the "right" decision for the readers. Discuss what other options a woman can choose in like circumstance and what are the possible results. What motivations could lead to other decisions for a woman in a similar circumstance?

We are told that Susanna is refined and beautiful. How do status, appearance and behavior act into the believability of women? The story also talks of her family and their reputation. Can the reputation of family impact the results of a sexual harassment or assault for a woman? How?

What are the words and actions of the two male judges?

These men have great authority in the Jewish community in Babylon. What are the specific ways they are abusing their authority?

The marital status of the two judges is not mentioned. If they are married, their actions take advantage of the relationship they have with their wives. This too is an act of power over a woman. If we knew this information, would it change our reading of the story?

Although the act of voyeurism is sinful, it is a solitary action. It is not until the two men know that they are not alone in their lust of Susanna that they decide to act. How can multiple perpetrators increase the likelihood of violence?

Because of the nature of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh (God), judges had an expectation of using faith to make rulings and decisions for the people. Yet as the story unfolds, do these men seek guidance from God? Is there concern of sin?

What are the words and actions of Joakim, Susanna's husband?

Joakim has a limited role in the story of Susanna. Although this gives a stronger role to Susanna in the story, the story reads as if her husband shows little to no support of her during her trial. How could this absence be interpreted? As we relate to Susanna, how would feel in that moment to have a husband who shows little support?

What are the words and actions of Susanna's family?

Susanna's family seems to be very supportive in their presence. What role do support systems play in traumatic events? What other support systems can a victim of sexual harassment and assault find in society?

What are the words and actions of Daniel?

Daniel does not seem to have any relationship with Susanna before the trial. What caring presence can strangers have during such traumatic events? Do you have knowledge of advocacy or recovery resources available in your community?

Although the outcome for Susanna positive, it only comes with evidence. Most cases that come before investigators and the legal system have little to no evidence. What can this mean for victims in such cases?

Women often have a precarious place in stories of the Bible. What other examples can you think of from Scripture where women are judged on their sexual lives? If beneficial for your class, you may want to take further look at stories of Sarah, Dinah, Ruth, the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery. There are more. They can be difficult to read. Stories of abuse, assault, harassment have a place in Scriptural study. These stories can help to inform an ethic of care, prevention, and empowerment.

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Suggested activities for Leaders:

Make a prayer wall for all women known to your group who endured sexual trauma.

Sharing your own stories may be healing. Decide if that is an activity that would be helpful or hurtful for your group.

Research resources in your community. Find a way to share them throughout the life of the church (youth group, UMW, etc.).

Close in prayer.

# SUSANNA

## Senior High Study

The following study presents the text of Susanna alongside questions for each passage. A complete copy of the text appears on the last page of the study and can be photocopied for use by the group.

Study leaders should read the entire text ahead of time. It is also recommended that they read the supplied Commentary as it provides additional insights into the text and can aid with discussion.

Please note: this study contains some very heavy topics (voyeurism, sexual assault, and the death penalty). To begin, you may want to divide the group into male and female small groups and then bring them together at the close for a total group discussion. Conducting the study in one sitting is probably best, but if the group seriously engages each question, it may take two or more sessions to complete.

**Begin by reading or having someone read the entire story aloud. Then consider the text in these smaller pieces:**

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

What qualities do you look for in someone you would like to date? What role does physical attractiveness, religious background, and social upbringing play in your search? Are you more likely to date someone who you have been friends with for some time, or approach a relative stranger who you find attractive?

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*<sup>5</sup> That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: "Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people." <sup>6</sup> These men were frequently at Joakim's house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there.*

What are our cultural feelings about judges? Do they have a place of honor in our culture? Are they generally trusted? Do we consider their verdicts fair? Share examples from the news, TV and film, or from personal experience.

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*<sup>7</sup> When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. <sup>8</sup> Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. <sup>9</sup> They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. <sup>10</sup> Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, <sup>11</sup> for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. <sup>12</sup> Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.*

What does it mean to have a “crush” on someone? How many were from afar and how many did you reveal your feelings to? What were the results?

What is the difference between “having a crush” on someone and “lusting after” them?

What are the barriers that exist that keep us from being with the people we lust after? Why do those barriers exist?

Have you ever adjusted your routine so that you could intersect someone you lusted after or had a crush on? What did you hope to get out of it?

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*<sup>13</sup> One day they said to each other, “Let us go home, for it is time for lunch.” So they both left and parted from each other. <sup>14</sup> But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone.*

The passage says that the two men decided to act on their lust on the same day and that they encountered and then questioned each other. They both confessed.

Do you have a friend that you feel that you could confide in if you were having thoughts about acting on your feelings toward someone who was not available to you?

What do you think you would say if one of your friends came to you and shared that they were thinking about acting in this way?

Had the men been following their faith and not their impulses, how should the conversation between them gone? What could have/should have been said?

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*<sup>15</sup> Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. <sup>16</sup> No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. <sup>17</sup> She said to her maids, “Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe.” <sup>18</sup> They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the*

*garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding.*

*<sup>19</sup> When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. <sup>20</sup> They said, "Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. <sup>21</sup> If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away."*

Define voyeurism. What are the ways that people can and do act as voyeurs today? What role has technology played? What role has the media or popular film played?

Define sexual assault. What is the difference between "flirting" and "assault?" What actions conducted by men toward or against women in previous decades (for example: catcalling) are now considered sexual harassment or assault? What constitutes "consent" in a "consensual relationship?" What role can drugs and alcohol play in situations where sexual assault may occur?

Define intimidation. Have you ever been in a situation where you've experienced intimidation from another person? How does the power dynamic between the aggressor and the victim come into play?

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*<sup>22</sup> Susanna groaned and said, "I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. <sup>23</sup> I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord."*

What is the trap that they have laid for Susanna? Name all the ways that they have all the power in this situation and she has none.

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*<sup>24</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. <sup>25</sup> And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. <sup>26</sup> When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. <sup>27</sup> And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.*

How do you define "reputation"? What do you think is your reputation among your classmates? Why?

What role does a person's reputation have in your school? Do reputations change?

Have you ever had your reputation unfairly tarnished or know someone who has? What was the outcome?

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*<sup>28</sup> The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, <sup>29</sup> “Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joakim.” <sup>30</sup> So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives.*

What effect does simply being accused of wrongdoing have on a person’s psyche and self-esteem? If you were unjustly accused, who do you think would defend you without question? What relationships do you think would always be tarnished?

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*<sup>31</sup> Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. <sup>32</sup> As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. <sup>33</sup> Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping.*

*<sup>34</sup> Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. <sup>35</sup> Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.*

What do you think empowered these two men to demonstrate their power over Susanna publically at her trial (having her remove her veil and touching her head)? What do you think Susanna was thinking and feeling at this moment? What do you think her husband and family were thinking and feeling?

If you were in her place, do you think that you would still have any faith that God was watching out for you? What would your prayer to God sound like in that moment?

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*<sup>36</sup> The elders said, “While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. <sup>37</sup> Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. <sup>38</sup> We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. <sup>39</sup> Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we, and he opened the doors and got away. <sup>40</sup> We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, <sup>41</sup> but she would not tell us. These things we testify.”*

*Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.*

*<sup>42</sup> Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; <sup>43</sup> you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!”*

What is the power dynamic in the room? Why does the crowd so readily accept the story of the two men? Why do you think that no one asked Susanna her side of the story?

What role does the court of public opinion play in situations like this? When it is a he-said-she-said situation, what must the victim do to show that they are the victim? In other words, who has to be able to prove their side of the story and what “evidence” is generally required to convince people?

Why does Susanna appeal the verdict to God directly and not to the crowd or the elders?

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*<sup>44</sup> The Lord heard her cry. <sup>45</sup> Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, <sup>46</sup> and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”*

*<sup>47</sup> All the people turned to him and asked, “What is this you are saying?” <sup>48</sup> Taking his stand among them he said, “Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? <sup>49</sup> Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.”*

*<sup>50</sup> So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.”*

What is “mob mentality?” When have you seen it played out to dangerous ends?

Who is Daniel and what is his significance in the larger story of the Exile in Babylon? What makes him a man that the crowd will listen to?

What does Daniel say that makes him “the voice of reason?”

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*<sup>51</sup> Daniel said to them, “Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.”*

*<sup>52</sup> When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, <sup>53</sup> pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, ‘You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.’ <sup>54</sup> Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under a mastic tree.” <sup>55</sup> And Daniel said, “Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut you in two.”*

*<sup>56</sup> Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. <sup>57</sup> This is how*



*you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. <sup>58</sup> Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under an evergreen oak." <sup>59</sup> Daniel said to him, "Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split you in two, so as to destroy you both."*

What in the judges' histories make them unreliable witnesses? How should past actions be viewed in a case like this? What causes the men's story to fall apart?

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*<sup>60</sup> Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him. <sup>61</sup> And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. <sup>62</sup> Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day.*

How far are people willing to go to cover their own sin? Why? What motivates them to go to those lengths?

How is not saying or doing anything when an allegation of sexual assault comes to light like becoming complicit in the sin? What would be the appropriate response if you were to find out that one of your friends had been sexually assaulted? What if you were a witness to sexual assault being committed by one of your friends—what would you do?

How might protecting a perpetrator from the consequences of their actions embolden them to commit similar acts again?

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*<sup>63</sup> Hilkiah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joakim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. <sup>64</sup> And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.*

The biblical Susanna story has a happy ending, but what is the long-term damage to Susanna, her family, and the community?

Through the course of the story, what sins stemmed from the initial sin of lust? How was sin compounded throughout the narrative?

What is your take away from the Susanna story?

# SUSANNA

## New Revised Standard Translation

*The story of Susanna is a companion story to the book of Daniel. In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, it is included as Chapter 13 of Daniel. Protestants, however, consider the story apocryphal as it does not appear in any Hebrew texts.*

*Though the story is set in Babylon during The Exile (587-538 BC), it, like Daniel, was likely written during the Hellenistic (Greek) Period (333-160 BC). It was a popular morality tale up through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and inspired several works of art beginning around 1470.*

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### Susanna's Beauty Attracts Two Elders

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

<sup>5</sup>That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: "Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people." <sup>6</sup>These men were frequently at Joakim's house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there.

<sup>7</sup>When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. <sup>8</sup>Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. <sup>9</sup>They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. <sup>10</sup>Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, <sup>11</sup>for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. <sup>12</sup>Day after day they watched eagerly to see her.

<sup>13</sup>One day they said to each other, "Let us go home, for it is time for lunch." So they both left and parted from each other. <sup>14</sup>But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone.

### The Elders Attempt to Seduce Susanna

<sup>15</sup>Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. <sup>16</sup>No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. <sup>17</sup>She said to her maids, "Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe." <sup>18</sup>They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding.

<sup>19</sup>When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. <sup>20</sup>They said, “Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. <sup>21</sup>If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.”

<sup>22</sup>Susanna groaned and said, “I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. <sup>23</sup>I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.”

<sup>24</sup>Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. <sup>25</sup>And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. <sup>26</sup>When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. <sup>27</sup>And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna.

### **The Elders Testify against Susanna**

<sup>28</sup>The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joakim, the two elders came, full of their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, <sup>29</sup>“Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiyah, the wife of Joakim.” <sup>30</sup>So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives.

<sup>31</sup>Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. <sup>32</sup>As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. <sup>33</sup>Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping.

<sup>34</sup>Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. <sup>35</sup>Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord. <sup>36</sup>The elders said, “While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. <sup>37</sup>Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. <sup>38</sup>We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. <sup>39</sup>Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we, and he opened the doors and got away. <sup>40</sup>We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, <sup>41</sup>but she would not tell us. These things we testify.”

Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death.

<sup>42</sup>Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, “O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; <sup>43</sup>you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!”

<sup>44</sup>The Lord heard her cry. <sup>45</sup>Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, <sup>46</sup>and he shouted with a loud voice, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!”

## Daniel Rescues Susanna

<sup>47</sup> All the people turned to him and asked, “What is this you are saying?” <sup>48</sup> Taking his stand among them he said, “Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? <sup>49</sup> Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her.”

<sup>50</sup> So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the <sup>51</sup> elders said to him, “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.” <sup>52</sup> Daniel said to them, “Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them.”

<sup>53</sup> When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, “You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, <sup>54</sup> pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, ‘You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death.’ <sup>55</sup> Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under a mastic tree.” <sup>56</sup> And Daniel said, “Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut <sup>57</sup> you in two.”

<sup>58</sup> Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. <sup>59</sup> This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. <sup>60</sup> Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under an evergreen oak.” <sup>61</sup> Daniel said to him, “Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split <sup>62</sup> you in two, so as to destroy you both.”

<sup>63</sup> Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him. <sup>64</sup> And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. <sup>65</sup> Acting in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day.

<sup>66</sup> Hilkiyah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joakim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. <sup>67</sup> And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.