

Female tricksters in the Old Testament

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Abstract: The trickster is a character found in stories from virtually all cultures. The trickster can be male or female, malevolent, humorous, or both. They exist on the fringes of society, being different or disenfranchised in some way, and often possess secret knowledge that enables them to “get ahead.” The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is no different. Tricksters abound, both male and female, but particularly female. So, I ask: why are female tricksters so prevalent in the Old Testament? How do they differ from the male tricksters? How do they compare to the general trickster archetype? To explore this, I survey each book of the Old Testament, cataloging every character that engages in trickery or deceit. I compare their circumstances and motives and demonstrate that while the male tricksters stick closely to the traditional trickster archetype, utilizing trickery for self-preservation, personal gain, or amusement, the female tricksters defy norms. As opposed to the men, their actions are never malevolent or humorous, but often desperate, last-ditch attempts to protect their husbands, families, and communities.

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