

# WHY WOMEN FOLLOWED JESUS: A DISCUSSION OF FEMALE PIETY

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Almost without exception, Jewish sects in Second Temple Judaism are treated as the reserve of male Jews. Though scholars rightly stress the diversity of Second Temple Judaism when its variety is explained, one has the very real sense that only men were doing religion. The sources tease us with glimpses of women participating in religion, but often women seem more of a foil for other interests. We cannot be sure whether the descriptions are idealistic dreams of how it should be (one thinks of Philo perhaps)<sup>1</sup> or angry mutterings of a frustrated misogynist (Ben Sira comes to mind).<sup>2</sup> While there are texts with women as central characters, such as *Judith*<sup>3</sup> or *Joseph and Aseneth*,<sup>4</sup> and there are tales where women are featured, such as *Susanna* in the Daniel corpus or Sarah in *Tobit*,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Romney Wegner, 'Philo's Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenic?' in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 41-66.

<sup>2</sup> W. C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View on Women: A Literary Analysis* (Chico, CA: Brown Judaic Studies 38, 1982). See Claudia V. Camp, 'Understanding a Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem through the Eyes of Ben Sira' in Amy-Jill Levine (ed.), *Women Like This*, 1-39, who offers a nuanced view of Ben Sira's position on women as resulting from his fears about his changing social environment.

<sup>3</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Judith*, Anchor Bible, vol. 40 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1985.) See also Margarita Stocker, who examines *Judith* throughout its history of interpretation, and explores the myths and stereotypes, as well as the counter-cultural messages reflected therein. Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Ross Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> A helpful resource for information on women in the canonical texts, including the Apocrypha, is the *Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). See also *Women in Scripture*, Carol Meyers, general editor, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, associate editors (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000). For information on women in biblical Israel, *Women in the Hebrew Bible: a Reader*, edited by Alice Bach (NY: Routledge, 1999).

the reader is never quite sure that these narratives reflect reality on the ground, as it were.<sup>6</sup> Tal Ilan, contrasting the practical non-existence of women in the historiographical books of 1 and 2 Maccabees with the extensive references to women in the non-historiographical books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, remarks, 'I can only deduce from this that in the minds of the ancient historians, real history was enacted in the male realm, while women were confined to the field of fiction.'<sup>7</sup>

Initially, I will focus on two groups within Second Temple Judaism that offer potential windows into women's religious activities, the Pharisees and the Jesus sect. What questions or concerns drew women to follow Pharisaism or the Jesus movement? Discovering the options available to women, or choices women made with regard to Pharisaism might illumine aspects of the Jesus sect concerning women disciples. Given their historical and geographical proximity, often these two groups' treatment and attitudes towards women have been discussed together, often to the Pharisees' disadvantage. For example, more than a few scholars use a biased reconstruction of the Pharisaic position to highlight Jesus' 'enlightened' view of women.<sup>8</sup> While I reject this predisposition, nevertheless, distinctions between women within the Pharisaic movement and those who followed Jesus are suggestive. To understand these differences, especially as they shed light on women in the Jesus movement, useful information can be gained from Diaspora evidence about Jewish women. The similarities between data from the Diaspora and that mined from the New Testament suggest more continuity than many scholars have allowed between Palestine and the Diaspora, at least regarding Jewish women.

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<sup>6</sup> The literature on ideological and methodological problems inherent in studying women in ancient texts is extensive. Ross Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (eds), *Women and Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 35-79; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the "Linguistic Turn"' (*Church History* 67:1, 1998, 1-31); Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2-43; Miriam Peskowitz, 'Spinning Tales: On Reading Gender and Otherness in Tannaitic Texts' in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, ed. by Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (NY: New York University Press, 1994), 91-120; Judith Romney Wegner, 'The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism' in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by J. R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1990), 68-93; *Gender and Religion: on the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. by Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 1-19.

<sup>7</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> See Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 132, 139.

In pursuing these avenues of inquiry, a variety of sources are explored. All literary evidence to one degree or another presents problems for the historian, as Elizabeth Clark wryly comments, 'historians should take care not to overlook the obvious: that we deal, always, with representation'.<sup>9</sup> Most all of our literary sources were produced by men, from the aristocratic or wealthy class. 'Dominant social status led men in these circles not only to express their opinions regarding women but also to try directly to shape women's social status according to their own evaluation of women's character, abilities and limitations.'<sup>10</sup> Josephus' stories about the Hasmonean and Herodian courts in a few instances focuses on the wealthy and powerful women and their interest in the Pharisees, but readers should not suppose that Josephus' material is untainted by rhetoric or political motivation. Novels such as *Judith*<sup>11</sup> or *Joseph and Aseneth*<sup>12</sup> raise further interpretive problems for the historian asking what 'real women' were doing in our period, but may reveal aspects of everyday life much as do parables found in the rabbis' and Jesus' teachings.<sup>13</sup> Rabbinic texts and those of the New Testament are read with an awareness of their polemical and rhetorical posture, but with the recognition that they may reflect authentic women and their behaviour.<sup>14</sup> Also examined are epigraphic and inscriptional evidence from the Diaspora, appreciating that Palestine was continually impacted by news and views from Jewish communities outside of its borders.

Not only is the reconstruction of women's lives problematic given the limited and biased sources available to the historian, but also the difficulty runs to describing the Pharisees. Josephus' positive evaluation of

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes', 30.

<sup>10</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Carey A. Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 40B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985); James C. VanderKam, 'No One Spoke Ill of Her': *Essays on Judith*, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature Series 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> See Ross S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*.

<sup>13</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 34, writes, 'The author of a parable uses examples he perceives as real-life situations in order to illustrate an important idea or message... thus a parable has the same historical value as an historical novel, such as *Susannah*, *Judith* or *Tobit*.'

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on interpreting historical material, including rabbinic and New Testament material, see Ross S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).

the Pharisees is in sharp contrast to the New Testament's condemnation, while the rabbinic texts present numerous challenges to the historian. Martin Jaffee laments that we only have these partisan voices, but he adds, 'what does seem certain – because it is the only thing upon which our otherwise irreconcilable sources agree – is that the Pharisees placed a great premium on something called "ancestral tradition"'.<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, Anthony Saldarini's summary of the Pharisees is most helpful, 'the Pharisaic association probably functioned as a social movement organization seeking to change society... [and] probably sought a new, communal commitment to a strict Jewish way of life based on adherence to the covenant'.<sup>16</sup>

As Richard Bauckham notes, 'No historical reconstruction is possible without the exercise of historical imagination.'<sup>17</sup> This is especially true with the history of women, because of the paucity of evidence, and the questionable authenticity of much of the literary evidence about women written by male authors. However, preliminary conclusions suggest that Jewish women in Jerusalem were drawn to Pharisaism at least in part because of its approach to ritual purity. But women who interacted with Jesus were unconcerned about the ritual purity rites prioritized by many women (and men) who dwelt in Jerusalem and who thus lived under the intense purity codes of the Temple.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the women Jesus met and those who were drawn to him from Galilee and the land outside of Jerusalem, were to one degree or another likely interested in messianic issues, were acutely aware of apocalyptic ideas, and were comfortable learning from Jesus in a mixed group of men and women disciples. The inscriptional evidence from the Diaspora suggests that Jewish women enjoyed full and robust participation in the synagogue, matching the energy and engagement we find among Jesus' female followers.

## WOMEN PHARISEES

The question of whether a woman could be a Pharisee, or would consider herself under that banner, is raised directly by a short sentence in the Mishnah. In *m. Sot.* 3:4 we read,

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<sup>15</sup> Martin S. Jaffee, *Early Judaism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, 'Pharisees', *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. V, edited by David Noel Freedman (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 289-303.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, *op. cit.*, 194.

<sup>18</sup> The question of ritual purity would not be acute for those living outside of Jerusalem and the Temple. See Mary Rose D'Angelo, '(Re)presentations of women in the Gospels' in *Women and Christian Origins*, 140.

R. Eliezer says: If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the law it is as though he taught her lechery. R. Joshua says: A woman has more pleasure in one *kab* [portion of wealth] with lechery than in nine *kabs* with modesty. He used to say: A foolish saint and a cunning knave and a woman that is a hypocrite (*perushah*) and the wounds of the Pharisees (*perushim*), these wear out the world.<sup>19</sup>

The rabbis' intentions are debated extensively, though with consensus that the woman mentioned is not being complimented! The term *perushah* translated 'abstinence' has the same root as the word 'Pharisee'. Scholars argue whether or not to translate *perushah* as 'Pharisee',<sup>20</sup> but there is virtual unanimity that later, in *b. Sot.* 22b, the same Hebrew term should read 'Pharisee'.<sup>21</sup> Such convictions arise from a parallel story recorded by Josephus in *Ant.* 13.401.

The *m. Sot.* 3:4 passage raises several important issues. First, women seem to be associated with the label 'Pharisee', in that they are acting according to the ways of the Pharisees.<sup>22</sup> In particular, the women are condemned because they have decided on sexual abstinence over against their husbands' wishes. These women are married to non-Pharisees otherwise the condemnation makes no sense. Second, the *perushim* are likewise condemned, apparently for swaying women to their views. A story in *t. Nid.* 5:3 confirms this view. The wife of a Sadducean priest is conversing with a high priest. Some spittle from her mouth falls onto his clothes. He turns green with dismay about the possible purity ramifications, but she reassures everyone that she is examined by a sage, so is ceremonially pure. Note that the woman is certified by the rival group, the Pharisees. It is possible that this story tells us little beyond the rabbis' conviction of their own importance vis-à-vis the Sadducees. But it might also hold a kernel of authentic history in its suggestion that Pharisaic teachings were attractive to some women who chose to adhere to specific Pharisaic rites

<sup>19</sup> *m. Sot.* 3.4 in *The Mishnah*, translated by Herbert Danby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 296.

<sup>20</sup> Jastrow offers several definitions of the term, including: 'discreet', 'abstemious', 'saintly', 'pure', and when used of a woman, 'sanctimonious'. *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Marcus Jastrow (NY: Judaica Press, Inc., 1975), 1222.

<sup>21</sup> Ilan notes that in rabbinic literature, no individual male is identified explicitly with the term Pharisee, hence we should not be surprised if a circumlocution is used for a woman Pharisee. Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women in Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period', *HTR* 88.1 (1995), 1-33.

<sup>22</sup> The rabbis in the rabbinic writings do not use the name 'Pharisee' for themselves, so we should not look for them to name directly women as Pharisees.

rather than follow their husbands' sect. Control over her own sexuality could be a formidable claim by a woman to independent thinking about God and religious duties. For this insubordination, these women are condemned in *m. Sot.* 3:4.<sup>23</sup>

This picture fits well with Josephus' declaration that the Pharisees were influential over the masses. Moreover, in a story about Pharisees being fined by Herod the Great, we find a claim that Pharisees 'ruled over' women, perhaps meaning women of the court. Josephus, in *Ant.* 17.41-3, relays that about 6,000 Pharisees were unwilling to sign an oath to Caesar, and so were fined.<sup>24</sup> The wife of Pheroras, Herod's brother, paid the fine for them.

Several points are worth noting from this story. First, Josephus attacks Pheroras' character in part by accusing him of being under the controlling influence of his wife. Second, that she pays the fine might indicate further rebellion against her husband, or it might reflect her aggressive yearnings for power. Third, the Pharisees whom she helps return her favor by prophesying that she and her husband will rule in Herod's stead – and of course, the Pharisees will be empowered with their rule. As portrayed by Josephus, Pheroras' wife's designs in supporting the Pharisees rested on political hopes, though religious sympathies are not ruled out.

Another instance of a royal woman siding with the Pharisees is the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra.<sup>25</sup> She supported the Pharisees over against the Sadducees to avert the civil war caused by her husband's inept internal policies (*War* 1.91-98; *Ant.* 13.372-83). Thus the rabbinic evidence suggests that some women were drawn to the religious teachings of the Pharisees, and Josephus' picture of Pharisees having influence does not weaken the rabbis' picture. Yet Josephus also suggests that some women

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<sup>23</sup> Tal Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period', *HTR* 88:1 (1995), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Tal Ilan notes that Josephus also speaks about this incident in *Ant.* 15.369-70. She holds that the two accounts reflect one event. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Josephus offers two contrasting portraits of Alexandra. In *War* 1.107-112, Josephus portrays her very positively as a strict observer of the national traditions and sacred laws. In *Ant.* 13.407, however, his tone shifts to the negative as he accuses her of having an unreasonable love for power and desiring those things unbecoming a woman. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 21-3, suggests this may be due to his sources. Steve Mason also notes that *War* was concerned to promote the Jewish aristocracy, and Alexandra clearly follows their lead. Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd edn (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

of the court colluded with the Pharisees to advance mutually advantageous political agendas.<sup>26</sup>

#### WOMEN PHARISEES AND WOMEN FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Women of some means were drawn to Pharisaism<sup>27</sup> and also to Jesus' movement. Why? Tal Ilan posits that both the Pharisees and the company that followed Jesus were reactionary opposition groups within Judaism.<sup>28</sup> In each case, these groups lacked clout in running the Temple, the centre of power within first century Judaism, and sought to influence the Jewish community to accept their teachings and lifestyles. Both attracted women who had wealth and provided for them an avenue for influence. Typically, a new group values any sponsorship, and opposition groups allow women to play a key role in leadership. Examples from Christian history are numerous, from the Methodists to the modern evangelical movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with its women pastors and missionaries.<sup>29</sup> Affluent women in the ancient world might have found the Pharisaic movement or the Jesus group open to women's participation inasmuch as the women were patrons of the group.

A key to understanding the attitude expressed about women is appreciating the role of social class. Wealthy women expected to have a role because of their wealth. Luke notes that 'Mary (called Magdalene)... Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others' (Luke 8:2-3, TNIV) supported Jesus and the Twelve from their own funds (see also Mark 15:41). Mark and Luke may be honouring these women in their Gospels as Jesus' patrons, as well as his followers. Bauckham notes particularly that 'Joanna's'<sup>30</sup> courageous independence in

<sup>26</sup> Richard Bauckham contrasts Pheroras' wife's behaviour with Joanna, wife of Chuza (Luke 8:3) by claiming that the latter actually became a member of Jesus' itinerant group traveling the countryside, thus giving up much more in terms of social status than Pheroras' wife, who followed the Pharisees' teachings but did not leave the court. Bauckham, *op. cit.*, 162.

<sup>27</sup> Within Pharisaism itself, different positions were represented, such as the Schools of Hillel and of Shammai. We should not posit a homogeneous group. See Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 228.

<sup>28</sup> Tal Ilan, 'The Attraction of Aristocratic Women', 24.

<sup>29</sup> Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry around the turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> For discussion on women having wealth independent of their husband or father, plus a argument connecting Joanna with the disciple Junia mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:7, see Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 109-202. Tal

supporting the [Jesus] movement evidently stands in a tradition of Herodian aristocratic women who exercised remarkable independence in their religious allegiance and their financial support for religious movements.<sup>31</sup> These women had money to give and were disposed to do so.

The connection of money and leadership is found as well in some of the New Testament epistles. About some women leaders, such as Euodia and Syntyche, we have no data on their personal wealth (Phil. 4:2). But we know that Lydia was wealthy (Acts 16:11-15),<sup>32</sup> as was Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2)<sup>33</sup> and likely Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11).<sup>34</sup> These women might have found within the new Christian movement a freedom to participate that they did not find in the wider world.<sup>35</sup>

New finds from the Judean Desert have substantiated the possibility that some women might have access to financial resources independent of any male. In the archives of Babatha and Salome Komaïse,<sup>36</sup> we find

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Ilan in *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 167-74, discusses the topic of inheritance.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, op. cit., 162. He makes the important point that Luke's primary focus is not the women's patronage, but their discipleship, that they were first and foremost followers of Jesus, even as were the Twelve (see page 112).

<sup>32</sup> Lydia is called a 'dealer in purple cloth' from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. Purple cloth was a luxury item, and it is presumed that Lydia was a wealthy business woman.

<sup>33</sup> Phoebe is mentioned by Paul as being his benefactor (*prostotes*), a common term in the Greco-Roman world for the patron in a patron-client relationship.

<sup>34</sup> It appears that slaves from Chloe's household travelled from Corinth to Ephesus with news for Paul. This implies a household with enough wealth to support several slaves.

<sup>35</sup> Yet the evidence from the Mishnah and Josephus also warns us that the public was accepting of stereotypical formulations about court intrigue and scandal, and would believe that women connived and schemed to gain their own power. Sexual appetite was a common accusation, and served as a warning to unsuspecting men lured by women's advances.

<sup>36</sup> Naphtali Lewis, Yigael Yadin and Jonas C. Greenfield (eds), *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*, Judean Desert Studies 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Hebrew University: Shrine of the Book, 1989) and Hannah M. Cotton and Ada Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Nahal Hever and Other Sites, with an Appendix Containing Alleged Qumran Texts* (the Seiyâl Collection II), Discoveries in the Judean Desert 27 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). For a translation of pertinent material on women in this collection, see Ross S. Kraemer (ed.), *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: a Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143-55.



women given 'deeds of gift' in lieu of inheritances, as the latter always<sup>37</sup> went to male descendants in Jewish Law. These deeds of gift allowed a father or husband to pass financial resources onto his wife, mother or daughter.

The church theologian, Origen, defends Jesus and his disciples taking money from women against Celsus' slander that Christianity collected its money in a disgraceful manner. Origen counters that pagan philosophers as well accepted money from their students.<sup>38</sup> Celsus' comment reveals the low prestige women donors had in the eyes of the larger Roman world. Whether Jesus or the earliest church leaders shared this assessment is an open question. Claims about the parity between male and female disciples might indicate that some women leaders were accepted apart from their financial contribution (Euodia's and Syntyche's wealth is unknown, while their role as leaders in Philippi is attested to by Paul in Phil. 4:2).

Of course, we cannot assume that social standing and wealth were the only factors in women's attraction to either Pharisaism or the Jesus movement. Tal Ilan wonders whether women were drawn 'to the Pharisees' belief in a life after death or the Pharisees' middle ground on the question of predestination (*Ant.* 13.171-3) or simply the Pharisee life-style (*War* 2.166).<sup>39</sup> The women we meet in the gospels are interested in ideas about the resurrection and the end times, even as the male disciples are. For example, Martha shows knowledge of the resurrection when she declares her belief that her brother Lazarus will rise on the last day (John 11:24).

Nor should we conclude that women who followed Pharisaic traditions viewed menstrual purity regulations as did the rabbis, in no small part because the links between Pharisaism and rabbinic teachings is so disputed. But if we allow for the moment that first century women following the Pharisaic lifestyle were expected to keep the menstrual purity codes as recorded in later rabbinic material, it may be that some women viewed (or at least used) the laws to limit procreation by declaring themselves unclean when they were not to prevent or delay a pregnancy.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that some women followed Jesus without the consent of their

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<sup>37</sup> Numbers 27:1-11 allows for women to inherit if there are no male descendants. Moreover, the Jewish marriage contract (*ketubah*) could be written so that the widow was maintained out of her husband's estate.

<sup>38</sup> Origen *C.Cel.* 1.65. Margaret MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 102.

<sup>39</sup> Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. See also Judith Wegner, 'The Image and Status of Women in Classical Rabbinic Judaism' in Judith Baskin (ed.), *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 80-1.

husbands, and perhaps others saw that decision as acceptable, just as within the Pharisaic movement.

#### EVIDENCE FROM THE DIASPORA

Strikingly absent from any account of women interacting with Jesus is a concern for purity issues pertaining to women's menstrual cycles. Neither women nor men are bothered by the presence among the group of potentially 'unclean' or menstruating women.<sup>41</sup> A likely reason for this discrepancy is that Jesus ministered primarily outside of the holy city, Jerusalem, and thus outside the sacred space created by God's presence in the Temple. Kraemer adds an important perspective with her evaluation of the evidence. Applying Mary Douglas' group/grid analysis<sup>42</sup> to Jewish women in rabbinic communities and in the Diaspora, she remarks that 'the weakening of both group and grid among many Jews in the Diaspora was likely to be accompanied by a relaxation of menstrual purity laws'.<sup>43</sup> The rabbis experienced high grid in their intense concern for boundary markers which set them apart from Gentiles and the unclean. Kraemer argues that among Jesus' followers, one finds a strong group/weak grid social arrangement. She characterizes the earliest Christian communities as having a 'strong group identity coupled with a rejection of status distinctions, of hierarchical structure, of ritual purity, and of social conformity.... In Douglas' cultural model, they were quintessentially egalitarian (strong group, weak grid).'<sup>44</sup>

Thus while the limited material about women and Pharisaism helps illumine some possibilities open to women who chose to join the Jesus movement, other questions are better addressed by considering the Diaspora evidence. As Kraemer's quotation above highlights, female

<sup>41</sup> Philo, *On the Special Laws* 2.54, writes that women are part of the world of the senses and cannot escape it, because of their menstrual flow, which symbolizes passion and senses.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1970, reprinted 1973); and 'Cultural Bias' in *In the Active Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982). Douglas suggests that religious practices are correlated to social experiences measurable in two ways, through group participation and through a grid of regulation which an individual experiences. When grid is strong, the individuals share beliefs and symbols to express those convictions. A weak group/weak grid emphasizes individualism, while a strong group/strong grid includes ascribed hierarchy. A strong group/weak grid includes sectarians and egalitarians, those who promote a strong boundary against outsiders, but little internal hierarchy.

<sup>43</sup> Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 125.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

followers of the Jesus movement as witnessed in the canonical Gospels had apparent similarities to some Jewish women from the Diaspora. By considering this Diaspora evidence we can understand more fully the options open to women connected with nascent Christianity.

Recent scholarship has successfully challenged the older theory postulating a sharp dichotomy between Diaspora Judaism and Judaism in Judea and Galilee.<sup>45</sup> Hellenism had made great inroads into Judea, and many Diaspora Jews were 'faithful' to the traditions/Law.<sup>46</sup> The Diaspora evidence suggests that at least some women were vigorous participants in the public life of the Jewish community. Epigraphic evidence from the Greco-Roman Diaspora highlights some Jewish women's participation in the leadership of synagogues, their love of the Law and their relative economic freedom. Absent is any focus on purity issues such as menstrual purity which is stressed intensely in rabbinic texts. These inscriptions also offer a window into women's own expectations (or their families') about participation in religion, the family, and the economy.

In this sense, they reflect the Gospels' picture of women interacting freely and publicly with Jesus and apparently not overstepping major cultural taboos. I suggest that the similarities between women in the Jesus movement and Jewish women of the Diaspora further strengthens the contention that the Jewish Homeland and the Diaspora were deeply engaged and integrated with each other.

## WOMEN LEADERS

Several inscriptions from Asia Minor reveal women as leaders of the synagogues.<sup>47</sup> Bernadette Brooten has demonstrated conclusively from inscriptions from Asia Minor, Egypt, Rome and even Palestine that titles such as 'head of the synagogue' (*archisynagogue*), 'leader' (*archon*), and 'elder' (*presbytera*) represent for both men and women a functional role

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<sup>45</sup> Ross Kraemer remarks, 'As more and more scholars are beginning to concede, rabbinic sources may at best refract the social realities of a handful of Jewish communities, and at worst may reflect only the utopian visions of a relative handful of Jewish men.' She points to 'more persuasive evidence of epigraphical, archaeological, and nonrabbinic writings for Jewish communities'. *Her Share of the Blessings*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, it is the Jews from Asia who cause a riot in the Temple because they suspect Paul of inviting a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple, according to Luke (Acts 21:27-29).

<sup>47</sup> Bernadette Brooten in *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 23, notes that over 30 inscriptions list the title head of the synagogue. Only three refer to women.

and not an honorary title. For example, concerning the reference to 'head of the synagogue', in Smyrna a second century inscription reads in part, 'Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue, built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house.'<sup>48</sup> The inscription reveals a Jewish woman with a Roman name, fairly wealthy and apparently making decisions for her household independent of males.<sup>49</sup>

In a burial inscription from Crete dated to the fourth or fifth century CE, we read 'Sophia of Gortyn, elder and head of the synagogue of Kisamos lies here. The memory of the righteous one for ever [sic]. Amen.'<sup>50</sup> A second inscription honouring a donation from the same time period, but found in Myndos, Caria, reads, '[From [Th]eopempte, head of the synagogue, and her son Eusebios.'<sup>51</sup> Sophia's titles are both in the feminine form and there is no husband mentioned. In Theopempte's situation, likely she was married, but her husband is not mentioned, nor does her son bear a title.

These three inscriptions which identify women as head of the synagogue are among about thirty inscriptions found throughout the Roman Empire. Eight inscriptions praise the donations given by these heads of the synagogue, while the vast majority consists of funerary epitaphs, and note only the title without any description of its function.<sup>52</sup> Some conclude that this title identified a community benefactor and had no religious component.<sup>53</sup> But Levine counters that literary use of the term in rabbinic, Christian and pagan sources points to multiple responsibilities and roles.<sup>54</sup> He advocates reading the inscription alongside the literary material, because 'a [literary] source should be acknowledged to have some measure of historical value, unless a persuasive case can be made to disqualify it'.<sup>55</sup> He finds that religious sources, such as rabbinic, New

<sup>48</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 5. Inscription CII 741, IGR IV 1452.

<sup>49</sup> Two other inscriptions noting male leadership have been found in the area, for example, CII 739 tells of a donation made by an elder and 'father of the tribe', who is also the son of an elder.

<sup>50</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 11. Inscription CII 731c.

<sup>51</sup> Brooten, op. cit., 13. Inscription CII 756.

<sup>52</sup> See G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, 7 vols from MacQuarrie University (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-1994). Note especially vol. iv (1987) for a discussion of synagogue leadership.

<sup>53</sup> T. Rajak and D. Noy, 'Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Graeco-Jewish Synagogue', *JRS* 83 (1993), 75-93.

<sup>54</sup> Lee Levine, 'Synagogue Leadership: The Case of the Archisynagogue', in Martin Goodman (ed.), *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195-213.

<sup>55</sup> Lee Levine, 'Synagogue Leadership', 201.

Testament and Patristic writings, all emphasize the religious nature of this role, while inscriptions focus on the public benefactions. The general picture emerges of a key leader within the local Jewish community who represents it to the larger Greco-Roman world, 'an archisynagogue was looked upon by Jews and non-Jews alike as a leader and representative of his community'.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, Levine does not address Brooten's discussion of a female *archisynagogue*, but proceeds under the assumption that those holding this title were all male.<sup>57</sup>

Looking at the evidence from the New Testament, we discover that Mark and Luke/Acts use the male form *archisynagōgos* in Luke 8:49 to describe Jairus (see also Mark 5:22-38, where he distinguishes Jairus as one of the heads of the synagogue). In Luke 8:41, in describing Jairus, Luke writes *archōn tēs synagōgēs*. Matthew in his telling of the story has *archōn*. The evidence suggests that for the Gospel writers, *archisynagōgos* is a functioning leader of the community. Again in Luke, we read of an angry 'head of the synagogue' who chastised the people about Jesus healing on the Sabbath (13:10-17). And we learn of heads of the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch who invited Paul and Barnabas to speak to the congregation (Acts 13:15; see also 18:1-17, where Crispus and Sosthenes are also known as heads of the synagogue).

Rabbinic and pagan sources also use the term in discussing the Jewish synagogue.<sup>58</sup> Of particular interest is the statement in *t. Meg* 3.21 which notes that the *rosh kneset* (Hebrew equivalent of *archisynagogue*) read from the Torah, which coincides with the picture presented in the New Testament. And in a late pagan work, *Life of Alexander Severus*, a mob verbally abuses the Emperor Severus 'calling him a Syrian archisynagogue and a high priest'. Levine questions whether this insult reflects the historical situation of Severus (third century) or of the author (fourth century). In either case, Levine concludes this title had enough purchase among the pagan population to provoke the affront.<sup>59</sup>

The three inscriptions referring to women as *archisynagōgēs* suggest the need to reexamine preconceived notions about the possibilities open to women within Judaism. In particular, in our reconstruction of women in Jesus' life, we should not be shocked that Martha and Mary were free to

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>57</sup> Levine refers to Brooten's 1982 monograph about women leaders, but only to note that she speaks generally about the office. Levine, *ibid.*, 198.

<sup>58</sup> Brooten, *op. cit.*, 17-27. See also Lee Levine, 'Synagogue Leadership', 204-9, who cites the Hebrew equivalent, *rosh kneset*, occurring in *m. Yom.* 7:1; *m. Sot.* 7:7-8; *t. Meg.* 3:21, *y. Ber.* 3.1; *Semahot* 14.14; *b. Pes.* 49b; *b. Shab.* 29b; *b. Git.* 60a.

<sup>59</sup> Levine, 208.

invite Jesus into their home (Luke 10:38-41; John 12:2), and that they had religious education sufficient to understand Jesus' teachings on the resurrection (John 11:24). In this, they resembled the description of Susanna, whose parents had trained her according to the law of Moses (Dan. 13:3, NRSV). It does not stretch beyond our limited evidence to ask whether Mary and Martha's own mother or another woman served as a head of the synagogue, acting as a role model and educating these women. I am not suggesting in this reconstruction that a female head of the synagogue worked only with women, for nothing in the inscriptions would indicate such. But it is also possible that a primary focus might have been other women in the congregation. Nor am I suggesting that a female head of the synagogue worked alone, but instead might have been a member of a leadership team.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar vein, six, possibly seven, inscriptions from around the Roman Empire speak of women as elders (*presbyterai*).<sup>61</sup> The title is well attested for men throughout our period both in Palestine and the Diaspora. Moreover, the elders' functions seem well established; they served to represent the Jewish congregation to other parties, they were honoured with special seats, and they likely functioned as a governing council for the community, perhaps dealing directly with funds. It is entirely possible that in some communities women and men served together in handling the funds and the religious matters of the community.

My assertions build on the picture already presented in the New Testament. Women are assumed to be participants in synagogue worship. Luke tells of a crippled woman healed by Jesus while attending synagogue (Luke 13:10-17). No mention is made that she is separated from the men in the group. In Acts 18:26, Priscilla had sufficient education that she felt compelled to correct and teach her fellow Christian, Apollos, after he spoke inadequately on matters of the gospel. Lydia and other women (and perhaps some men) met in Philippi for worship, and neither the author Luke nor Paul register surprise at their gathering.<sup>62</sup> Rabbinic evidence may support this picture. A *baraita* (Tannaitic saying) allows a Jewish woman to ask her gentile neighbour to stir her cooking while she visits the bathhouse or the synagogue (*b. Abod. Zar.* 38a-38b), highlighting the relative importance of synagogue participation over preparing (kosher) meals.

<sup>60</sup> I must also note that women were not alone in being oppressed in the ancient world. Most men were under the authority of other men; very, very few men were 'free' in the sense we use the term today.

<sup>61</sup> Brooten, *op. cit.*, 41-55.

<sup>62</sup> Note Brooten's discussion about *proseuxa* being a synonym for synagogue, 139-40.

The overwhelming evidence for women and men enjoying the synagogue together, and participating in its running, has many affinities with the Gospels' description of Jesus' own community of disciples. His male and female disciples learn from him, follow him, provide for him, comfort him and worship him. Gender distinctions were probably less important in certain cases than economic differences; wealthy women and men might be given more honours, as was consistent with the larger culture.

### WOMEN'S PIETY

A second century AD inscription from Rome, wherein a devoted Jewish husband praises his Jewish wife, Regina, highlights several characteristics of piety. I will quote it here in full.

Here lies Regina, covered by such a tomb, which her husband set up as fitting to his love. After twice ten years she spent with him one year, four months and eight days more. She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the life promised, as is our true faith, to the worthy and the pious, in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land. This your piety has assured you, this your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance of the Law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all these deeds your hope of the future is assured. In this your sorrowing husband seeks his comfort.<sup>63</sup>

Key elements of her piety should be highlighted. Her husband believes that she is worthy of life again, of 'an abode in the hallowed land'. Her piety was expressed in her chaste behaviour, her commitment to the Jewish community, her observance of the Law, and her devotion to her marriage. Unfortunately for us, Regina's husband does not detail what she did in observing the Law or how she showed her devotion to her people. Yet the fact remains that she did observe the Law according to him, which gains her life in the hereafter. Did she study the Law? While we cannot answer that question with certainty, probably she did charitable work, investing time and funds for the betterment of her people. Unlike today, where women's volunteer service is often undervalued, in the ancient world, the giving of alms by men and women was highly praised.

This inscription also references her upholding her wedlock, because it holds a glory that is precious to her. The husband in this inscription seems to connect marriage and glory for a woman. This calls to mind the

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<sup>63</sup> CIJ 476, Translated by Ross Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: a Sourcebook on Women's Religion in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 301.

enigmatic and hotly contested passage of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.<sup>64</sup> He also uses the term 'glory' in speaking about men/husbands and women/wives. When he states that the woman is the glory of man (11:7), could he be speaking in a similar way as this devoted husband of Regina? Could he be reflecting a belief that a wife finds a sense of glory in her devotion to the marriage? Is Paul drawing on a picture of marriage whereby the woman in her devotion to the institution itself gains glory as her husband is also honoured by her behaviour? If this is what Paul is reflecting, it helps make sense of his next sentence which speaks of the woman having authority on her head, for she used her authority or free choice to maintain her commitment to marriage.

The inscription lauding Regina does not declare or imply that she was secluded in her home. But some literary evidence promotes this picture of women, even as it also reveals them active in the marketplace and synagogue. Philo, a wealthy, first-century Jew living in Alexandria, is often mentioned for his claims that Jewish women should never be seen in public and his dismay that in fact he does encounter Jewish women in public (*Spec.* 3.169-175). He desires that a free-born woman<sup>65</sup> go out in public 'to the temple' (εἰς ἱερός) when the market is not crowded so as to protect her honour as befits her social status.<sup>66</sup> In his warning against women defending their husbands engaged in public arguments Philo unwittingly reveals that women and men were together in the market place or other public venue. His stereotype of women as driven by passions underlies his attack against a wife's 'boldness', and he decries the shrill tongue lifted above the market din and the hands lifted to assault, 'hands which were trained to weave and spin and not to inflict blows and injuries' (*Spec.* 174). Though he speaks against it, Philo's Alexandria is populated with women in the market place, the synagogue, and other public spaces.

Moreover, Judith Wegner notes that 'Philo has no interest in women as a topic for sustained discussion... yet [he] expresses opinions on "the

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<sup>64</sup> See Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians in NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 800-48, for extensive summaries of the major issues. See also Tal Ilan in *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 129-32, for a brief discussion of rabbinic texts on a woman's hair/head covering.

<sup>65</sup> Philo is unconcerned about female slaves, who had to be out in public.

<sup>66</sup> F. H. Colson remarks in his footnote to his Loeb translation that Philo may be using the term 'temple' as a synonym for 'synagogue', but more likely is speaking here to all women, Jewish and pagan, and is using a generic term for place of worship.



female” at every turn.<sup>67</sup> Instead, in Philo, masculine and feminine characteristics are apportioned to traits of the soul, where mind (*nous*) corresponds to man, and sense perception to woman (*Opif.* 165), and mind is always superior to sense perception, because the former is rational, while the latter is irrational (*Q.G.* 1:43; *Q.E.* 1:7; *Leg.* 2:38). For Philo, women are primarily a vehicle to discuss allegorically the passions, the senses, and all that is unmanly. They become a foil for his claims on the superiority of the rational sphere, which even a woman can enter, if she becomes ‘male’ (*Cher.* 50; *Contempl.* 68-9).<sup>68</sup>

2 Maccabees 3:19-20 comments on the seclusion of unmarried women, though not married women. Concerning the potential defamation of the Temple, it writes of married women lamenting in the streets, while unmarried women stand at the gates of their homes.<sup>69</sup> ‘Women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows. And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made supplication.’ But Tal Ilan cautions that archaeological evidence does not support the claim that Jewish families (at least in Palestine) had separate women’s quarters, especially in the homes of the poor, which made up the vast majority of the population.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, though in most rabbinic texts, the wife is to be kept out of the public eye, we do find remarks which reveal women out in the market place. For example, *t. Nidd.* 6.17, admits that a possible source of blood on a woman’s clothing is that which spattered on it from the butcher’s market. Again, a Talmudic tradition (*b. Ned.* 49b) relates the story of a poor couple whose wife went to the market and bought wool from which she made a garment. Then both she and her husband in turn used the garment when they went to market (wife) or out to pray (husband). While both rabbinic sources are later than our period, they do reveal some ambiguity about the desired role of a wife and unmarried daughter, and the actual experience of those women. This pattern is consistent with material from the first century CE and earlier.

<sup>67</sup> Judith Romney Wegner, ‘Philo’s Portrayal of Women – Hebraic or Hellenic?’ in Amy-Jill Levine, *Women Like This*, 44.

<sup>68</sup> For a brief discussion of Paul and Philo on women, see Judith Gundry-Volf, ‘Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison with Early Jewish Views’ in Richard N. Longenecker (ed.), *The Road from Damascus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 195-201.

<sup>69</sup> For another reference to women kept within the house, see *Ben Sira* 42:11, ‘See that there is no lattice in her room, no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house.’

<sup>70</sup> Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 132-4.

In all likelihood, the economic status of the individual woman had much to do with whether she was seen in public. The wealthy Aseneth is portrayed as secluded from the world, but she also has great power to refuse suitors (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 2:1, 4:8-15).<sup>71</sup> So too, Judith is described as remaining in her house until destiny ordained she save her people (*Judith* 8:4-8). The author of *Judith* draws on the figure of judge in ancient Israel, who saves Israel in a time of utter crisis, then returns to her private life.<sup>72</sup> But Judith had slaves who could go out into the market place and take care of her household business. Slave women, even Jewish slave women, would have been out publicly on a regular basis because of the nature of their tasks.<sup>73</sup>

Surprisingly absent in both Regina's burial inscription and Rufina's inscription forbidding anyone to plunder the tomb is any reference to children, or in Rufina's case, to even a husband.<sup>74</sup> Many scholars today take for granted that women in the Hellenistic period gained their status and value through bearing many children.<sup>75</sup> Yet that may not have been the

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<sup>71</sup> Ben Sira laments the burden a daughter causes her father, who fears she will not remain chaste before her marriage: 'My son, keep a strict watch over a daughter, lest she make fun of you to your enemies.... Let her not expose her beauty to any male, and let her not take counsel among women.... A daughter causes fear regarding disgrace more than a son' (42:11-14). The daughter is portrayed as sexually insatiable, and thus a constant worry for the father's honour: 'Keep strict watch over a daughter, lest she find freedom and make use of it.... As a thirsty traveler opens his mouth and drinks from any nearby water, she sits in front of every peg and opens her quiver to the arrow' (26:10, 12). In 4 Maccabees 18:7, the mother of the seven martyred sons, Hannah, proclaims 'I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house; but I guarded the rib that was built.' Clearly the author of 4 Maccabees believed that a chaste and holy mother would have protected her virginity before her marriage.

<sup>72</sup> Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, 150. See also Sidnie Ann White, 'In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heroine' in James C. VanderKam (ed.), *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 5-16.

<sup>73</sup> Female slaves or maidservants were also the sexual property of their owners. Thus rabbis assumed that they were as prostitutes. Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, 205-11.

<sup>74</sup> Girls married at about 15-18 years of age, though Roman girls may have married about 13. Rabbinic evidence suggests the age of 12 as appropriate for marriage, but there is no corroborating evidence to test this claim.

<sup>75</sup> Philo (*Spec.* 3.62) expands on the LXX's quotation of Numbers 5:28 when he writes 'For if she has been falsely accused, she may hope to conceive and bear children and pay not heed to her fears and apprehensions of sterility or

case, as epigraphic evidence does not support the common assumption that Jewish women had large families. Looking at burial inscriptions, often women have no more than one child. Even literary evidence could support this, as in *Tobit* where both Sarah and Tobias are only children, and in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where Aseneth is the only child of her father, the high priest. Women seemed to have nursed their babies for three years, and would also work as wet-nurses, which may have contributed to the low birthrate. Burial inscriptions reveal the likely prevalence of women dying during childbirth.<sup>76</sup>

Do the characteristics of observing the Law, belief in the resurrection, piety and love for one's people resonate with the women Jesus meets in the Gospels? Quite clearly they do. One need think no further than the eloquent sisters, Martha and Mary, to know that some of Jesus' female followers were well versed in the teachings about resurrection and believed that they and their loved ones would share in the life to come by God's power (John 11:24). So too, the Samaritan woman Jesus meets at the village knows the religious significance that both her people and the Jews give to certain holy sites in Palestine (John 4:7-26). She recognizes that Jesus is a prophet because Jesus can see into her past even as John tells the readers Jesus also saw Nathaniel's past (John 1:47-51). She is prepared and awaiting the Messiah, who will lead her in all truth. And she is astute enough to see in Jesus the coming Messiah. In believing her testimony, the village testifies to her pious life and trustworthiness (contrary to most readings of this passage, I do not think the issue here is her alleged sexual sin).

Luke tells us of Anna the prophetess who lived in the Temple and worshiped there night and day, praying to God. Her piety is exemplary, and from that close communion with God, she recognized in Jesus the hope of Israel (Luke 2:38). Luke's note that she never left the Temple is often interpreted as hyperbole, but it does raise the interesting possibility that women might have lived in the Court of Women. Luke's title of prophet is consistent with his language elsewhere, for he notes that Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). Luke parallels his claim about Anna's call as prophet with his statement about Simeon being filled with the

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*childlessness.*' See Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 116, who notes that 'Philo's elaboration, here italicized, suggests that if childlessness was not viewed as evidence of adultery, it was at least seen as evidence of divine displeasure.'

<sup>76</sup> Tal Ilan estimates about 5% of women died during childbirth. She disagrees with G. Meyer's figure of approximately 50%. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, 118-19. See also G. Meyer, *Die jüdische Frau in der hellenistisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart, 1987), 93.

Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25). Anna's response to Jesus is similar to Simeon's; upon seeing Jesus, they both praised God. It is unclear whether Anna represents an order of widows either within Early Judaism or nascent Christianity. Anna's love for her people is evidence in her preaching about Jesus as the redemption from God, directly after she sees the infant.

The Gospels also attributed one act only to women – only women anointed Jesus.<sup>77</sup> This is surprising because the act of anointing has a rich and very male history in Israel, with prophets anointing kings (see 1 Sam. 10:1, 16:13). Recognizing this record, many scholars point to Jesus' baptism by John as his anointing. All four Gospels speak of a woman who anoints Jesus (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:37-50; John 12:1-8). Scholars debate whether we have a single story altered by the various Gospel writers, or two different women anointing Jesus. My concern is not with textual issues; instead, I would like to focus on what those pericopes reveal about traditions of women worshiping Jesus.

The basic story is that a woman anoints Jesus with expensive ointment/perfume. In Mark and Matthew, she anoints his head with perfume, while in John she anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair. In Luke, her tears wet Jesus' feet, which she dries with her hair, and then anoints him with perfume. The Gospel writers explain the impact of the woman's deed variously. Mark, Matthew, and John all declare her actions to be prophetic; she has anointed Jesus in preparation for his death. In these accounts, Jesus reinterprets the ancient act of anointing future kings by the Hebrew prophets and instead focuses attention on his impending suffering and death. This picture is consistent with other evidence that women were learned in the theology of the day, and were free to mix with men in social situations. Note, for example, that the outcry in Mark and Matthew is not that a woman was present among the men, but that her action was extravagant and wasteful (Mark 14:4-5). In Luke's presentation, the woman, a sinner, represents the ideal disciple, full of contrition and humility in contrast to those who believe in their own righteousness. Women disciples serve as examples of proper theology in accepting Jesus' role as one who suffers, and as models of repentance in the face of God's supreme gift.<sup>78</sup>

In a final note, mention should be made of the various places and social locations in which these women met Jesus. As we have seen, most were quite public; Jesus met women at a well at midday, at a dinner party,

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<sup>77</sup> At Jesus' burial, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrap Jesus' body but do not anoint it.

<sup>78</sup> The positive picture of women does not *necessarily* mean that within Luke's communities women were held in this high esteem.

or at the Temple. Mark and Luke both note that several women 'used to follow [Jesus] and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem' (Mark 15:41). Luke confirms that Jesus numbered women among those who travelled with him 'through cities and villages' (Luke 8:1). Both Mark and Luke seem to indicate that women travelled with the men as itinerant preachers. Did they only do day trips? Luke 18:29 mentions Jesus' statement that 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.' In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus does not specifically mention 'wife', rather only notes that those who leave their house will receive much more from God (Matt. 19:29). It is not clear, then, from these statements whether women followed Jesus from town to town, or returned to their homes each night. Women pilgrims are known from later Christian history, and Thecla is an itinerant preacher par excellence in the early Christian tradition. Given the preponderance of Jewish villages in the Galilee at this time, as well as Jesus' apparent preference for ministering primarily in Galilee, it is entirely conceivable that women followed Jesus into towns and then stayed with friends and relatives much like the missionaries were enjoined to do by Jesus in Luke 10:1 and in Matthew 10:11. No convincing reason can be given to conclude that women did not travel with Jesus at least on part of his journeys.

Some scholars have argued, for example, that Martha and Mary might be such a team of missionaries, because both Luke and John refer to Martha as *diakonos* and to Mary as 'sister'. This mirrors Paul's identification of Phoebe as a deacon of the church of Cenchræa who travelled to Rome, perhaps delivering Paul's letter to that church. It also reflects Paul's use of 'brother' to describe his companion Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1). We know of couples that travelled as missionary pairs, including Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18; 2 Tim. 4:19), Junia and Andronicus (Rom. 16:7), and of two sisters who worked 'in the Lord', Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12).

## CONCLUSION

Viewed from the vantage point of Diaspora Judaism, the women who were part of the Jesus movement shared much with Jewish women outside of Roman Palestine. Both groups had a visible presence of women participating in significant ways, including leadership responsibilities, within the group. Women of means acted independently in caring for their slaves (Rufina) or in following a teacher (Mary Magdalene); they

were honoured for knowing the Law (Regina) and believing in the resurrection (Martha). The addition of Diaspora evidence fills out the picture of Jewish women's activities offered by the scant and highly problematic material about women within the Pharisaic movement.

By using both sets of evidence, a more complete picture is drawn of the options available to Jewish women, including those who were part of the Jesus movement. Women of wealth might have chosen to be followers of Jesus because this group offered a venue to promote their social prestige. Perhaps some women were drawn to possibilities in areas of leadership and/or learning. While we might not be able to answer fully the question of motivation (why women followed Jesus), our sources reveal women's behaviours from which we can build suppositions on their ambitions and aspirations. For some women, their social and/or religious goals of influence, learning and piety might be equally met within the Pharisaic community, the Diaspora community, or among those who followed Jesus. Some women who followed Jesus resembled their Pharisaic 'sisters' in their desire for political influence or in their strong convictions which set them at odds with the religious tradition of their family. Other female disciples of Jesus resembled their Diaspora 'sisters' in their hunger for religious knowledge and community leadership. To answer the question of why women followed Jesus, a comprehensive list of options must be reviewed, and this list must include not only the model of Pharisaic women, but also that of the Jewish women of the Diaspora.