

Session 1-July 12, 2018

Book of Joshua: Rahab-A Canaanite Heroine

The Passionate Torah: Sex & Judaism



Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism

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- July 12-Book of Joshua: Rahab-A Canaanite Heroine
- July 19-Talmud, Menahot-A Harlot Who Lived by The Sea
- July 26-Rabbi Meir & Beruria-In All Her Complexity

Study Resources: *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*
The Passionate Torah: Sex & Judaism



Prostitution

Not a Job for a Nice Jewish Girl

Judith R. Baskin

PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING in human beings for the purpose of prostitution have been and continue to be ugly realities of human life. In this chapter, I focus on some portrayals of prostitution in biblical and aggadic (non-legal) rabbinic writings. These traditions often display a romanticized view of prostitutes—as long as they are not Jews. This double standard is evident in attitudes expressed about the “world’s oldest profession” and its practitioners in the Hebrew Bible and in the midrashic traditions of the rabbinic era.¹

Prostitution in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew term for prostitution is *zenut* or *zenunim*; a prostitute is a *zonah*. The Hebrew Bible also mentions the *qedesh* and *qedeshah*, apparently male and female “cult” or “temple” prostitutes connected with non-Israelite rituals.² Biblical narratives present prostitutes as part of daily life in both the countryside and the city; we catch glimpses of their lives as they ply their trade at twilight (Prov. 7:6–11); attract customers by playing musical instruments (Isaiah 23:16); and sit by crossroads near public events such as sheep shearings (Gen. 38:13–19). One of the unnamed prostitutes who comes to Solomon for justice puts her child’s life above her claims as its mother (I Kings 3:16–27).

Women who became prostitutes were orphans, widows, or divorcées on the margins of Israelite society; some may have been released captive women or manumitted female servants or slaves. Certainly, they were

outside the mainstream patriarchal system that relegated women to domestic roles under the authority and care of specific men. Some prostitutes, such as the women who quarreled over the infant in I Kings 3, banded together and shared lodgings. Others may have functioned quite successfully as independent entrepreneurs. The biblical authors portray Rahab, the harlot of Joshua 2, as a respected citizen who lived in a private residence where she dried flax on the roof. The wanton woman of Proverbs 7 is said to have coverlets of Egyptian linen and to sprinkle her bed with “myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon” (Prov. 7:16–17).

Prostitutes were a reality in Israelite society, but biblical legislation took a negative view of their occupation. Deuteronomy 23:18–19 forbids male and female Israelites from serving as “cult” prostitutes, and Leviticus 19:29 adjures Israelite men not to degrade their daughters into *zenut*, lest “the land be filled with depravity.” Members of the high priestly caste (*kohanim*) are specifically prohibited from marrying harlots (Lev. 21:7, 14), because priests are required to marry virgins, which also rules out widows and divorcées (Lev. 21:14). The daughter of a priest who engaged in *zenut* was to be burned (Lev. 21:9), but no legal penalties are specified for other prostitutes. No Israelite man would have wished his daughter to descend to prostitution, although men facing bankruptcy may have been helpless to prevent it. Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, justified slaughtering their putative brother-in-law, Shechem, and all his male kinsmen on the grounds that their sister, Dinah, should not be treated as a *zonah* (Gen. 34:31). Tamar, of Genesis 38, posed as a prostitute and slept with her father-in-law, Judah, when he failed to fulfill his levirate obligation³ toward her; she is praised and honored as an ancestor of David (Gen. 38). The text makes clear, however, that Tamar would have faced death had she not presented the pledges her father-in-law had left with her in lieu of payment and had he not acknowledged the justice of her claims.

The religious opprobrium directed toward prostitutes is most intensely expressed in biblical passages that invoke harlotry as a metaphor for Israel’s betrayal of God. Thus the Israelites at Shittim are described as “whoring with the Moabite women who invite the people to the sacrifices for their god” (Num. 25:1). Jeremiah condemns “rebellious Israel” for “going to every high mountain and under every leafy tree and whoring there” (Jer. 3:6), and Hosea decries those who forsake God to practice *zenut* by worshipping other deities (Hos. 4:11–12). Hosea is ordered to take “a wife of whoredom” who will bear him “children of whoredom” (Hos. 1:2) as living allegories of Israel’s lack of faithfulness.

Gentile Prostitutes in the Bible and Midrash

The biblical narrative of the Canaanite Rahab, the harlot heroine of Joshua 2, presents a Gentile prostitute in an extremely positive light. Rahab is portrayed as a strong-minded, independent woman who cleverly saved two Israelite spies from capture in Jericho. Moreover, she had the spiritual capacity to recognize the unique powers of Israel's God, confessing that "the Lord your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below" (Joshua 2:11). In return for her generosity, the spies she had hidden promised that Rahab and her kin would be saved when Joshua and the Israelites destroyed Jericho. On the fateful day, Rahab hung a red thread from her window and gathered all her family within her house; remembering Rahab's goodness to his spies, Joshua ordered that she and her family be escorted to a safe place outside the Israelite camp. Joshua 6:25 confirms the happy ending: "Only Rahab the harlot and her father's family were spared by Joshua, along with all that belonged to her, and she dwelt among the Israelites—as is still the case." It is instructive that the biblical author depicts Rahab as a woman of substance, living in her home, respected by her neighbors, and in friendly contact with her relatives. This probably reflects the lives of some urban prostitutes in biblical times.

The biblical story of Rahab is exciting and hortatory, and Rahab herself is portrayed as a stalwart, praiseworthy woman. The Rabbis of the midrash and Talmud, moreover, developed Rahab beyond the scriptural parameters of her story. They saw Rahab as a preeminent model of the righteous convert who went beyond all others in her recognition of God's great powers. By imagining Rahab as a repentant fallen woman who found God and joined the community of Israel, the Rabbis also represent Rahab as an exemplar of the efficacy of Judaism and its traditions in taming the disordering powers of female sexuality. Indeed, Rahab's two personae, the good-hearted whore and repentant fallen woman, establish prototypes with far-reaching implications in the Western imagination—from Mary Magdalen of the New Testament to the ubiquitous whore with the heart of gold in the popular cultures of every era.⁴

Why did Rahab become such an important rabbinic model? It appears that both her gender and her profession appealed to rabbinic interpreters looking for engaging female figures of repentance and conversion. In an extended midrash on the Book of Esther in the Babylonian Talmud (BT) *Megillah* 15a, Rahab is also eroticized when she is linked with other

women whom the Rabbis associated with surpassing beauty and irregular sexual behavior. Part of this passage focuses on the unusually seductive qualities of Rahab, Yael (Judges 4–5), Abigail (1 Samuel 25), and Michal, the daughter of Saul (1 Samuel 18, 19, 25:44; 2 Samuel 6). Each biblical character is problematic for rabbinic exegetes because each acted in ways that included independence, assertion of sexuality, and an apparent willingness to betray the men of her own family and community. The passage, which is both funny and openly titillating, reads in part:

Rahab inspired lust by her name; Yael by her voice; Abigail by her memory; Michal, daughter of Saul, by her appearance. R. Isaac said, "Whoever says, 'Rahab, Rahab' at once ejaculates." R. Nahman responded, "I say 'Rahab, Rahab,' and nothing happens to me." He replied, "I was speaking of one who knew her and was intimate with her."

A.

Midrashic traditions about Rahab fall into several groups. First are those that emphasize her lurid past and then describe her sincerity as a convert. *Sifre Zuta* on Numbers 10:28 recounts that four names of disgrace and obscenity pertained to Rahab, and explains that she was called *zonah* because she was unchaste both with men of her own country and wanderers from elsewhere. According to BT *Zebahim* 116a–b, there was no prince or ruler who had not possessed Rahab the harlot: "She was ten years old when the Israelites departed from Egypt, and she played the harlot the whole forty years spent by the Israelites in the wilderness. At the age of fifty she became a proselyte." This tradition expresses the rabbinic conviction that women are sexually untrustworthy, particularly non-Jewish women. However, it stresses, too, the significant lesson that past wickedness is no bar to present repentance and future salvation. Perhaps the most important lesson is that women, as well as men, are capable of spiritual transformation and are equally welcomed into the Jewish community.

B.

A second category of remarks details Rahab's many distinguished descendants who were said to be priests and prophets in Israel. That a convert and former prostitute could achieve such a name for herself in the annals of Jewish history is proof that those who sincerely return to God will achieve repentance, no matter how great their previous sins. Rahab's name can be understood as "breadth" and her past excesses are frequently cited as evidence of the breadth of the gates of repentance, as in the following homiletic midrash from *Pesikta Rabbati* 40:3:

"He will judge the world and declare it acquitted / But He will minister judgment to the heathen peoples according to the upright" (Psalm 9:9). What is meant by, "according to the upright"? R. Alexandri said: He will minister judgment to the heathen people by citing as examples the upright ones among them, the example of Rahab, of Jethro, of Ruth. How will he do so? He will say to each individual of the peoples of the earth: "Why did you not bring yourself closer to Me?" And each of them will answer: "I was wicked, so steeped in wickedness that I was ashamed." And God will ask: "Were you more so than Rahab whose house was in the side of the wall so that on the outside she would receive robbers and then whore with them inside? Nevertheless, when she wished to draw near Me, did I not receive her and raise up prophets and priests from her line?"

C. A third group of traditions revises Rahab's past entirely and transforms her from a harlot to an innocent innkeeper who ultimately married Joshua (BT *Megillah* 114b). Because Rahab is said to have been so intimately connected with prominent figures in Israel, as wife and as ancestor, this revisionist tradition is not surprising.⁵ To launder her past in this way, however, seriously undercuts the main message about the warm reception Judaism offers the repentant harlot. Moreover, by transforming Rahab into a pious convert and devoted wife of Joshua, the Rabbis vitiate Rahab's otherness, defuse her dangerous sexuality, and undercut her disturbing independence.

Traditions about Rahab are part of a larger rabbinic repertoire of erotic stories about prostitutes. One midrashic tale in BT *Menahot* 44a (and *Sifre Numbers* 115), for example, appears in a discussion of the importance of observing the precept of *tzitzit* (ritual fringes) and recounts the tale of a student who was very careful in observing this precept. This young man learned about a prostitute "in the cities of the sea" who required four hundred gold pieces as a fee, and he determined to visit her. Sending the money in advance, he set a date for their assignation. When he arrived, the prostitute had prepared seven beds, "six of silver and one of gold; and between each bed there were steps of silver, but the last were of gold." The woman ascended to the top bed and lay down on it naked. When the young man followed her, the four fringes [of his garment] suddenly struck him across the face and he fell to the ground.

The harlot descended from the golden bed and asked what blemish he had found in her to treat her this way. The man replied that she was the

most beautiful women he had ever seen, but he explained that his "*tzitzit* had testified against him" and dissuaded him from endangering his life in the world to come by engaging in harlotry. The woman was so impressed that she became a convert to Judaism and married the man who had rejected her when she was a prostitute. The story ends, "Those very bed-clothes that had been spread for him for an illicit purpose she now spread out for him lawfully. This is the reward [for observing the precept] in this world; and as for its reward in the future world—I know not how great it is." This appealing and romantic narrative, like the Rahab story, juxtaposes some of the risqué imagined details of its subject's profession with a religious miracle and the spiritually elevating account of her acceptance into the Jewish community.

Rabbinic Ambivalence

Prostitution as a social reality is decried in rabbinic writings. BT *Berakhot* 23a tells the story of a student of the Rabbis who committed suicide when a prostitute revealed their apparent liaison to his teachers. Although contrary examples are given, the Sages advise that men should not practice their vocations in neighborhoods where harlots live (BT *Pesahim* 113a–b). Exodus *Rabbah* 43:7 and BT *Berakhot* 32a explain the Israelites' practice of idolatry in Egypt through the analogy of a man who established his son as a vendor of perfumes in a street where prostitutes lived and then upbraided him for frequenting his customers.⁶ *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* B3 advises:

Scripture says, "Keep yourself far from her [a forbidden woman]" (Proverbs 5:8). A man is told: "Do not walk down this street or enter this alley, for there is a prostitute here; she is an attractive woman and she seduces all creatures by her beauty. He said, "I am confident that although I walk [there], I won't look at her and I won't desire her beauty." He is told, "Although you are confident, don't go."

However, as is frequently the case in rabbinic *halakhah* (legal rulings), there is a distinction between what is ethically preferred and what is legally permitted. Thus the *halakhah* was decided in accordance with the opinion of R. Judah ha-Nasi (Tosefta *Temurah* 4:8): visiting prostitutes was not forbidden (assuming the prostitute was an unmarried woman so that adultery was not a factor). If a man chose to visit a prostitute, despite moral

exhortations to the contrary, there was a definite preference for Gentile women. This is based on rabbinic interpretations of the statements "do not degrade your daughter and make her a harlot" (Lev. 19:29) and "no Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute [*qedeshah*]; nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute [*qedesh*]" (Deut. 23:18). According to BT *Sanhedrin* 82a, *qedesh* and *qedesha* refer to all prostitutes.

A significant reason for this attempt to deter Jewish men from frequenting Jewish prostitutes was the fear of incest. According to an early midrashic collection on Leviticus, "Whoever hands his unmarried daughter [to a man] not for the purposes of matrimony," as well as the woman who makes herself sexually available not for the purposes of matrimony, could lead to the whole world being filled with *mamzerim* [illegitimate children], since "from his consorting with many women and not knowing with whom, or if she has had intercourse with many men and does not know with whom—he could marry his own daughter, or marry her to his son" (*Sifra Kedoshim* 7, 1–5). Such disastrous misalliances would be far less likely to occur if Jewish men avoided Jewish prostitutes. However, this is not to say that the Rabbis condone sexual contact with Gentiles. It is important to point out R. Hiyya b. Abuiyah's saying that "he who is intimate with a heathen woman is as though he had entered into marriage relationship with an idol" (BT *Sanhedrin* 82a).

Jewish Prostitutes in Rabbinic Midrash

A very different tone attends rabbinic narratives about Jewish men and women who were sold into brothels or sexual slavery by Roman conquerors following the failures of the First and Second Jewish Wars (66–70 C.E. and 132–136 C.E., respectively). These grim narratives fall into several categories, but they all portray prostitution as a degradation that, metaphorically, reflects the powerlessness and emasculation that Jews suffered under Roman rule. The prostitutes in these midrashic stories are male and female, but, as Daniel Boyarin has pointed out, all Jews were feminized in their subjugation to Roman rule.⁷

An expression of this is found in a tradition in BT *Gittin* 58a, attributed to the Sage Resh Lakish:

It is related of a certain woman named Tzafnat bat Peniel [the daughter of the high priest]⁸ . . . that Roman battalion abused her for a whole

night. In the morning [one of the captors] put seven veils around her and took her out to sell her. A certain man who was exceptionally ugly came and said: "Show me her beauty." He replied: "Fool, if you want to buy her, buy, for there is no other so beautiful in all the world." He said to him, "All the same [show her to me]. When the woman had been stripped of her seventh veil, she rolled in the dust and cried out, "Sovereign of the universe, if You do not have pity on us why do you not have pity on the sanctity of Your name?" Resh Lakish applied to her situation a verse from Jeremiah, "Daughters of my people, / put on sackcloth and strew dust on yourselves! / Mourn as for an only child; / Wail bitterly / for suddenly the destroyer is coming upon us" (6:26); he explained that since the verse says "upon us," the rape and degradations of the daughters of Israel are also attacks on God.⁹

Other traditions in the same *sugya* (Talmudic discussion) recount the story of four hundred boys and girls who were carried off by the Romans to be placed in brothels (BT *Gittin* 57b). The children knew their probable destination and discussed among themselves the option of suicide, wondering, "If we drown in the sea shall we attain the life of the future world?" When the eldest boy interpreted Psalm 68:23, "The Lord said, 'I will retrieve them from Bashan, I will retrieve them from the depth of the sea,'" in the affirmative, all the girls leaped into the sea. "The boys then drew the moral for themselves, saying, 'If these for whom this is natural [being sexually used by men] act so, shall not we, for whom it is unnatural?' They also leaped into the sea." The anecdote concludes with the citation of Psalm 44:23, "It is for Your sake that we are slaughtered all day long / That we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." As this midrash affirms, one of the three permitted reasons for martyrdom in Jewish tradition is to preserve oneself from sexual depredation. The other two reasons to prefer death, whether by suicide or the agency of another, are murder of another human being and participation in idolatry. The strong connection between prostitution and idolatry is constant in rabbinic writings. The tradition that immediately follows the story of the four hundred children is the martyrdom narrative of the woman and her seven sons who choose death over worshipping false gods.¹⁰

A related group of stories deals with ransoming Jews who were already in Roman brothels. According to the Mishnah, Jews have an obligation to redeem fellow Jews who have been enslaved: "A woman's nakedness must be covered sooner than a man's and she must be brought out of captivity

sooner than he. When both stand in danger of defilement, the man must be freed before the woman" (*Horayot* 3:7). One of the most famous of these narratives about redeeming captives is found in *BT Avodah Zarah* 18a, which relates that the Romans martyred the Sage R. Hanina b. Teradion because he persisted in teaching Torah against their orders. As part of his punishment, his wife was also killed and his daughter was placed in a brothel. Her sister, Beruriah, the wife of R. Meir, insisted that her husband attempt to rescue her. R. Meir agreed to do so and set out for Rome with funds with which to ransom his unnamed sister-in-law. On the way he determined that he would only be able to save her if, by some miracle, she had not committed any sexual sin (that is, been sexually violated as a prostitute). The story continues,

Disguised as a Roman officer, he came to her and said, "Prepare yourself for me." She replied, "The manner of women is upon me." He said, "I am prepared to wait." "But," she answered, "there are many here who are far more beautiful than I am." He said to himself, these [responses] prove that she has not committed any wrong, since she must say this to deter every potential customer. He then went to her warder and said, "Hand her over to me."¹¹

A similar story appears in different versions in *Tosefta Horayot* 2:5 and *BT Gittin* 58a recounting R. Joshua b. Hananiah's ransoming of a Jewish boy, "a child with beautiful eyes and face, and hair arranged in locks," who "was in danger of shame" in a Roman brothel.¹² When R. Joshua heard about this child, he stood at the doorway of the brothel and called out, "Who was it who gave Jacob over to despoilment and Israel to plunderers?" (*Isaiah* 42:24). The child answered, "Surely the Lord, against whom they sinned / In whose ways they would not walk / And whose law [*torah*] they would not obey" (*Isaiah* 42:24). R. Joshua said, "I feel sure that this one will be a teacher in Israel. I swear that I will not budge from here before I ransom him, whatever price may be demanded." The boy was redeemed at great cost and he grew up to become R. Ishmael b. Elisha.

In both these stories, each of the Jewish prisoners must pass a gender-based test of virtue and intelligence in order to merit being ransomed. R. Hanina b. Terodion's daughter showed that she had preserved her honor by using her wits to trick customers and deter their advances; this convinced her brother-in-law that she was worthy of redemption. Similarly,

R. Ishmael's demonstration of Torah knowledge ensured his rescue. Clearly, these didactic narratives are meant to emphasize the qualities that the Rabbis believed were essential for Jewish survival under Roman captivity.

Still, the Sages understood that resistance in a situation of virtually certain violation was generally not possible. Thus a related tradition immediately follows the narrative of how R. Ishmael was ransomed from captivity in *BT Gittin* 58a. Linking the related themes of prostitution, incest, and martyrdom, the story relates that R. Ishmael's children were taken captive and sold to different masters in Rome. The young people were both beautiful and their masters decided to mate them and share their offspring. They put them in a dark room overnight, but each sat in a separate corner,

He said [to himself] "I am a priest descended from high priests, and shall I marry a bondwoman?" She said: "I am a priestess descended from high priests, and shall I be married to a slave?" So they passed all the night in tears. When the day dawned they recognized one another and fell on one another's necks and lamented and wept until their souls departed. For them Jeremiah said, "For these things do I weep / My eyes flow with tears / Far from me is any comforter / Who might revive my spirit; / My children are forlorn / For the foe has prevailed" (*Lam.* 1:16).

In this tragic narrative, which also appears, in another version, in *Lamentations Rabbah* 1,¹³ the young people's strong consciousness of their priestly lineage saved them from committing incest, but their overwhelming horror and grief at their situation led to their merciful deaths as martyrs.

Conclusion

Religious systems promote ethical and moral principles and people depend on these teachings as they struggle with the ambiguities and compromises of human existence. As these biblical and rabbinic traditions about prostitutes and the state of being a prostitute reveal, Judaism and Jews are no different. It is easy to tell romantic tales about idealized and beautiful harlots who are convinced to abandon their wicked, if rather exciting, ways. It is not so pleasant to face the realities of prostitution when one's own identity and one's own loved ones are at risk of violation.

NOTES

1. This chapter focuses on biblical and rabbinic texts. For scholarly research on Jews and prostitution in medieval and modern times, see Yomtov Assis, "Sexual Behavior in Medieval Hispano-Jewish Society," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ava Rapoport-Albert and Steven Zipperstein (London: Halben, 1998), 25–59; Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 133–147; Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939* (New York: Schocken, 1983); Rachel Gershuni, "Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Prostitution: The Israeli Experience," *Mediterranean Quarterly* (fall 2004): 133–146; and Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York: Garland, 2000).
2. Elaine A. Goodfriend, "Prostitution," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:505–510.
3. "Levirate marriage," from the Latin *levir* (brother-in-law), refers to the mandated marriage of a widowed woman to her husband's brother. Levirate marriage in the case of a childless widow is a feature of Israelite religion and has a long history in Judaism. According to the Hebrew Bible, if a man dies and leaves no sons, his widow should not be married to a "stranger" (Deut. 25:6–8). Rather, her husband's oldest brother is to perform the duty of the *levir* (in Hebrew, *yibbum*) and marry her. The first son that the woman bears to her new husband will be considered the heir of the deceased brother, "so that his name is not blotted out in Israel."
4. On rabbinic midrash about Rahab, see Judith R. Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 154–160; and Leila Leah Bronner, "Hope for the Harlot: The Estate of the Marginalized Woman," in idem, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1994), 142–162.
5. For these traditions, see Baskin, *Midrashic Women*, 157–160; on Rahab's Israelite descendants, see *Sifre Numbers* 78 and *Ruth Rabbah* 2:1; on Rahab as an innkeeper, see *Sifre Numbers* 78; and on Rahab as a linen maker, see *Ruth Rabbah* 2:1, *Sifre Numbers* 78, and *Sifre Zuta* on Numbers 10:28.
6. On this narrative and for other stories about involvements of rabbis with prostitutes, see Meir Bar-Ilan, "Prostitutes," in idem, *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 317 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 132–155, 139–141.
7. Daniel Boyarin, "Thinking with Virgins: Engendering Judaeo-Christian Difference," in idem, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 67–92, 73.
8. The allegorical nature of this narrative is evident in the name of the pro-

tagonist. BT *Gittin* 58a explains that she was called Tzafnat because all gazed "tzofin" at her beauty; her father was Peniel because he served as high priest at the Temple's inner shrine in the Divine presence (p'nei El).

9. Concerning the possible influence of Greco-Roman erotic romances on this narrative's themes and construction, see David Stern, "The Captive Woman: Hellenization, Greco Roman Erotic Narrative, and Rabbinic Literature," *Poetics Today* 19, no. 1 (1998): 91–127, 94–96.

10. On martyrdom in rabbinic literature, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*; on this story, see 87–88.

11. This narrative about R. Meir continues with numerous complications and complexities. For fuller discussions than are possible here, see Rachel Adler, "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruryah," *Tikkun* 3, no. 6 (1988): 28–32, 102, 105; and Daniel Boyarin, "Thinking with Virgins," 71–73.

12. The earlier version of this story in the Tosefta makes it clear that the boy is in a brothel. By the time the narrative is associated with R. Ishmael and appears in the Babylonian Talmud, the brothel has been changed to a "prison," no doubt out of deference to R. Ishmael's scholarly reputation. However, as with the rehabilitation of Rahab to a different occupation discussed above, much of the point of the story is lost. With thanks to Robert Daum, "Rabbi Ishmael in the Roman Brothel: Early Palestinian Narrative and Babylonian Rabbinic Hagiography," unpublished paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Vancouver, B.C., April 4, 2008.

13. On the somewhat different and more extended version of this narrative in *Lamentations Rabbah*, its erotic overtones, and its transgressive reversal of the typical romance plot, see Stern, "The Captive Woman," 96–97; and idem, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 244–245.

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