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Shalom all! Welcome to Torah Notes + PLUS... (at no extra charge 😊)

FIRST UP

IF YOU HAVE A PRAYER REQUEST YOU WOULD LIKE PEOPLE ON THE LIST TO PRAY FOR YOU CAN SEND THEM TO ME AT TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG OR BY TEXT MESSAGE TO 575 644-7706 AND I WILL SEND THEM BY EMAIL ONLY.

Remember that you can support the work of Tree of Life Messianic Ministries with a donation made via PayPal or by check to PO Box 467, Organ, NM 88052. Your donation helps our continued outreach to inmates and the time it takes to put this Newsletter together.

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Tree of Life Messianic Ministries primarily focuses on its Prison Ministry and now advises for the JSI Staff. TOLMM is moving into a new role in conjunction with JSI. TOLMM will provide oversight on Mesharet and Rabbinic students in the JSI classes and courses by offering Semicha (Ordination) as an Elder or Rabbi in Training. A student must be enrolled in the JSI classes and courses to be an Elder or Rabbi in Training.

Your support is needed for the Prison Ministry due to continuing rising costs. We now have an Affiliate in Australia.

POINT OF INFORMATION

BOTH RABBI BRANDT AND I HAVE BOOKS LISTED ON AMAZON AND ON HER WEBSITE-SEE BELOW. TO SEARCH FOR MY BOOKS ON AMAZON ENTER “BOOKS BY RAV MORDECAI SILVER**”. MINE ARE AVAILABLE IN PRINT OR KINDLE FORMAT.**

FOR RABBI BRANDT'S BOOKS YOU CAN GO TO HER WEBSITE AT [HTTP://WWW.DEBORAHSMESSIANICMINISTRIES.COM/BOOK%20NOOK.HTM](http://www.deborahsmessianicministries.com/book%20nook.htm) TO SEE THE LIBRARY OF BOOKS SHE CARRIES, BOTH THROUGH HER WEBSITE AND ON AMAZON. RABBI BRANDT HAS SEVERAL DEVOTIONALS TO AID YOU IN YOUR WALK WITH MESSIAH YESHUA. SHE TRULY HAS A SERVANT'S HEART FOR MESSIAH.

HOME GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS AND PEOPLE SEEKING FELLOWSHIP...

Shawn Warren lives in Arizona. If you know of someone who is looking for a group in that area, please let me know and I will send the information to Shawn.

Marcia Hedrick would like to host a group on the west side of El Paso in her home. She also needs someone to lead the group while she will be the host. If you are interested let me know and I will send her the information.

Gabriel Martinez has a home group in El Paso (different area). If interested let me know and I will send him the information.

Rabbi Deborah Brandt, Ph.D., is the Director of JSI and has classes and seminars for JSI and has online Bible studies. Contact her at Rabbindmm@comcast.net. Rabbi Brandt has a Shabbat Service on Zoom and a Bible Study online on Zoom. Contact her for more information. Rabbi Brandt is located Illinois.

Rabbi Phillip Hammond has a Zoom Bible Study and a Shabbat Service on Zoom Sat. morning at 11:00am. Rabbi Hammond is in Australia and the time difference would be 5:00pm Friday Mountain Time. Rabbi Hammond also has a men's group. You can contact Rabbi Hammond at Philip@etz-chayim.org. Rabbi Hammond is now affiliated with Rabbi Mordecai Silver and his ministry, Tree of Life Messianic Ministries. Check out Rabbi Hammond's at <https://www.etz-chayim.org/australia-affiliate/>.

We thank you for your support.

Blessings in Messiah Yeshua,
Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph. D

**MESSIANIC TEACHING ON THE WEEKLY TORAH, HAFTARAH, AND APOSTOLIC
SCRIPTURE PORTIONS...**



Message for 4-9-22

Message originally sent 4/18/97

Metsora - Infected one

Vayikra - Lev 14:1-15:33

2 Kings 7:3-20

Mattiyahu 23:19-24:2

*Matthew 23:23: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe the mint and the anise and the cumin and **have neglected the weightier matters of the law: the right-ruling and the compassion and the belief.** These need to have been done, without neglecting the others.*

Matthew 23:27-28: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly indeed look well, but inside are filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

So, you too outwardly indeed appear righteous to men, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Vayikra 14:37: And he shall look at the plague and see, if the plague is on the walls of the house with sunken places, greenish or reddish, which appear to be deep in the wall.

Vayikra 14:40-42: Then the priest shall command, and they shall remove the stones with the plague in them, and they shall throw them outside the city, into an unclean place, while he lets the house be scraped inside, all around, and the dust that they scrape off they shall pour out in an unclean place outside the city. And they shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones and take other mortar and plaster the house.

Vayikra 14:45: And he shall break down the house, its stones, and its timber, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall bring them outside the city to an unclean place.

Before a Kohen diagnoses that a house has tzara'as, household possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The tzara'as is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house; if it reappears, the entire building must be razed.

Can we compare ourselves to this? We are unclean due to sin and the Holy One through Messiah Yeshua tears us down and rebuilds us.

I include a Traditional Torah Commentary and my Messianic Commentary. The reason for this is so you can see a Messianic Perspective and a Traditional Jewish one. Remember to use discernment in approaching Traditional Jewish teachings as they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. There are various ideas in traditional Jewish circles about the Messiah and even that there is no Messiah, the thinking in Reform Judaism. So, please be careful to balance the teachings.

NOTE: I do not agree with the Jewish position on Yeshua, but Believers need to know the Jewish thinking on Yeshua and not buy into this thinking and forsake faith in our Messiah. For those who say they would never do this, I must beg to differ, because I have seen it over my life as a Jewish Believer in Yeshua. I have been a Believer in Messiah Yeshua since 1976. I have seen a lot and had many discussions with my fellow Jews and non-Jews who ultimately turned away from Yeshua because they steeped themselves in Jewish teachings. One does not come out of either traditional Judaism or Christianity and come into the Messianic walk, and then going back, or into,

traditional Judaism. There are many good things in Judaism but denying Yeshua as Messiah is not one of them. Berachot (Blessings), Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D.

A TRADITIONAL TORAH AND HAFTARAH COMMENTARY...



Parashat Metzora: Summary Lev. 14:1-15:33

God describes the purification ritual for people and homes afflicted with leprosy; God also instructs Moses and Aaron regarding the laws of the emission of bodily fluids.

God spoke to Moses, saying, “This is the instruction on how to purify a leper who is healed. When the time is right, a priest shall go outside the camp to the leper’s area and confirm if the leper is healed. The priest then shall make a sacrifice with two clean, living birds. One bird is to be killed with ritual while the other is to be set free in open country.

“The healed leper must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe in water. Then he shall be clean enough to enter the camp, but he must remain outside his tent for seven days. On the seventh day, after he shaves off all the hair on his body, scrubs his clothes and washes his body, then he shall be clean.

“On the eighth day, the healed leper, two lambs without blemish, and a flour and oil offering shall be presented before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest shall ritually slaughter the lambs and use their blood and the flour and oil to make wave offerings, sin offerings, burnt offerings and guilt offerings for the leper who is to be cleansed. With ritual and ceremony, the priest shall make expiation for him before the Lord. Then he shall be clean.”

Then God spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, “When you enter the land of Canaan and I inflict leprosy upon a house there, the owner shall come and tell the priest of the affliction. The priest must examine the house and pronounce the home clean or unclean. The unclean parts must be removed and replaced with clean materials. If the whole house is unclean, the house shall be

torn down and its materials shall be taken to an unclean place outside the city. The house is to be rebuilt with clean materials.

“The priest will inspect the house again. If the priest pronounces the house clean of leprosy, then the priest is to perform a cleansing ritual for the house. He shall make offerings before the Lord with two clean birds. One is to be slaughtered and the other is to be set free in the open country. The priest thus effects purification for the house and it is clean.”

The Lord then spoke to Moses and Aaron and instructed them to tell the people about the laws concerning the emission of bodily fluids. There are times when a man or a woman is “clean” [in a spiritual, not physical sense] and a time when a man or a woman is “unclean.” There are specific rituals to transform a man or woman from unclean to clean.

Parashat Metzora Discussion Questions

1) Why do you think there is a specific priestly purification ritual for a leper who is no longer sick? Do you have a purification ritual for when you become well after being sick? What is it?

2) In this portion, God says that God inflicts leprosy. Do you believe that God causes leprosy? Do you believe that God causes sicknesses? Why or why not?

Haftarah for Metzora 2 Kings 7:3-20

Four lepers save the Israelite camp.

This week’s haftarah is set in the time of a brutal famine in Israel, while Jehoram son of Ahab was king of Israel. The scene opens with four lepers sitting outside the city limits, discussing their sad, hungry prospects.

The four lepers realize that they will soon starve to death if they take no action. They decide to defect from the Israelite camp and go to the camp of the Arameans, who had laid siege over the area. They explain that they have nothing to lose: “If they [the Arameans] let us live, we shall live; and if they put us to death, we shall but die” (7:4).

At twilight, they head for the Aramean camp. Much to their surprise, they discover that the camp was totally abandoned. God had created a miracle, causing the Arameans to hear sounds of chariots and horses, and flee their own camp in fear of attack.

The four lepers help themselves to all the Arameans had left behind: food, drink, silver, and gold. Then they realize they should share the wealth: “This is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent! Come, let us go and inform the king’s palace” (7:9).

The lepers return to the city and tell the gatekeepers about their discovery. The gatekeepers pass the news along and soon King Jehoram, receives the message. Yet he is skeptical, believing that the Arameans had left the camp as a trap, and would be waiting nearby, ready to ambush, as soon as the hungry Israelites entered the Aramean camp to look for food.

But one of the king's courtiers—perhaps out of desperation in famine—encourages the king to investigate the situation further. The courtier proposes sending some horses ahead to see if the Arameans are really laying in ambush. The messengers on these horses discover that the lepers were in fact correct. The camp was fully deserted, and the road, all the way to the Jordan, was strewn with clothing and gear that the Arameans had thrown out in haste.

The people of Israel plundered the Aramean camp. The Israelite economy experienced an upturn, actualizing the prophecy which Elisha had delivered on the previous day: “This time tomorrow, a *seah* [a biblical measurement] of choice flour shall sell for a shekel at the gate of Samaria, and two seahs of barley for a shekel” (7:1, 7:18).

When Elisha had delivered this prophecy, the king's aide had expressed disbelief, and even mocked Elisha: “Even if the Lord made windows in the sky, could this come to pass?” Elisha had responded harshly: “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it” (7:2, 7:19).

Sure enough, the king appointed this aide to stand at the gate of the Aramean camp while the Israelites helped themselves to the loot. In their massive excitement, the crowd descended on the camp and trampled this aide to death.

Connection to the Parashah

The name of this week's parashah, *Metzora*, means “leper.” The parashah describes the process for ritual cleansing after one is afflicted with leprosy—a skin disease which the Bible also considers a spiritual affliction, and therefore different from what we call leprosy today.

According to the Torah, lepers must separate from the community: “As for the person with a leprous affection, his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip, and he shall call out ‘Unclean! Unclean’...He shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:45-46).

In our haftarah, we see that even though lepers are separate from the community—indeed, the four lepers were at first situated outside the city gates—they can, and should, still feel communal responsibility. Instead of resenting their outsider status, the four lepers choose to share the news of the wealth they had found and were therefore instrumental in saving Israel from starvation.

Jewish Tidbits...



Pikuach Nefesh: The Jewish Value of Saving a Life

The primacy of human life is a fundamental principle of Jewish law and a core value of Jewish tradition.

One of the most basic principles in Jewish law is that human life comes first. Almost any religious commandment can be broken in order to save the life of a human being.

While the Torah goes to great lengths to tell us how important some of the commandments are, the start of the Torah foreshadows that saving human life will be more important: “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him.” (Genesis 1:27)

Clearly, the life of a human being is special and unique, and as would become clear later in the Torah, demands preservation beyond anything else.

This idea, known as *pikuach nefesh*, is derived from two main sources. One, preferred by the 12th century scholar Maimonides, is the verse in Leviticus 18:5: “You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit of which man shall live.” The talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva comments that the verse says, “by the pursuit of which man shall live” — not “shall die.” Built into every mitzvah — with some exceptions — is the precedence of human life. Keep the Sabbath — but if you must violate its laws to perform life-saving surgery or get someone to the hospital, do it.

Many rabbis, Maimonides included, apply this principle only to the life of a fellow Jew. In a sense, they are saying that a Jew should never do a commandment that puts another Jew at risk. Over the centuries, the rabbis have successfully resorted to roundabout explanations so that by now there is now a consensus that the lives of non-Jews must be saved as well. But the core of this first understanding is the idea that *pikuach nefesh* is basically a Jewish concept embedded in commandments that apply only to Jews.

This read of *pikuach nefesh* tells us clearly that commandments are not about restrictions on life — though they might restrict our actions to some extent — nor are they about pulling us back from life. Rather, the mitzvot are supposed to enable us to live in the image of God to

the fullest extent possible, to be an integral part of life in this world. If a mitzvah even runs the risk of stopping us from living, it is pushed away by pikuach nefesh, the ultimate concern for life. This understanding pushes us to reflect on our own lives: Are we life affirming? Are we acting in a way that celebrates the God-infused life we have been given?

The second source, preferred by the 13th century sage Nahmanides, is also from Leviticus: “the stranger and the citizen shall live with you.” According to the Talmud, this verse tells us that we have a positive commandment to preserve life, even if it means violating other ritual or ethical commandments. As opposed to being a built-in exception to every commandment, this source tells us that saving lives is a positive commandment on its own.

Nahmanides is clear that this applies to gentiles as well as Jews. We are all human beings created in the image of God. Whether Jewish or not, citizen or stranger, the commandment of saving a life is preeminent.

This community-minded understanding of pikuach nefesh teaches us that not only are we to celebrate mitzvot as affirming of our creation in the image of God, but also as vehicles to affirm that others are created in the image of God as well. Our tradition aims to create a society which celebrates the creation of all of humanity. Nahmanides’ interpretation asks us: Are we creating a society on the principles of pikuach nefesh, where everyone is looking out for the life, safety and well-being of the “stranger and the citizen” around us?

Of course, nothing in Judaism is so simple – nor should it be. So, there are exceptions to pikuach nefesh. The Talmud tells us that a person cannot kill another person to save their own life. Adultery and idolatry are also excluded; according to most authorities, a person must give up their life rather than violating these prohibitions. The Talmud also tells us that if the violation would be public — and especially if it’s a time when the ruling authorities are seeking to get Jews to violate the Torah’s commandments — you must give up your life rather than commit even the smallest infraction.

There is one other important exception to saving life as declared by Rabbi Akiva: If the choice is between saving your own life or someone else’s, save your own first. If you are in the desert and have only one bottle of water, and you need it all to survive, drink the water — even if it means your friend gets stuck without any water and dies.

All of this was hotly debated in the medieval period because the basic idea of never having a commandment come at the expense of human life was so central. Our tradition just cannot conceive of it in a normal world. In the late Middle Ages, Rabbi Menachem Meiri said that while the Talmud seemed to exclude many non-Jews from the laws of pikuach nefesh, had it known of the civilized societies of Meiri’s era (and ours), it would have been more explicit that everyone living in civilized society, Jew, or non-Jew, is covered by the law of pikuach nefesh. Their lives must be saved, even if that meant violating almost all the central commandments of Judaism.

Meiri understood that pikuach nefesh is not a loophole. It is a way to view the sanctity of human life as central to our tradition, our society, and our commandments.

Prayer



The Most Profound Prayer

Quotes from the Jewish Bible about Peace

The Hebrew Bible has no shortage of beautiful expressions about yearning for peace.

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *shalom*, usually translated as peace, means more than the absence of conflict; it connotes a secure sense of well-being and wholeness (the latter is perhaps the best literal definition). The word appears hundreds of times in the Bible, in all kinds of contexts: individuals, cities, nations and even the whole world at various points seek peace and, in the words of the psalmist, pursue it. In fact, the rabbis even taught that Shalom is one of the secret names of God. ([Leviticus Rabbah 9:9](#)) Many of the Bible's eloquent expressions of peace are echoed in the *siddur*, the Jewish prayer book, and in wider culture. Here are some of the most loved.

Thus, shall you bless the people of Israel: May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! May the Lord bestow favor on you and grant you peace.

[Numbers 6:23–26](#)

This is the famous blessing Aaron, the first high priest used to bless the people, and later the Jewish priests in the Temple would do the same. Today, it is still recited in synagogues by descendants of the priests, and parents use it to bless their children on Friday night.

Her ways are pleasant ways, And all her paths, peaceful. She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, And whoever holds on to her is happy.

Proverbs 3:17-18

Common Jewish interpretation holds that the Tree of Life described here in the Book of Proverbs, whose paths lead to peace, is not the tree found in the Garden of Eden but the Torah itself. It is sung liturgically when the Torah is removed from the ark for the Torah service.

Peace! Peace! Near and far — said the Lord — and I shall heal them.

Isaiah 57:19

The prophet Isaiah was known for recording many poetic exhortations from God. Some, like this one, offer words of profound comfort, promising the people completeness — peace. In fact, the sense of wholeness and healing (not just absence of war) evoked by this passage is an essential meaning of the word *shalom*.

Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home in peace. Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Isaiah 57:19

This verse, also from Isaiah, describes the homecoming of the Jewish people after their difficult exile in Babylonia. The prospect of returning home to live in peace is so joyful that all of nature celebrates.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; May those who love you find serenity. May there be wellbeing within your ramparts, serenity in your citadels.

Psalms 122:6-7

The psalms are some of the best and most-loved examples of early Jewish prayer — and are used in Jewish prayer constantly to this day. This line from [Psalm 122](#) asks for peace in Jerusalem and is frequently set to music.

Turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.

Psalms 34:15

This is one of the most succinct and oft-quoted biblical verses about peace. It captures both our yearning for peace and our obligation to bring it about. Many Jewish texts, including some here, describe God as the source of peace. Many others imagine us as partners with God, working actively to bring about this ideal state.

In peace I lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, keep me secure.

Psalms 4:9

This line from Psalms expresses the security and peacefulness that faith in God can impart.

May the Lord grant strength to his people; May the Lord bless his people with peace.

Psalms 29:11

This is the final line of *Psalm 29*, the entirety of which is recited as part of Kabbalat Shabbat services. It expresses the hope that God will bring peace to the Jewish people.

Speak the truth to one another, render true and perfect peace in your gates.

Zechariah 8:16

Just a few lines below this, the prophet Zechariah puts it even more succinctly: **“You shall love truth and peace.”** (*Zechariah 8:19*) Zechariah sums up two of Judaism’s most important values, which he took to depend critically on one another — peace and truth. However, interestingly enough, the rabbis said that of the two, peace was primary and sometimes the only one achievable. They cite *Genesis 18*, noting that when Sarah complained that her husband was too old to have children, God reported this complaint inaccurately to Abraham, saying that Sarah had said she herself was too old — a “white lie” meant to maintain peace between husband and wife. (*Leviticus Rabbah 9:9*)

He imposes peace in His heights.

Job 25:1

People familiar with Jewish liturgy might recognize this better in the Hebrew: *oseh shalom bimromav*. In its original context in the Book of Job is an expression of God’s wise rule of the upper realms. As the first line of Oseh Shalom, it is one of the most recognizable Jewish prayers for peace, which is found in the conclusion of the Mourner’s Kaddish.

Food for Thought



Deborah

In a disorderly, violent time, as Israel fought for land and survival, Deborah was called--and stepped forward--to aid her people.

Israel, crossing into Canaan, changes its role. It is a time of conquest, a time of war. The Israelites have become fighters, and the saviors of Israel--women as well as men--have to be aggressors. The times call for warriors, and two warrior women (Deborah and Yael) appear in the decisive defeat of the Canaanites. One, Deborah, initiates the battle, calling the troops to action and declaring the start of hostilities.

The story (of Deborah) is in [Judges 4](#), and the song is in [Judges 5](#). "The Song of Deborah" is a very ancient poem, one of the earliest writings that the Bible preserves: it was most probably written in the eleventh century, soon after the events it records.

The story reached its present shape much later in Israel's history. The two literary creations have subtly different attitudes, and in placing them side by side, the historian of the book of Judges encourages the reader to read them together as well as separately.

Deborah, Prophet, and Judge: [Judges 4:4-5](#)

"Deborah the prophetess-woman, *Lapidot*-woman--she judged Israel at that time.

"She would sit under 'Deborah's Palm Tree' between Ramah and Beth-El on Mount Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment."

Prophet and "*Lapidot*-woman"

The record begins as Israel is oppressed by Yavin king of Hazor. Deborah is a prophet-woman, someone who speaks with divine authority, and she is *Lapidot*-woman. *Eshet lapidot* could be translated "wife of Lapidot," but it also means "woman of torches." *Lapidot*, "torches," comes where we would ordinarily expect a husband's name, but it is a strange-sounding name for a man and, moreover, does not have the standard patronymic "son of."

The reader must decide whether to translate *lapidot* as a name or a noun. Translating it "wife of Lapidot" has the advantage of emphasizing that a prophet could be married and that a married woman could have another role.

On the other hand, "woman of torches" or "fiery woman" fits the image of Deborah and would fit the story in the manner of biblical names. "Torch-Lady" provides a significant wordplay, for it is Deborah, not her husband, who is the torch that sets the general Barak (whose name means "lightning") on fire.

Moreover, in Mesopotamian mythology, the torch and the lightning (*tsullat* and *hanish*) are the heralds of the storm god. In the same way, "Torch Lady" and "Lightning" are fit agents for the God of Israel, who defeats Sisera by creating a river of mud to incapacitate his chariots.

Deborah the Judge

The story also tells us that Deborah judged Israel. The “judges” were Israel’s charismatic leaders in the days before the monarchy. These leaders usually acquired their political authority after they saved Israel through battle. The first such judge, Othniel ben Kenaz, set the pattern: the oppressed people cried out to God, “the spirit of YHWH came upon him (Othniel), he judged Israel and went out to battle, and YHWH gave Cushan Rishatayim king of Aram into his hand” (Judges 3:10).

Did Deborah become a judge in the same way, by leading a group in battle? Or perhaps she acquired her authority by offering sage advice that led to a victory, or by predicting an important matter that came true. The story never tells us.

In the “Song”, Deborah describes a total breakdown of order in Israel. Wayfarers had to go by roundabout ways to avoid danger; in those days there was no rescue “Until I arose, Deborah, until I arose, a mother in Israel (Judges 5:7)”. Somehow Deborah imposed order on Israel. How this happened, neither the poem nor the story records. Their silence on such important matters is a reminder that neither the story nor the Song was framed as a record of Deborah’s life.

One day, Deborah called Barak: Judges 4:6-10

She sent and called for Barak ben Avinoam from Qedesh-Naftali. She said to him, ‘Did not YHWH God of Israel command: “Go and pull toward Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the men of Naphtali and Zebulun. I will draw Sisera the head of Yavin’s army and his chariotry and masses to Wadi Kishon and I will give him into your hand. Barak said to her, ‘If you go with me, I will go. if you will not go with me, I will not go.’ She said, ‘I will indeed go with you, especially since you will get no glory on the way you are going, for into the hand of a woman YHWH will deliver Sisera.’ Deborah rose and went with Barak to Qedesh. Barak mustered Zebulun and Naphtali to Qedesh.

Ten thousand men went up at his feet, and Deborah went up with him.

What prompted Deborah to call Barak? Perhaps the people initiated the call. The people not only regularly went to her for decisions, they came to her one day for a particular kind of “judgment.” The poem provides a hint as to what they wanted: “Then the people of YHWH went down to the gates: ‘Awake, awake, Deborah. Awake, awake, speak a song. Arise, Barak, take your captives, son of Avinoam” (Judges 5:12). This anguished outcry may have impelled Deborah to begin the redemption.

Deborah calls Barak in her role as a prophet, an envoy of God. Moreover, Deborah hints that she is following up on a previous call to Barak: Did not YHWH God of Israel command? God has spoken to Barak, and Deborah’s call is a second summons. Barak is reluctant to go, like Moses before him, like Gideon and Samuel later in Israel’s history, others called by God to be envoys.

He seeks assurance that God is really with him and insists that Deborah go with him to the battle staging area where the warriors assemble.

Is It “Weak” of Barak to Need Deborah?

Readers have often been bothered by Barak’s reluctance to go without Deborah, declaring that his hesitation makes him “less manly” or tarnishes his glory. But Barak has good reason to be insecure: Yavin, after all, has nine hundred chariots! Moreover, prophets play several roles in battle: they muster and inspire the troops, and also declare the correct, auspicious time to begin. Prophets are such an important presence in battle that Elijah and Elisha are called “Israel’s chariot and cavalry.”

Female Prophets, Women at War

Many readers of this story have been particularly troubled by the presence of women in war, believing that they are somehow out of place there and assuming that ancient Israelites would have felt the same way. But most of the Assyrian prophets were women, and reports from both the ancient and more recent Near East show a consistent pattern of the presence of women to inspire the troops and taunt the enemy. There is no reason to think that biblical readers found anything strange about Barak’s request to Deborah, as either prophet or woman.

The Battle: Judges 4:13-16

Sisera mustered all his chariotry, nine hundred iron chariots, and all his people from Harosheth-Hagoyim to Wadi Kishon. Deborah said to Barak, ‘Arise, for this is the day that YHWH gives Sisera into your hand. Does not YHWH go out before you?’ Barak quickly descended from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men after him. YHWH distressed Sisera and all the chariotry and all the camp by the sword before Barak and Sisera descended from his chariot and fled on foot. Barak chased the chariots and the camp to Harosheth-Hagoyim and fell on Sisera’s camp with the sword. Not even one remained.

Deborah’s Weapon, the Word, Shows God as Israel’s True Savior

On Mount Tabor, Deborah the prophet announces the victory. She herself does not go down to the battle. Like Moses, Deborah is not a battle commander. Her role is to inspire, predict, and celebrate in song. Her weapon is the word, and her very name is an anagram of “she spoke” (*dibberah*). The battle itself is not essential. It is important only to remember that God fought, God distressed Sisera. Deborah has announced God’s victory, Barak has facilitated it, and God has saved Israel. The Song of Deborah provides a glimpse of how God defeated Canaan: God brought a flash flood that made a bog of sliding mud in which chariots were useless.

A Woman and Mother, Neither Hidden nor Incidental

Both the story and the song emphasize the fact that Deborah is a woman. The story tells us that she was a prophetess-woman, adding the word “woman,” *ishah*, when the female noun

“prophetess,” *nebi’ah*, already conveys that information. She is called “Lapidot” -woman or Lapidot’s woman, again repeating the word “woman,” *eshet*.

And the song stresses that Deborah was a “mother in Israel.” The femaleness is neither hidden nor incidental: it is an integral part of the story. The motherhood of this “mother in Israel” goes beyond biology. It describes her role as counselor during the days before the war, and it indicates her role in preserving the heritage of Israel, in her case by advising in battle.

The fullest sense of Deborah as mother is revealed in her name, which is not only an anagram of “she spoke”; it is also a noun meaning “bee.” Like the queen bee, she raises up the swarm for battle, sending out the drones to protect the hive and conquer new territory.



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