

Deborah

A Fiery Woman of YHVH

HAFTORAH READING—JUDGES 4:4-5:31

The Torah and Haftorah portions for this week bear many similarities. In both pericopes, Israel was languishing under oppressive foreign powers, YHVH sent them a savior to deliver them and through miracles and against overwhelming odds, Israel defeated its oppressors and the nation was brought to a new spiritual level. Prophets were instrumental in both cases, and women were used of YHVH in the deliverance of his people. And finally, both scenarios climax in the production of a psalm of praise to YHVH for his mighty hand in setting his people free.

1 The story of Deborah often brings up the question concerning the role of women among YHVH's people. Proponents of women in leadership roles point to Deborah as a champion to their cause. Those who decry any sort of women leadership blush when the example of Deborah is brought up and are often quick to add that she was a one-time exception to this rule. What is the truth as presented by Scripture? Please note the role of women in Scripture by reviewing the following examples as Batya Wootten points out in her book, *Mama's Torah—the Role of Women*:

- Miriam was a prophetess and coworker with her brothers Moses and Aaron in leading Israel (Mic. 6:4).
- YHVH used the daughters of Zelophehad to help instruct Moses, and on the basis of their wisdom, the Torah was amended (Num. 27:1-11).
- Huldah was a prophetess and an advisor to King Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:11-20).
- Queen Esther helped to write law (Est. 9:29).
- Phoebe was a deacon/minister within the spiritual body of early Messianic Believers (Rom. 16:1-2).
- Junia along with Andronicus, her husband, are listed as apostles (Rom. 16:7).
- Priscilla and Aquila were a husband and wife ministry team and pastored a congregation that met in their home. There are times when the Scripture even records Priscilla's name first. She was evidently a dynamic leader, along with her husband (Acts 18:2,18,26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).
- The women in Corinth prayed and prophesied publicly (1 Cor. 11:5-6).
- Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).
- A nucleus of women developed a congregation at Phillipi (Acts 16:12-15,40).

Wootten then deduces from the biblical record that "believing communities should be aligned with Biblical patterns of the Scripture. And while it clearly depicts a pattern of male leadership, is also clearly shows female participation" (p. 37).

In light of the example of Deborah we must ask the question: will YHVH's plans and purposes be put on hold or thwarted simply because there lacks a person of the male gender to fulfill those plans? Can he who used Balaam's ass for his purposes, and who said that he could raise up rocks to declare his praises not use women as he so chooses when there lacks a man to do the job, or use women to assist men in doing theirs?

2 4:4, *The wife of Lapidoth* (KJV). The *ArtScroll Tanach* has translated this phrase as *a fiery woman* since the Hebrew word *lapid* means *torch*. This implies that Deborah was energetic and decisive. The Jewish Sages teach that *Lapidoth* is but another name for *Barak* since both names connote flashes of lightning, and there-

fore are used interchangeably (*ArtScroll Rubin Edition Joshua/Judges Commentary*, p. 137). If the Sages are correct, then Deborah was assisting her husband, Barak. He was the military leader of Israel, while she was the spiritual leader. Does this shake your paradigm about the role of women in biblical societies? Many times fiery women are labeled and branded as *persona non grata*. Is this a fair thing to do if they are women who walk in and uphold biblical standards of righteousness, and who honor and defer to male headship, if there is righteous male headship worthy of honor?

- 3 Often Barak is viewed as a reluctant, even cowardly military leader. Is this a fair assessment? Didn't he display great faith when he heeded the Word of Elohim through Deborah, and furthermore abandoned the strategic high ground when attacking the enemy on the plain where their chariots would be most advantageous? If Barak and Deborah were husband and wife, what does this story teach us about husbands and wives not only respecting, but heeding each other's counsel, and then working together as a team? Who knows, YHVH may be using your wife or husband to speak to deliver a word from him to you right now!
- 4 **5:1, *On that day.*** Deborah composed her praise psalm on the very day of battle and victory. She did not delay to offer up a sacrifice of praise to the Elohim of Israel. "Given the fragile nature of joy so great that it bursts into a song, it must be expressed immediately, before the heightened perception begins to fade away, or is depleted by sin" (*Ibid.*, p. 141). Is your relationship that vital with your Maker and your joy and gratitude that child-like spontaneous and unquenchable that you do not delay to praise YHVH the moment a blessing comes your way?
- 5 **5:7, *A mother in Israel.*** Have you along your spiritual journey ever encountered a "mother in Israel" who YHVH used to change the course of your life and shape your spiritual destiny through her wise counsel and guidance? Such a Deborah-like woman is loving, but she does not fail to scold or discipline her children when they need it. May YHVH raise up such righteous and discerning women in Israel in our day!
- 6 Let's not forget the other woman in this passage: Jael. While one woman, Deborah, was a well-known public figure functioning as a prophetess, judge and military leader in Israel, another woman was tucked away in the wilderness, away from others fulfilling her role as a house (or, tent) wife. She, too, was a mother in Israel, who was quietly walking in righteousness in her own home, yet YHVH brought a ministry opportunity her way. Though the task she was asked to do was a grisly one, she did not shrink back when duty called to her. In so doing, she helped to save the nation of Israel at a very tenuous time in its existence, and her name is immortalized in Deborah's psalm of praise. What is the lesson for us? Be faithful to do what YHVH has called you to do, no matter how insignificant and out of the limelight it may seem, and he will bring you greater opportunities and reward you with blessings unspeakable.

