



JEAN LAFFITE: THE PIRATE WHO SAVED AMERICA

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This biography of Jean Laffite, a real-life pirate of the Caribbean, is an action-packed adventure tale. Throughout all his escapades, he never forgets his Jewish upbringing, and eventually is moved to do the right thing.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Role Models and Heroes

What is a hero? Obvious choices include those people who perform selfless acts, such as *pekua nefesh* (saving a life), struggling for *herut* (freedom) for the oppressed, or working for *shalom* (peace)? Must our role models be near-perfect, or can we separate their worthy actions from their faults? Are professional sports figures and famous entertainers true heroes? And what constitutes a Jewish hero?

Enter Jean Laffite, whose life is a lesson in choices and an opening into important family discussions about the flawed lives of some role models and heroes. Biblical characters are a case in point: King David, a great leader of our ancestors, made questionable personal choices; Leah deceived her sister Rachel; and Jacob tricked his elderly father, Isaac, into a blessing meant for his brother Esau.

The Talmud, a collection of ancient rabbinical teachings and legal opinions, tells us that the highest goal in life is to “follow in God’s ways” (Sotah 14a). It guides us to emulate God’s model by providing clothing for the needy, visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner. Even these seemingly small acts are heroic to the beneficiary.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Here are some questions your family might discuss during and after reading this book:

- What signs of Jewish life do you see in this story?
- Jean Laffite stole from Spanish ships, saying it was acceptable because of Spain’s expulsion of the Jews. Is it ever OK to take what isn’t yours?
- If a person performs some good deeds, as Laffite did, can that excuse illegal or unethical behavior?
- Jean Laffite claimed he wouldn’t profit from slavery, yet he sold human beings. This behavior can never be excused. Can it be understood?

Challenge your family to find real-life heroes. A visit to your local fire station or nursing home is a fine starting point. And for Biblical role models, conduct family research into Ruth, who left everyone and everything she knew to stand by her mother-in-law, Naomi; Esther, who risked her life to save the Jewish people from Haman’s destructive plot; and Jonathan and David, whose friendship and loyalty overcame great obstacles.