

The Revenge of Lilith

Wildcats shall meet with desert beasts, satyrs shall call to one another;
There shall the Lilith repose, and find for herself a place to rest.
-Isaiah 34:14

In Ancient Jewish mythology, Lilith was a demon who preyed on newborns. Evidence suggests that originally Lilith was not the proper name of a single demon but rather an entire class of demon that was comparable to the Greek vampire "lamia." Regardless, the creature(s) we are concerned with have their origins in Mesopotamian mythologies, took a liking to the Jewish exiles that came into their land and apparently followed the Jews when they were at last able to leave. Males less than eight days old (the age of circumcision) were vulnerable to their snatching, while females were at risk for the first twenty days. Until infants reached these ages, images of Adam and Eve would adorn the children and home for protection, much like Christians might use a Cross or Crucifix to ward off demons in general. As can be seen in the leading scripture, they appeared in Isaiah, but with much controversy. It is not certain if Isaiah originally meant singular or plural, or if he even suggested demons at all (all the other references in the chapter are to animals, not spirits). The Greek Old Testament uses "lamia" and uses it in the plural, but sentence structure in the original Hebrew is unclear as to the original intent being singular or plural. There are those who believe that Proverbs 2:17-19 was speaking about Lilith: One who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; For her path sinks down to death, and her footsteps lead to the shades. None who enter there come back, or gain the paths of life.

She (as a singular person/demon) is mentioned five times in the Talmud (but not the Mishnah, suggesting little concern for her before the 2nd century) and has generally been regarded as an individual since then. As the Talmud was being developed (4th century and afterwards), several Midrashes (Jewish folk stories) were likewise created for her. Not much more can be said with any certainty until the 6th century when, suddenly, she began to receive a lot of attention. Perhaps the most important work of this era was *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* (8th century) which was the first full-length story featuring her.

Sexual wantonness is a common theme of hers and it appears to have ancient origins. By the 14th century both Jews and Christians would believe she was one of the four demon queens who became the original Succubi. In these legends, she was the only one of the four who could not beget children from the males she seduced. This might account for her hatred of newborns, but, in other legends, she is portrayed as being very fertile but driven to commit infanticide. But all of this is of little interest outside of horror stories. What makes Lilith stand out among others is her imagined roots in Genesis, where creative minds took advantage of two historical "gaps," giving an air of credibility to the stories they tell.

Most of what is "known" about her is of relatively modern origin, so there are many inconsistent descriptions of her. They are often at odds with, if not outright contrary to, each other (the gentle reader will get a glimpse of this as the paper goes on) and I will make no effort to reconcile them. Beauty, cruelty, sexual wantonness and a hatred of children are the characteristics that have withstood the test of time. Vampirism is also quite common in most of her history due to her association with lamias, and has been a consistent trait since George MacDonald's allegorical novel *Lilith* was written.

A) The "Gaps" of Genesis: Before I explain how Genesis was used to lend credibility to the Lilith stories, let me remind the gentle reader that "Adam" and "Eve" were not the names the first man and

woman went by for quite some time. It is not until after the Fall of Man and just before being expelled from Eden that Eve is called by this name (3:20), and not until Eve conceives Seth to replace her lost son Abel (4:25) that Adam is first named. Before this, they were called "Man" and "Woman." Actually, they continue to be called that afterwards and one has to correctly trace the family tree using verses 3:20, 4:1-2 and 4:25 to prove that the first man and woman were the ones later called Adam and Eve. Or were they?

In the First Story of Creation (1 and 2:1-3), it is said that *mankind* was created, male and female (1:27). Note that these are not really names, but rather classifications of mankind. In the Second Story of Creation (also known as The Garden of Eden), man is clearly made first (2:7) while woman is made much later (2:23). Unlike the first story, these words are used as names. "Man" continues to be used in lieu of "Adam" throughout the Bible. It is rather obvious throughout the first four chapters of Genesis, but it "hides in plain sight" otherwise. In just one example, the phrase "Son of Man" is used no less than 250 times in the Bible, yet this connection to Adam is often overlooked. As for "Woman," we see it resurface at very important times in the New Testament, most notably by Jesus Himself at the Wedding at Cana (John 2:4) and at the Crucifixion (John 19:26). To those who believe in the Lilith mythology, these differences are critical. These differences are reinforced, they say, by the very words Man says upon seeing Woman for the first time: the man said: "*This one*, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; *This one* shall be called 'woman,' for out of man this one has been taken." (2:23) (italics mine).

Traditionally, the two creation stories are meant to describe the same event from different perspectives. The first story focused on mankind as being the crowning achievement of creation, therefore little detail was needed concerning the actual creation of man and woman. In contrast, the second story emphasized man's role *within* creation. While the rest of creation is rather vaguely discussed, man's creation and details concerning his dominion and power over animals all points to the proper order of things. It should be no surprise, then, that the creation of Woman is likewise detailed and developed, with the end of the story specifically identifying their respective roles in each other's lives. In the traditional sense, when man says "this one," he means this creature, unlike the animals he met before, is human and therefore has a unique relationship with him.

The Lilith myth, however, does not look at both stories as the same event. It looks at the second story as a sequel to the first. It presupposes that the female human was created as a separate being at the same time the male was. When Man later claims "this one" will be his wife, it is to suggest that a previous human female was not fit to be his wife. Those who promote the Lilith legend suggest that it was Lilith who was the first female and who refused the male (or, possibly, the male refused her, **Topic B**). Woman, who would later be called Eve, was the first female to accept (or be accepted by) Man.

B) The Growth of the Myth: While some characteristics have remained the same since ancient times, the personification of Lilith really didn't begin until *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, about 2,300 years after Moses compiled the different Hebrew traditions into what is now known as the Book of Genesis. Building on the idea that the first human female was Lilith, most stories have *her* rejecting the one who would be known as Adam. I will not seriously entertain the idea that Adam rejected her (which has a strong minority of believers) here because that would have meant *he* would have been ejected from the Garden while a new mate would be found for her. Lilith, after rejecting Man, chose instead to find a mate among the fallen angels, and many legends have her marrying Asmodeus (the primary antagonist in the Book of Tobit and often depicted in popular culture as the leading prince of Hell). It was said that God sent messengers asking her to return to her appointed duty, which she refused. For rejecting human companionship and refusing her duty to bear children for Man, she was made into a demon and

ordered to kill at least 100 of her demonic offspring a day!

For centuries, she was looked at as the human version of a fallen angel. She would corrupt men and destroy infants. Her first modern appearance was in Goethe's *Faust* (lines 4206-4223) in the early 19th century. In it, she is described as a deadly seductress and retains the idea of being Man's first wife. Since then, she has appeared in many paintings, poems and stories, both as the main character (such as George MacDonald's *Lilith*, where Adam gave her one child which she eventually kills) or to add a diabolical aspect to the antagonist (such as being an ancestor to Janis, the White Witch in C.S. Lewis's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). Lilith is popular in Wicca and other cults, where she has special reverence as being the "first mother," not to mention being a chief witch in her own right or even a goddess. She is also worshiped by Satan Worshipers, particularly female ones.

Today, Lilith is used in a variety of ways, and authors and artists rarely care about her "backstory." She always represents "terror, sensuality, and unbridled freedom. More recently, she has come to represent the freedom of feminist women who no longer want to be 'good girls.'" (Rabbit Jill Hammer). Finally, women who willfully abort their children, as well as those who help them in this practice, are sometimes identified as being in her circle (for what I hope are obvious reasons). So, what is a Jew or Christian supposed to think of all this? I want to focus on three issues I think are most important to our faith: her ties to Genesis, her role as a monster and her contemporary status as feminist heroine.

C) Lilith's Ties to Genesis: Fitting Lilith into Genesis makes for an interesting campfire story with which to scare children. The great apologist George MacDonald has done nothing short of taking this campfire story and making a masterpiece work of literature. But such a view is ultimately unsound theologically. For simplicity, I will refer to the man and the women as Adam, Eve and Lilith respectively.

1) Historical Impossibility: Contrary to popular myth, Moses did not write the book of Genesis in the sense we normally assume "writing a book" is meant. There were no less than four religious traditions among the Hebrew people at the time of Moses, and he interwove them into the book we have today. This explains much of why Genesis is the way it is: two creation stories, two sets of instructions on how many animals Noah was to take on the ark, genealogies popping up in awkward places, etc. It is this consolidated story that is considered "inspired" by Jews and Christians, not the parts of tradition that were left out or added on.

We cannot ignore that the fact that man was made *last* in the first creation story and in the *middle* of the second. This is not historically possible! To suggest that Lilith "answers" the question of what became of the first female does not address this contradiction; it conveniently ignores it to pursue its own agenda. The Bible cannot "historically" prove the first female is different than the first woman on a historical argument when there are no historical arguments to begin with.

2) Original Sin: For Christians who embrace the concept of Original Sin (which is at least 75% of Christians worldwide), to have Lilith as the first wife of Adam is a major heresy. For her to abandon Adam would mean it was she who committed the first sin and went against God's will. The whole of the 3rd chapter, as written, would be pointless. Calling it pointless, in turn, calls into question the "inspirational" nature of the whole book. This, likewise, would make anything in the book questionable, including the "evidence" that Adam had a wife before Eve. To use Genesis as "proof" of Lilith being Adam's first wife destroys any credibility Genesis has.

3) The Peyton Place of Eden: If one looks at all the Lilith stories surrounding her Eden days,

they all involve inappropriate sexual tensions and in every way imaginable. Lilith rejects Adam, Adam rejects Lilith (a concept I rejected in **Topic B**), Lilith lusts after Eve (which is sometimes reciprocated), and more. They are all quite preposterous. There are at least three important points mentioned in Genesis that need to be addressed concerning sexual activity before the fall.

First of all, verse 1:28 does clearly and unquestionably direct man and woman to reproduce, which means mating. If taken by itself, then it is certainly reasonable to assume that such mating did take place. But it is not by itself and we have two more points to consider which suggest mating did not happen until *after* the Fall of Man. I did mention in **Topic C.1** that we cannot assume any specific time line in the first *two* chapters. The events in chapter 3, however, clearly show a logical sequence of events that must be followed to make sense.

We see in 2:9 and 2:17 the tree of knowledge, from which man was not to eat. For one to "receive knowledge" has had sexual connotations since time immemorial, as is to "lose one's innocence." As the Tree of Knowledge has yet to be undefiled, we see a suggestion that they were still chaste at this time. This is perhaps a weak argument (although no weaker than any argument for Lilith to be the first female), but the final point I will make is much more convincing.

To "see one's nakedness" is a very Biblical expression for sexual misconduct, and the first thing Adam and Eve discovered after eating was that they were naked (3.7). We see "nakedness" used quite often throughout the Old Testament and always with sexual impropriety. Different Bibles translate Leviticus 18:7 in one of two ways: the literal translation of "nakedness" or the intended meaning of "sexual impropriety."

Why would Genesis focus so much on Adam and Eve's sexual sin if Lilith had already done it? It might make sense if Lilith was the serpent that tempted Eve (which has been suggested in some stories where Lilith fell in love with Eve and hoped to get Eve exiled with her), but now we no longer see Lilith as the first human female, but rather as one of the other creatures God created.

D) Lilith as a Monster: Even in the most primitive understanding of Lilith, a demon who kills (and sometimes eats) infants and/or seduces and destroys men, Lilith is a fearsome monster. When George MacDonald wrote *Lilith*, he embraced her Grecian vampiric ties, and this aspect of Lilith has been popular ever since. Now she really has it all: clear and definite connections to two powerful ancient mythologies (and possibly a third), endorsed by the second oldest religion still practiced today (Hinduism is the oldest), marriage to the Devil, sexual depravity, irresistible allure, evil to the point of infanticide and unimaginable deadliness. I certainly cannot blame writers and artists for using her for inspiration. To be able to top this list of credentials would truly be an impressive feat.

But what I can blame certain writers for is blatant disrespect for the Jewish and, by extension, Christian faiths. In the Vertigo Comics (a subsidiary of DC Comics) series *The Sandman*, Lilith has slept with all the angels, not just the fallen ones. Jose' Saramago's novel *Cain* is so perverse one is left to wonder whether he read Genesis or just stole names out of it. In the popular White Wolf role-playing game *Vampire: the Masquerade*, Lilith taught Cain how to use his vampiric powers. But perhaps the most disgusting perversion goes to the series *True Blood*, where they proposed that God first created Lilith (as a vampire), and then created Adam and Eve to serve as her food. While one might argue that this is all just fiction, what about the many conspiracy theory books being published that tell of the "real" story behind Genesis?

Regardless of whether it is fiction or conspiracy theory, there is a real problem with her growing

popularity in the darker cultures today. The fact that she is a Biblical figure (no matter how obscure) means every mention of her automatically ties her to the Judaeo-Christian faith. In a world where Voluntarism (I believe something is true because I want it to be true) is a widespread philosophy, this is a potential disaster to those teaching the faith. How much do Jews and Christians really know about her true place in the Bible? Not many from what I have found. And if we are so poorly educated ourselves, what can be said for the Agnostics and Atheists? I imagine their line of logic goes something like this: "Lilith is in the Bible, Christians believe the Bible is true, so everything I hear about Lilith must be what Christians believe." Some parts of the popular legends won't hurt the faith, such as calling her the wife of Asmodeus. However, at the other extreme, to say Adam and Eve were created by God to keep her fed is pure heresy! But this idea is so "over the top" that I would guess most won't think too much of it (then again, I have been embarrassed many times for overestimating the intelligence of my fellow man).

But where does one draw the line between harmless storytelling of Biblical characters and attacks on the faith? Actually, I believe it's the tales straddling this line that pose the most insidious threat - close enough to scripture to be believable yet viral enough to corrupt core doctrines. To those who are scared of Christian mysticism (which includes many Christians) and are skeptical of Church leaders, these fantasies may very well be looked at as the secrets the conspiracy theorists present them as.

E) Lilith as a Tragic Figure: As far as Lilith herself, she is often depicted as a victim of her own ambitions. She frequently looks at her powers with both contentment and disgust, much like a drug addict may despise what the poison does to him yet still seeks out the next "hit" rather than get help. In the television series *Lucifer* (a spin off of *The Sandman* comic book series), Lilith ultimately decided to give up her immortality. In the MacDonald book, Lilith likewise finds redemption when she appeals to Adam to cut off her hand as it was keeping her from accepting God's grace (a clear reference to one of Jesus's teachings). She had stolen all the surface water (another clear Biblical reference) and placed it in a jewel. To safeguard the jewel, she never let it out of her hand and eventually her fingers had melded with the palm and could no longer be opened. Enid Dame wrote a poem where Lilith is living in New Jersey with a cab driver. In the poem, Lilith is mentioned as sometimes crying in the bathroom over the loss of Eden, Adam and the God she can't live with.

F) Lilith as a Feminist Anti-Hero: In a world where Christianity is increasingly attacked from the outside and abandoned by its members from the inside, it should be no surprise that most of today's so-called "heroes" are increasingly more and more contemptible while villains are glorified. All too often, the "hero" is either a malcontent more interested in getting back at the "system" than actually doing good, or an implausibly lucky imbecile that stumbles his way onto victory. It's the villains who are educated, dedicated, disciplined, organized, successful, focused, motivated and inspired. The world is giving up the value Christianity places on virtue and regressing to the pagan idea of "might makes right."

Lilith has become such a feminist anti-hero, especially among female Jews. She is the one who dared to dream for freedom rather than to be obedient to God or man. She, like her future husband in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, effectively said "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

G) The True Threat: What I find scariest about the Lilith myths is not the theological inconsistencies. Rather, it is the insanity that comes from suggesting her miserable freedom is better than joyful obedience. Perhaps Satan and Lilith have the right to plead, "We didn't know the true meaning of what the consequences would be," but their own stories demonstrate the true cost for

others. Those who choose to follow this path cannot say they acted out of ignorance. But rather than look at the price, the followers actually seem to see this misery as glorious in some perverse way.

Lilith's freely-chosen husband lies, deceives, betrays, destroys, murders and torments for the simple purpose of being able to do so. She is free from the bonds of motherhood by having to kill her own children, yet remains insanely jealous of women who do have children. She can be who she wants to be at the cost of becoming abhorrent and shunned by her own kind. And still there are those who seek to be like her.

Conclusion:

And when nobody wakes you up in the morning, and when nobody waits for you at night, and when you can do whatever you want. What do you call it, Freedom or Loneliness?
-Charles Bukowski

Lilith, as depicted since the 6th century, should have stood as a warning as to what today's idea of "freedom" means. To deny God really means to deny oneself. To be separated from God's will means to be separated from what one is. It means to be barren. It means to become a monster. It means being exploited or exploiting. And, in the end, it means futility: Lilith only gained freedom from a loving marriage and from raising children only to enter a marriage of hatred and murder.

Lilith is not a model to be followed, but rather a warning to be heeded. Yet for the wide-eyed souls looking for something to believe in, this lesson is sadly lost. This is her ultimate revenge: to inspire others to turn against God in full knowledge of the suffering they will ultimately endure for doing so.

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