



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

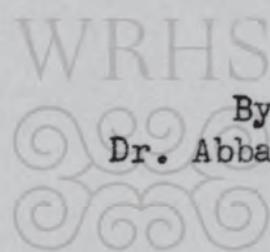
Reel
161

Box
58

Folder
728

Extraordinary women of the Bible, 1945.

659
EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN OF THE BIBLE



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 8, 1945

The Bible, friends, is a very busy and colorful thoroughfare crowded with all kinds and sorts of people, men and women and children, young and old, princes and paupers, sages and fools, heroes and cowards, sinners and saints, men and women of great nobility men and women of great depravity. The whole panorama of life is there. Nearly all of these folks step out of the pages of the Bible in spite of their ancient garb or speech - we discover that they are not unlike the men and women whom we see about us in our own world on the busy road which we are traveling. We recognize them as familiar people. And as we look deeply into their hearts and minds, we discover that their hearts and emotions are not very different from our own, the same desires, the same passions, the same ambitions, the same hopes, the same frustrations. In a larger sense they are our kith and kin, our own contemporaries. They belong to our world in spite of the full of centuries which separates them from us.

This is true of the women of the Bible quite as much as of the men in spite of the fact that the status of the women in ancient Israel was very different from what it is today. The free mingling of men and women, their easy association were unknown in the ancient world. The freedom which woman enjoys today in the Western world is generally a very recent acquirement. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to imagine that the women of the Bible, the women of ancient Israel were all the sequestered isolated harem type, secluded from the world and all concern with it was purely domestic. I say it would be a mistake to assume that.

We find among women^{of} the Bible women judges, prophets, teachers, queens, rulers of nations. Quite naturally the principal domain of women in ancient Israel was the home. But here it is noteworthy that the chief attribute of ancient women, the principal quality we find in almost everyone of them is the quality of competence, capability, a sort of authoritativeness, actual if not formal, possessed of a strong endowment of will, and above all, dignity. The Bible speaks approvingly of the ancient woman of strength, the woman of valor. That is the highest tribute paid in the Bible to women, the woman of strength, of efficiency. Not clinging vines, by any means! No

languishing beauties among them, no helpless damsels waiting for some chivalrous knights to rescue them! No neurotics among them! They were competent, purposeful enterprising women.

Not all of them were good or virtuous by any means. The Bible is not an all saints book. That is why it is such a great human document. It is an album of life. Turn to your own family albums. It is not always a book of good men and women. Sometimes we don't like to turn the pages of the album and show it to friends. Because an album is an amazing assortment of all types of human beings -- that is what the Bible is -- and even the good women are not without an inescapable admixture of human frailties.

It is characteristic of the genius of the Bible that it never paints a human being as a superman, from Moses down no one is represented as a perfect human for none is perfect but God. And the weakness of human beings are sometimes pointed to as background for revelation for their strength, how they mastered their weaknesses and how they rise above their shortcomings, and how people pass through fear and failure and frustration to redemption and salvation and purification.

Take, for example, the matriarchs of the Bible, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah. They are strong and good women all of them adequate, absolutely adequate to the hard nomadic life which they led. There is something regal, dominant about their personalities. There is so much of sweetness and tenderness about them, but also the quality of fairness, but also a quality of ruthlessness. They experience and react violently to jealousy and to envy, and when it comes to shielding ~~xx~~ and protecting their own they are as deadly as anyone. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, the first of the matriarchs, will have her handmaid and her child, also the child of Ishmael, driven from the home and sent out into the wilderness out of jealousy, hurt pride and fear for her own child Isaac. Rebecca, because she favored Jacob rather than Esau plots with Jacob to trick his blind father to rob Esau of the paternal blessing. Rachel and Lea, sisters, are fiercely envious of each other and jealous of the love of Jacob. The Bible tells of it. Nevertheless

when one sees the total character study of these matriarchs, one sees that their love is strong and their loyalty constant and with their elemental strength they build homes and look well to the ways of their households.

This quality of competence, ability, of being able to serve life is the outstanding quality of most of the extraordinary women of the Bible. It is interesting to get an insight into the conception of our forefather's ideal of womanhood. You have it reflected in the very first few pages of the Bible in the mythical story of Eve - Eve, the mother of all the living. The Bible is very clear -- that is the genius of Israel -- it is very clear that Adam and Eve were meant to be one and inseparable, and although Eve was fashioned out of Adam, and they became two, nevertheless in life they were to be one and inseparable. "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." The woman Eve and all her descendants through the ages that were to follow were to be for the man, the helpmate, to help him. And man, Adam and his descendants, all the men who follow him, were, according to the Bible, to leave each man his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, "and they shall be one flesh." It is not good for a man, says the Bible in those early chapters, it is not good for a man to be alone. Men and women were to complement one another, not to compete with one another.

The Bible knows nothing of the battle of the sexes which has become a favorite theme of many writers of our more sophisticated generation. The woman of strength, the woman of valor is the crown of a man's life. She is the consummation of his life, the adornment of his life. "He who has found a good woman has found a supreme good in life."

And of course Eve, the mother of all the living, had all the weaknesses common to all the living. The Bible points them out in the ~~first~~ very first woman. She was curious. She was inquisitive. She could be tempted. She was tempted. She succumbed. She ate of the tree of knowledge which was forbidden her to eat. And having eaten, she persuaded Adam to eat. They both sinned the sin of disobedience. The Bible points it out. But Eve took her great punishment for her sin quite as bravely as Adam took his punishment. For his sin he was exiled from the Garden of Eden as was Eve. "In

pain shall she bring forth children." She didn't complain. She accepted her fate as Adam did accept his: "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread henceforth." Sin and suffering do not at all diminish her status. The loving wife, the faithful wife, the companion, the adequate helpmate, the mother of all living beings.

Now the Bible knows of other types of women, women who sinned, destroyed not themselves, but other people, & women whose sins stepped from evil intent, from rottenness of character, depravity, women who break and destroy the men who love them.

There is, for example, Delilah. Delilah was such a woman and I don't suppose in the whole literature of mankind has just this type of woman been delineated as within the Bible. Delilah was a Philistine woman. Samson was an Israelite, a Nazarite dedicated to the Lord. He was a powerful man. Delilah took this man dedicated to the Lord, this powerful man broke him. Samson was a giant in Israel. He fought against the Philistines. The Philistines hated him and sought his undoing. But they conquered Samson through the woman Delilah. He met her, this Philistine woman, and he loved her, a blind infatuation for a worthless woman. And the Philistines, knowing of this infatuation, went to her and said: "entice him and see wherein his great strength lies and we will give you 1100 pieces of silver. Betray him to us, this man, and we will reward you. You know the story of Delilah. Delilah was to blind Samson with flattery, to beguile him to tell her wherein his strength lies. He tries to ward her off playfully. "If you will bind me with fresh bowstrings that have never been dried, I will become weak and helpless." He allowed himself to be bound with fresh bowstrings and & Delilah then cried out: "The Philistines are upon thee." Samson burst these bowstrings. Delilah persists. "You are mocking me," she says. She urges him on to tell her wherein his strength lies. Samson tries again to play off the urgency of Delilah. "Tie me with new ropes, with which no work has been done." Again he is tied, and again Delilah cries out: "The Philistines are upon thee." And Samson tears the ropes asunder like a thread is broken when it toucheth fire." And Delilah says again: "Thou art trifling with me." And again the same thing is repeated when Samson tells Delilah "Weave seven

locks of my head into a web and beat them in with the pin. Delilah does that and again cries out: "The Philistines are upon thee." And again Samson pulled up both the loom and the web. Samson grows tired of this and finally he reveals the true secret of his strength. "A razor has never been used on my head. If I were to be shaved, my strength would leave me." Delilah puts him to sleep and cuts off his hair. His eyes are put out and shackles are bound to him. They take him to the dungeon where Samson is made sport of, Samson, the Nazarite who was dedicated to the Lord. He is made into a beast of burden.

Yes, the Bible knows of the love which betrays, the love which destroys, the love which is really no love at all. It is the prostitution of ~~the~~ sex and the lust that kills.

That great Book of Books also knows of noble women whose love leads them to supreme sacrifice. There is a strange and moving story of Jephtha's daughter, a story as strange and moving as you will find in any great tragedy of suffering. In fact the theme of the story of Jephtha's daughter was also found in one of the Greek myths, that of Agamemnon and his daughter . The story takes place during a stormy battle when the Jews are fighting foot by foot in the land of Canaan. Jephtha was a judge, and a mighty man of valor." During one of the decisive days of battle Jephtha made a vow unto the Lord that if he would deliver them from the Ammonites "then whatsoever shall come out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return I will offer it up ~~for~~ for a burnt-offering." And the Lord did deliver the Ammonites into the hand of Jephtha, and Jephtha returned triumphant to his home. The first one whom came out to meet him was his daughter dancing with a timbrel in her hand. When Jephtha saw her he rent his clothes and cried out in the bitterness of his soul. But I have vowed unto the Lord. I cannot go back. And his daughter who loved her father deeply understood the power of the vow which her father had taken said unto him: "Do unto me according to what thou hast vowed. Let me alone for two months go away with friends to say farewell to life and I will return at the end of two months. She returns at the end of two months and she was sacrificed. There is anguish in all this

and tragedy and the glory of a love which was stronger than death in the story of this young woman, the daughter of Jephtha.

There are so many extraordinary women in the Bible: Esther who helps save her people from Destruction. There is Deborah who arouses a nation to fight for its freedom, a judge, a prophetess. The Jews had been enslaved by the Canaanites for more than twenty years. They came to Deborah to help them. She called upon Barak to assume leadership. And Barak replied: "If thou wilt go with me, I will go. "I will surely go with thee - not for thy honor will the Lord give Sisera over into the hands of a woman. If you will insist I will go with you. She went with him. She inspired the hosts and she summoned them and organized them and sent them to battle with a battle song. This turned out to be one of the great decisive victorys of ancient times which made it possible for the Jews to settle in Canaan.

There are other types. There is this Jezebel, a prncess of Tyre who married Ahab, King of Israel. She was a hard, unscrupulous, idolatrous woman who married the King and who carried on a relentless war against the prophets of Israel. She introduced many of the customs of the Phonecians. She vowed to destroy the prophet Elijah. And when Ahab coveted the vineyard next to the palace and Naboth refused to sell it because it was the patrimony of his ancestors and wouldn't sell it, Ahab was grieved about it, but was restrained by the moral tenets of his faith. Jezebel said: "What, you a king will permit a commoner to defy you?" She cleverly arranged to have two witnesses perjure themselves in testifying against Naboth. And Naboth was put to death. Ahab acquired the vineyard and was satisfied. But the prophet, Elijah, came to Ahab and said to him: "You have murdered and the dogs of lick your blood and the blood of Jezebel your wife having violated the law of God and of man." This came to pass that after sone years Ahab died in Battle. His son Joram was killed by Jehu who led a successful revolution. As Jehu approached the palace, Jezebel with painted eyes mocked Jehu from the window of the palace. Jehu commanded her attendants to & cast her down from the window to her death. The dogs licked her blood as Elijah

had prophesied.

There is a picture of a very beautiful woman, Bathseba for whom a great and good king committed murder, a sin for which he later on atoned in blood and tears and penance. There is very little told about Bathsheba in the Bible, but because so little is told, so much can be ~~inferred~~ conjectured. A child is born to David and Bathseba. The child died. The grief of David for his child whom he loved is told about. One can assume also the deep grief of the mother. A second child was born to them. He was named Solomon. He succeeded his father to the throne in Israel. The only other mention of Bathsheba was when David is about to die, Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon comes to him and reminds him of his promise that Solomon shall reign in his stead. And David tells her that he intends to keep his his promise.

And so there are many many other characters fascinating, intriguing and challenging. There is the story of Ruth, the Moabite, a non-Jewess. A certain Elimelech, his wife and two sons go to sojourn in the land of Moab. There the two sons marry the daughters of the Moabites. After some years, both sons die and the old lady decides to return to her home and she tells her two daughters-in-law that she is returning to her home and she is sure they would like to remain in their home. But Ruth says to her: "Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." These words have come down the ages, beautiful words of protection and loyalty and devotion. And Ruth, according to tradition became one of the ancestors of King David.

One could call attention to other types of other women. There was Hannah, who had no children and who grieved because she was childless. And her husband who tried to comfort her who said: "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" She then goes down to the sanctuary and prays for a child and weeps bitterly. And she vows that if she has a child she will give the child up to the Lord. She does have a child and after she had weaned him and has hardly had time to drink deep of the love for the child she takes him

to Shiloh to the Temple. And every year Hannah came to Shilo to offer a sacrifice and each year she broght for her boy Samuel a little overcoat.

May I conclude with this beautiful tribute paid to woman in the Bible, perhaps the most perfect figure ever painted of woman:

"A woman of valor who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband doth
safely trust in her.
She doeth him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor,
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
Strehgth and dignity are her clothing;
She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
And the law of kindness is on her tongue.
She looketh well to the ways of jer household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up, and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praiseth her;
Many daughters have done valiantly,
But thou excellest them all.

And our forefathers on returning from their places of worship recited this passage from the Book of Proverbs as a tribute to their helpmates in life.



1) Bible story, colorful therefore crowded with all kinds of sorts of people - men - women - young - old - strong and powerful - long tools - heroes and cowards, men of great nobility or great depravity. → The whole panorama of life is there - in And nearly all of them, can speak of their ancient garb & speech, as if it were the men of today whom we see about us in our own world - as the busy Road which we are traveling. We recognize their types and when we look deep into their heart minds, we discover that their thoughts & emotions are not so very different from our own - the same instincts - desires - hopes - fears - passions - ambitions. In a larger sense they are our kindred. They have belonged to the same world of ~~humanity~~ in spite of the gulf of centuries which separates us.

~~But~~ This is a time, the woman, the Bible as of the man - even the status of woman in ancient Israel & in the Orient generally was diff. in many ways from to-day. The free mingling of men & women, their easy association was unknown in the ancient world. The freedom which woman enjoys today in W. world is generally a very recent achievement. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to imagine that the woman of the Bible the woman of ancient Israel was all, the ~~sequestered~~ ^{sequestered} isolated harem type - ~~secluded~~ ^{secluded} from the world and all the concerns ~~aspects~~ other than the purely domestic.

Not at all! we find poets among them, and prophets, and teachers and rules, nations!

2/ Just naturally their province domain is the house. ~~But~~ there the chief attribute these Bib. women is their quality of capability - competence - actual if not formal authority - strong endorsement & well valued and Dignity!

B. speaks approvingly, the firm ally the woman of strength - & power efficiency. No chasing vine! No beginning beauty! No helpless damsel to be rescued by a chivalrous knight! No prudes, no neuroses, no overwrought sophisticates. But competent, purposeful, and enterprising women -

3/ Not all good & virtuous by any means! B. is not ^{an} all-saints book! It is the Album of and it has an amazing assortment of all types & qualities of human beings ~~but~~ Even the good are not without an admixture of human frailties.

Talk the master arches - Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah! Strong & good women - adequate to the hard, exacting life of the nomadic life, the family, fit help with their husbands - a resolute, dominant quality

about them. There is no reaction there - a few degrees + but ~~not~~ ^{not} down (3)
+ less a. pieces and a rather well.

They have experience + vast industry to jealousy + envy
and in shielding + protecting their own they are as deadly
as any. Their spirit - Sarah will have her hand made by
the child driven out with the wilderness out of jealousy,
hurt pride, and fear for her own child Isaac. Rebecca
~~is~~ the lovely, but she favored Jacob rather than Esau, plots
with Jacob to trick his blind father, to rob Esau
of the paternal blessing. Rachel + Leah, sisters, are
jealous of each other, and Jacob, the long Jacob
nevertheless, their love is strong & their loyalty constant
and they build houses and look well to the ways of
their households.

WRHS AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

4/ The Hebrew conception of Woman & her role is already
 pre-shadowed in the mythical figure (EVE) "The
 Mother of all the living". Adam & Eve were meant to be
one inseparable. Eve was fashioned out of Adam,
 but they were both one flesh, very close & united.
 She was to be his helpmate. He was
 to leave his father & mother & cleave to
 his wife, and they shall be one flesh. If it is not so,
 how can he alone
 They were not to complete each other but to complement one
 another. B. knows very little, the so-called
 war, the sexes.

2/16 13N 2/16 13N -

(4)

2/16 13N 2/16 13N -

Eve - "the mother, all the living" - had the Weak-
ness of conscience to all the living - she was curious
she was tempted! She succumbed to the secret
tempter! She ate of Tree, knowledge! She persuaded her
husband to eat. They ruined the innocence!
- But Eve took her first punishment as harsh as
Adam - exile from Eden - and that in form
shall she bear with children - even a Adam-like

2/16 13N - WRHS
~~the~~ sin + suffering do not diminish her
status - the loving wife, the faithful companion, the dearest
helpmate - "the mother, all the living"

5) The B. Pharisee women whose rites destroy themselves
but others - because it stems from evil + depravity -
who break it + destroy the man who loves them + not himself
they debase love - and from the cups of life, Deborah was
such a woman! Deborah was a Pharisee! Samson was an
Israelite - a Hebrew - devoted to the Lord, and desired from
truth to be the deliverer his people and the house the Pharisee
- Has passed his right against the Pharisee him - so much that
the Ph. whose name was Deborah! infatuated -

"Enter him, and see wherein his great strength lieth"
+ and we will put thee away as 1100 pieces of silver"
+ Pries him with flattery - wiles - Plays with him - we will
+ 7 ~~fresh bowstrings~~ ^{fresh bowstrings} that had never been dried" - Allowed
her to bind him - ^{Philistines are upon thee, Samson} - ~~burst in~~
"as a thread is broken when it toucheth fire"

"Then hast mocked me" - she pricked. Told us lies!
② New ropes - wherein no work has been done. triple
③ Weave 7 locks of my head ^{with} ~~with~~ the web - + beat them
in with the pin - Pulled up both the loom & the web
- 3 times triple - got tied to death -

~~She prostituted her love to~~
- Hazanti - a razor has never been used on my head!
- If I were to be shamed - my strength would leave me
- He put him to sleep - cut off the locks, the hair
- helpless - seized him - pouged his eyes -
Saza - bound him bronze shackles - prison
crucifixion - Made sport of him

I've used to betray + destroy ^{the} people ^{was} But
wicked it was not love - but sex lust.

- 6/ B. Kuss & noble woman who loves leads to self-sacrifice. (6)
- Strange & moving story of Joseph's Daughter. - as moving a drama as anything. The great secret Tray - might have written. In fact a similar theme is found in the Bible story of a woman who sacrificed her daughter. Philip's story - battle-days of Carver & Lot. - Warrant with - pro-fuge - - I am on, then - a mighty man of valor. Ammonites - made a vow - "If Thou wilt deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, then whatsoever shall come out of the doors, my hand to meet me, when I return - I will give it up for a burnt-offering".
- The Lord ^{did} deliver Ammon into his hand,
 - Returned in triumph to his home.
 - His daughter ^{- his only child -} came out to meet him with timbers and with dances.
 - When he saw her he rent his clothes - Cried out Loved his father anguish
 - "I have vowed. I cannot go back" - anguish
 - "Do with me according to what thou hast vowed"
 - Let me alone for 2 months - go away with my companions - to "burn my faith" - say prayer to God.
 - Returned - and was soon freed.
 - There is anguish - & tragedy - & glory in this young woman.

7/ There is the woman - Esther - who helps save a nation from destruction. There is the woman Deborah, who arouses a nation to fight for its freedom. A judge - a prophetess - Palm-tree -

Chanaanite - 20 yrs slavery - 900 chariots / lions -
called Barak - "If thou wilt go with me, I will go"
"If thou wilt not go with me - I will not go"
- "I will surely go with thee - not for thy crown
but will give Sisera as a wife into the hands, a woman
inspires host - summons them to battle
Great, decisive victory!

8) In Jezebel - the Tyrian princess - wife of King
Ahab - we find the Phoenician queen - who came to Israel
a bitter, relentless war against the prophets of Israel -
during epoch when Israelites fighting for
the imputed Phoenician captivity of them Israel
men against Idolatry of pagans would - She was to
destroy Elijah. She has valued put to death and
because she Ahab covered his vineyard. She led him to destruction
"Hast thou killed and also taken possession" "The dogs
shall eat Jezebel in the moat of Jezreel."
Jezebel Ahab died in battle. Her son Joram was killed
by Jehu who led a successful revolution, as
Jehu approached the palace - she faunted her eyes -
withdrew her head & utterly mocked Jehu. from
the windows of the palace - Jehu shot her attendants
cast her down from the windows to her death. The
dogs ate her body

9/ And then ^{- a woman very beautiful & yet a poor} was Bath-Sheba ^{for whom a thing} committed murder - explained by passion - ^{later} later atoned for it in blood & tears & penance & remorse.
From little about her - David married her - Child born
to them died - ^{grieved} - But then second child born -
Shimon - And when David grew old - Bath-Sheba
reminded him, his promise ^{to marry that then} that then
M Shimon shall reign ^{- but Adonijah, as giving the throne} after him. And David
- He will keep his pledge!

10/ And so many other interesting women - ^{- Alham} who step
out of the page 7 B - Ruth + Elimelech ^{- Hannah} ^{- trip - 2 years}
- Moad - died - 2 sons married - Ospha - ^{10th} Ruth -
later - died - ^{harrow} return to Judah - Eshvat me
- A glower - 10th - King David was descended!

11/ And Hannah, mother / Samuel, giving her she is childless.
Elkanah - lost his child - 'Am I not better to thee 210 sons?'
Shib - works better - dedicate her son to the Lord -
- After she had weaned him lost him to the Temple -
Every year Hannah came to Shib to the 0 temple, and
at same time she lost a little overcoat for her boy
Samuel -

12/ Par. 31