

## All of the women of the Bible

Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955),  
Deen served as a woman's department editor and author of the column "From a Woman's Corner" of Fort Worth Press for 25 years. She also served on Texas Commission on the Status of Women, a Fort Worth City Councilwoman, and received many awards including honorary Doctor of Letters.

### **Jephthah and Jephthah's Daughter** (Judg. 11;34-40). P. 74 and 312-)

Jephthah, ninth judge of Israel, makes public vow to offer a burnt offering in case of victory. He is victorious, but learns his daughter must be his offering. He accepts her father's pledge with meekness and patience.<sup>1</sup>

Jephthah was the son of a distinguished Hebrew named Gilead, who lived in territory of that name. His mother was stranger to the tribe, as an inferior woman described as a harlot (Judg. 11:1-2). Despite his mother's foreign blood Jephthah became a great commander and a believer in the one God.<sup>2</sup>

In the early part of his life, because of his illegitimacy, he had been banished from his father's house and had taken up his residence in Tob, not far from Gilead. Here he became head of a warring tribe of freebooters who went raiding with him. When war broke out between the Ammonites and the Gileadites, the latter sought Jephthah as their commander. He consented only after a solemn covenant, ratified on both sides at Mizpeh, a strongly fortified frontier town of Gilead. Here he established his residence temporarily and brought his daughter. In his perplexity to give fresh courage to his troops and to sustain his own confidence against such fearful odds, he made a vow publicly to the Lord. In that reckless vow he exhibited a rude and unenlightened piety typical of the wild mountaineer fighter that he was when he declared, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, the whoever comes to meet me, when I returned victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering (Judg. 11:30-31)."<sup>3</sup>

The women and maiden had assembled to greet this victorious warrior with songs and dances. Who should be the first to come out from Jephthah's own doorway but his beloved daughter! Probably he had thought a servant or a hound dog would precede her. Or maybe not until this moment had he stopped to realize how rash and cruel had been his vow. But now his shock was great and his distress poignant as he looked and saw his beautiful daughter standing there in front of his own doorway.<sup>4</sup>

She ran to embrace him. He had been all in all to her. Born in exile, reared amid the wild scenes of desert life, she had known no other protection but her father's tent, no greater love than his. While the whole land echoed the triumphant shouts of freedom, all

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 75.

<sup>4</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 76.

the glory died out for Jephtha as he embraced his daughter, only to cry loudly; When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow (Judg. 11:35)"<sup>5</sup>

With heroic courage Jephtha's daughter gave the answer, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites (Judg. 11:36). ... the life she had envisioned as a wife and mother, the hope of every woman in Israel, was gone. She asked her father for two months, so that she might go to the mountain with young friends and "bewail her virginity" (Judg. 11:38).

### **Mary, Mother of Jesus**

No woman in the entire history of the world has been so honored and revered. The world's most majestic poems, novels, and plays have had Mary and her son as their central figures. In the most magnificent cathedrals she is depicted on canvas, in stained-glass windows, in bronze, marble, and stone. Through the centuries the most triumphant hymns and best-loved carols, lullabies, and folk songs have told of her pre-eminence among women. Her names of praise, such as "Mother of Mercy," "Mother Most Blessed," "Queen of Heaven," "Mother Most Pure," "Virgin Most Powerful," and "Spiritual Vessel," have been bestowed upon her. The angel Gabriel and her cousin Elisabeth said of her: "Blessed are thou among women" (Luke 1:28, 42).<sup>6</sup>

Yet her greatness had a humble beginning. She was an obscure peasant girl living in Nazareth twenty centuries ago. But her story has spread to the ends of the earth. Though her life came to its tragic yet glorious climax at the foot of the cross, it continues to inspire and uplift millions. Though she reared her son in obscurity and had neither wealth nor acclaim, the world has worshipped at her feet all down the centuries. Though Mary herself never wore fine clothes, the Madonnas through the ages have been draped in the most costly of garments, and people have left at her feet the world's most precious jewels. Though she never exalted herself, literature has raised her to the highest pinnacle of any woman in history. Though she never entered a palace, her picture has graced the most magnificent palaces. Though she never traveled any farther than from Palestine to Egypt, and they by donkey, her story still travels to the farthest corners of the earth. And though she suffered as much as any woman in the world's history, her suffering changed to joy at her son's resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

**Hagar** (Gen. 16:1-4, 8, 15-16; 21:9, 14, 17; 25:12) was Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, obtained probably while she and Abraham were in Egypt. The maid became the mother, through Abraham, of Ishmael, from which came the tribe of Ishmaelites, who were nomads of northern Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 76.

<sup>6</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 157.

<sup>7</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 157.

<sup>8</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 264.

Sarah was 76 years old and had failed to conceive the heir God had promised, she followed a custom of the times, that of giving her maid Hagar to her husband. And Hagar became the earthly channel for what Sarah thought was the Heir of Promise.<sup>9</sup>

One tradition centers around Hagar and Mecca and the holy well of Zem-Zem, in the sacred area surrounding the Kaaba, or holy building. In the cornerstone here is said to be the original Koran of the Mohammedans. At this well Hagar and her son were supposed to have quenched their thirst. From the Arab of the Hagar-Abraham line, Mohammed was descended, say Mohammedans. The strength of Islam, still mightily on three continents, is said to be bound up with the name of Hagar.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 265.

<sup>10</sup> Edith Deen, *All of the women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 266.