In the aftermath of the Bill and Monica saga, the bookstores were filled with self-help books on saving one’s marriage. One of these, entitled *Emotional Infidelity: How to Affair-Proof Your Marriage and 10 Other Secrets to a Great Relationship*, argued that the major threat to marriage today is not sexual infidelity but rather “emotional infidelity,” the sharing of emotional intimacy with someone outside the marital relationship. Those who would avoid infidelity are urged to avoid personal conversation with friends and co-workers over lunch or on e-mail, and, of course, to spend more “quality time” with one’s partner.  

Whether the distinction between sexual and emotional infidelity condemns or exonerates Clinton I do not know. But the book raised some interesting questions about a group of women with whom I have spent many enjoyable hours: Esther, Susanna, Sarah, and Judith. These women are not personal friends or co-workers, nor do we do lunch or exchange e-mails. Nevertheless, as leading ladies in one or another of the books of the apocrypha, they are more absorbing, to me at least, than Monica, Hilary, and Bill. All four of these apocryphal women are pious, chaste, beautiful, and unavailable. Susanna, Sarah and Esther are married; Judith is widowed and determined to stay that way. Despite their piety and chastity, however, all of these women have significant, perhaps even emotionally intimate, relationships with men other than their husbands: Esther with her kinsman Mordecai, Susanna with the young prophet Daniel, Sarah with their father-in-law Tobit, and the beautiful widow Judith with the Assyrian general Holofernes. If Neuman’s book is correct, such relationships are a form of infidelity, a threat to marriage, and therefore should have been studiously avoided by these Hellenistic Jewish poster girls. Yet in the apocryphal texts

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known as Greek Esther, Susanna, Tobit and Judith, these liaisons are not only tolerated but actively encouraged and lavishly praised. How are we to understand this paradox?

*Apocrypha and Diaspora*

The apocrypha are fascinating not only for their role in the vagaries and controversies that surround the lengthy canonization processes within Jewish and Christian communities but also for the insight they provide into the travails, concerns, and beliefs of second temple Jews as they considered their place in the culture, politics and religious systems of the Hellenistic world.²

The apocryphal texts demonstrate an acute awareness of the Babylonian conquest which left a sizeable Jewish population living outside the land of Israel. Tobit, for example, instructs his son Tobias to take his children to Media, for “all of our kindred, inhabitants of the land of Israel, will be scattered and taken as captives from the good land; and the whole land of Israel will be desolate, even Samaria and Jerusalem will be desolate. And the temple of God in it will be burned to the ground and it will be desolate for a while” (14:3–4). The Letter of Jeremiah warns the exiles in Babylonia “…to beware of becoming at all like the foreigners or of letting fear for the[ir] gods possess you when you see the multitude before and behind them worshipping them.” (5–6).

The apocrypha provide a blueprint for how to maintain Jewish identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora. Like Esther (14:15, Addition C) and Judith (10:5, 12:19), Diaspora Jews should maintain the dietary laws even under the most adverse circumstances; they should observe the holidays of Purim (Greek Esther) and Hanukkah (2 Maccabees 2:16–10), which commemorate victories of Israel against foreign political, military and spiritual forces. Sabbath observance was essential, of course, but could be compromised in times of war, for, as the Maccabean leader Mattathias noted, “If we all…refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy

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