

Deborah: Troublesome Woman or Woman of Valor?

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Unwarranted criticisms by evangelical scholars of Deborah's leadership in Judg 4–5 continue to devalue her work as “abnormal,” “wrong,”¹ something done only in private² or even in subservience to Barak.³ Some rabbinical scholars go so far as to brand her an arrogant woman who deserves God's punishment.⁴ In contrast, this paper argues that a close reading of her story and song reveals an *'eshet hayil*, a “woman of valor” (cf. Ruth 3:11, Prov 12:4, 31:10).⁵ This is evident not only in the direct references to her, but also in the narratives regarding her associates Barak and Jael.

Deborah's Story (Judges 4)

The Story's Setting (4:1–3)

The repetitive pattern in Judges of spiritual corruption, foreign oppression, pleas for deliverance, and a judge who brings peace until the next cycle starts⁶ sets the distressing backdrop to Deborah's story and song in chs. 4–5. This literary unit forms the first of the four longer accounts that include Gideon (chs. 6–8), Jephthah (chs. 10–12), and Samson (chs. 13–16).⁷ Deborah is the first judge in this book to be introduced at length and the only one to function as both judge and prophet—perhaps an intentional parallel to Israel's last judge Samuel in the continuing narrative of 1 Sam 1–8.

Deborah faces the imposing threat of Jabin's army stretching from the strategic Jezreel Valley to Canaan's northern gate at Hazor on the Via Maris, the international trade and military route connecting Africa, Europe, and Asia. In comparison, her judgeship is situated in Benjaminite territory in Israel's central plateau, some seventy miles south of the conflict that Barak already faces in Kedesh of Naphtali.⁸ Her base of operation “between Ramah and Bethel” suggests she may have had a regional influence—again, like Samuel who later leads Israel from this same location (1 Sam 7:15–16, 8:4). When Deborah appears in the narrative, Israel's oppression by Jabin has already dragged on for twenty years.

Deborah's Dramatic Introduction (4:4–5)

Deborah is introduced dramatically as the story's main character with a string of seven consecutive, grammatically feminine words: her proper name followed by three paired terms. She is “Deborah,” (1) “a woman, a prophet” (fem. nouns), (2) “a woman of light /fire” (fem. nouns), and (3) “she herself, she is judging” (fem. pronoun, fem. participle).

The traditional etymology of Deborah's name as “bee” or “wasp” is possible, though it may instead connote “leader” or “pursuer” (cf. *debir*, Josh 10:3).⁹ Comparatively, the imagery of “bees” (*deborah*) is used in Isa 7 to describe the Assyrian army's “pursuit” of Israel (Isa 7:17–20, esp. 18). A similar wordplay would make sense in this text as well. Moreover, Deborah's role as prophet and judge allows for a symbolic significance to her name in this story.

The three pairs that follow accent Deborah's gender. In the first, as “a woman, a prophet,” she brings God's authoritative word

to Israel, which they are expected to obey. The second pair, “wife/woman of *lappidoth*” is open to dispute. “Lappidoth” is traditionally taken to be her husband's name—although the common reference to his father is absent.¹⁰ Moreover, it would be odd for a feminine plural term (*lappidoth*) to refer to a masculine singular husband. Rather, it seems more plausible to read, “a woman of light/fire,” in that the word in question carries this meaning in the narratives regarding Gideon and Samson (Judg 7:16, 15:4) and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ Perhaps she is “a woman of light” in the sense of “giving spiritual guidance,¹² or a “woman of fire” (an alternative rabbinical reading)¹³ as a parallel to Barak's name meaning “lightning.” In fact, the plural form *lappidim* carries exactly this connotation in Exod 20:18. The writer of Deborah's narrative may even intend a dual meaning of guidance and valor: a wise and capable woman with great courage. In the third pair, “she herself, she is judging,” Deborah renders judgment for her people based on Israel's Torah at a public site named the “Palm of Deborah” (4:5)—likely a role reaching beyond that of tribal and village elders who settled local disputes.¹⁴ Moreover, she is the only judge apart from Samuel already in prophetic service before she acts as judge. This prior status may be the reason she is not described like other judges as being “raised up” on a particular occasion.¹⁵ Instead, she receives the most dramatic introduction of any OT judge.

Deborah and Barak's Verbal Exchange (4:6–9a)

Deborah's summoning of Barak is consistent with her responsibilities as prophet and judge. Wisely she calls one who lives in the region of conflict and knows the situation, the people, and the terrain. He is the best person to serve as general under her command, though both will be present in battle. He responds without apparent hesitation. Upon his arrival, the fiery prophet confronts him with the classical rhetoric, “Yahweh the God of Israel commands you . . .” (4:6b). However, Barak's cryptic response and Deborah's counter-response are not as clear.

The NLT concisely captures the sense of Barak's words, “I will go, but only if you go with me.” He complies with Deborah's orders, but on condition she accompany him in battle. This need not be read as a “lack of faith” on his part,¹⁶ or an “intentional shaming” on hers.¹⁷ Rather, given his bravery later in the account (4:10, 14–16, 22), it is more likely that Barak seeks her wisdom and prophetic voice in the uncertainty of battle.¹⁸ Later, the prophet and judge Samuel affirms Barak's actions as a divinely guided mission (1 Sam 12:9–11),¹⁹ and the NT writer of Hebrews honors him as a noble person “who through faith conquered kingdoms” and “administered justice”—indeed, of whom “the world was not worthy” (Heb 11:32–39).²⁰ Barak's words to Deborah reflect his willingness to go and, at the same time, his respect for Deborah's role as a prophet and judge to provide critical guidance when a field decision is needed. Though negative assessments of this exchange abound,²¹ casting doubt on Barak's response flies in the face of his affirmation in the NT.

In her counter-response, Deborah agrees to accompany Barak yet adds a curious challenge: “Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman” (4:9a NIV). This woman is later identified as “Jael, the Kenite” (4:17, 21–22, 5:6, 24). Barak acts as a man of faith who is willing to obey God’s messenger, even if his personal glory is not part of the reward. Deborah’s rejoinder thus completes her commissioning speech (4:6–7, 9), which had been interrupted by Barak’s eagerness to secure her accompaniment (4:8).

Deborah and Barak’s Shared Journey (4:9b–16)

After the prophet-judge and her general make verbal commitments to each other, they embark together on their arduous yet divinely appointed journey to deliver their people. Thus far, they have spoken beneath the “Palm of Deborah” where she “sits to judge” Israel (4:5). But now, she decisively “arises” to join Barak. The journey that he was about to take (4:9a) has now commenced, and as it does, the author briefly introduces the community of the Kenites from which Jael will come—the other woman deliverer in this story.

Both Deborah and Barak have put themselves in harm’s way in response to God’s calling. Atop Mt. Tabor in the middle of the Jezreel Valley he assembles his army of local foot soldiers from the territories most affected by the conflict: Zebulun and Naphtali. Awaiting Deborah’s command, his actions evoke a countermove by Jabin’s general, Sisera, who calls out nine hundred iron chariots into the open plains to the west of Barak’s position. Then, Deborah prophesies once more: “Arise! This is the day in which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hands! Has not Yahweh gone out before you?” And Barak responds with obedience, knowing that facing chariots with swords will not, in the end, bring him the honor of victory. Yahweh blesses their combined efforts by routing Sisera’s forces before Barak, exactly as Deborah has predicted.²² Barak’s courage contrasts with Sisera’s cowardice as the latter abandons his troops in the thick of battle and escapes capture or death on foot. This sets the stage for the narrative’s climax.

Jael’s Military Honors (4:17–23)

The story of Jael’s military honor begins by emphatically recounting Sisera’s cowardly flight (cf. 4:15) in contrast to Barak’s persistent pursuit—the latter on foot from the beginning of the battle. This scene also introduces the exploits of Jael the Kenite, both in this story and in the victory song that follows (5:24–30). She is not an Israelite, but rather a descendant of Hobab, son of Jethro/Reuel, the father-in-law of Moses (Exod 2–4, 18, Num 10:29–32). Her ancestors migrated northward from the Midianite territory near Mt. Horeb (Sinai) and settled near Arad, in the Judean Negeb desert just east of Beersheba (Judg 1:16). By this time, they had separated from the rest of the Kenites and “pitched their tents” in Naphtali territory, where her family had likely allied with King Jabin to live under his protection (4:11, 17).

Just as Deborah is best understood as “woman of light/fire” (*lappidoth*), so Jael should be read either as a “woman of the community (*heber*) of the Kenites” (Judg 4:17, 21, 5:24),²³ or perhaps a “woman of divination.”²⁴ Again a father’s name

is absent from the text, making it less clear that *heber* is her husband’s name. Given Jael’s independent actions in the story, it is more plausible that the writer wishes to identify her only with her people (or occupation), rather than with a husband. She is nomadic and independent with no apparent allegiance to Israel at first, providing context for her actions in the story. Sisera seeks refuge from the fighting anywhere he can find it, while Jael recognizes him and lures him into her tent. Alone with him, she hides him under a rug and provides him with milk to drink (4:18–19)—perhaps intended as a natural sedative.

Sisera’s words to Jael are gender-specific: “Stand in the opening of the tent, and if any man (*ish*) comes and inquires of you saying, ‘Is there a man (*ish*) here?’ tell him ‘No one!’” (4:20).²⁵ This is likely an allusion to the “man” Barak hunting for the “man” Sisera, with the “woman” Jael (4:9) standing between them, about to rob Barak of his glory. With courage and cunning—not unlike the judge Ehud when he assassinated King Eglon of Moab (Judg 3:15–23)—Jael fulfills Deborah’s prophecy (4:9). Stealthily she hammers a convenient tent peg through Sisera’s head as he sleeps in sheer exhaustion from his frantic escape (4:21). She then steps outside the tent to meet Barak’s arrival and to bring him inside to display her trophy of victory—and with it her implicit defection to Barak and the victorious Israelites (4:22).

Appropriately, the story ends (4:23–24) with an emphasis on Israel’s God: the true hero and victor in the battle. The generals are no longer in view, nor the valiant women with whom they interacted. Yahweh subdues Jabin before the Israelites, freeing God’s people (4:3) from their oppression in this round of the ongoing cycles of the judges. This sets the stage for Deborah’s battle hymn, which follows in Judg 5.

Deborah’s Song (Judges 5)²⁶

The Author and Lead Character

The Poem’s Introduction (5:1–2)

The superb example of ancient Hebrew poetry²⁷ found in Judg 5 is introduced with the phrase, “And Deborah sang, accompanied by Barak son of Abinoam, on that day,” marking her as the author of the poem (5:1).²⁸ The writer puts emphasis at the outset on her primary role by using the gender-specific, singular verbal form (*wattashar*), as in her dramatic introduction in Judg 4:4–6.²⁹ Deborah’s preeminence is also evident through the use of first-person singular pronouns: “I, even I, will sing to Yahweh . . . I will praise Yahweh” (5:3); “I, Deborah, arose . . . until I arose, a mother in Israel” (5:7); and “My heart is with Israel’s commanders, with those who offered themselves freely among the people . . .” (5:9). Without question, she is the lead character in the poem, as she was in the narrative.

Deborah’s actions are also highlighted by the verbal imperatives in her antiphonal exchange with Barak: “Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!” and “Arise, Barak, lead away your captives . . .” (5:12, cf. 4:14). She authors the song while he rounds up the Canaanites taken alive in battle. In addition, Issachar’s princes stand by Deborah in the battle, while the rest of Issachar accompanies Barak (5:15). Perhaps she devises

a flanking strategy with the chief warriors of Israel, drawing out Sisera for Barak's troops to attack from Mt. Tabor.³⁰ This would be consistent with the first-person reference, "My heart is with Israel's princes," distinguishing them from the rest of the "willing volunteers among the people" (5:9). It also supports the majority translation tradition of 5:2, "When leaders lead in Israel / When the people willingly offer themselves / Bless the Lord!"³¹ Deborah and Barak (and perhaps Jael, cf. 5:6) are grouped together as "leaders," which requires the masculine plural ending in Hebrew.

Imagery of Moses (5:3–5)

In 5:3–5 Deborah implicitly calls to mind Israel's great redemptive event when Yahweh delivered them from Egyptian bondage through Moses (Exod 1–18). The pattern in Judg 4–5 of a story of military conflict preceding³² a victory song of praise reflects the exodus story (Exod 14) preceding the victory song of Moses accompanied by Israel (Exod 15). Moreover, the imagery of Yahweh coming out of Seir and marching from Edom (Judg 5:4) recalls the end of Israel's wilderness wanderings after the exodus (Deut 33:2). Finally, the earth trembling and the mountains quaking (Judg 5:4)—especially the explicit mention of the shaking of Mt. Sinai in Yahweh's presence with Moses (Judg 5:5)—remind the reader of Moses's first encounter with God after arriving at Mt. Sinai (Exod, 19:18, cf. Hag 2:21, Heb 12:26).³³

By linking her song to that of Moses, Deborah consciously identifies herself with Israel's first and greatest judge who gave the initial instructions for appointing other judges (Exod 18:13–23, Deut 16:18–20, 34:10). This allusion, along with Deborah's location between Ramah and Bethel (Judg 4:5, cf. 1 Sam 7:15–16, 8:4), places her strategically between Moses and Samuel—two critically important prophets and judges that served Israel well in their respective eras.

A Mother in Israel (5:6–11)

With brief references to Shamgar and Jael—two other deliverers (5:6)—Deborah dramatically reappears in the song by inserting her name between two identical verbal forms (*shaqqamti deborah shaqqamti*), "until I arose, I Deborah arose, a mother in Israel" (5:7). The cryptic account of Shamgar (3:31) immediately precedes Deborah's story, which ends with the lengthy account of Jael (4:17–23). With his ox goad and her tent peg they each act individually rather than leading a group of warriors. Yet, Israel is described as living in fear of travel and afraid to fight back (5:6–7a, 8) until Deborah intervenes. The emphatic repetition here of "I arose"³⁴ takes the reader back to Judg 4:9 where she "arises" from her seat of judgment at the Palm of Deborah to accompany Barak to war, and where she calls him to "arise" and fight (4:14), then later to sing the victory song with her (5:12). Perhaps the reference in 5:7a to the reluctance of the "villagers in Israel" to fight (NIV)³⁵ alludes to Barak's unwillingness to go into battle without Deborah (4:8). Neither he nor they engage until she arises.

Deborah's function as "a mother in Israel" (5:7) is one of the rare parental metaphors for Israel's leaders in the OT. The also fiery prophet Elijah is called "father" by Elisha (2 Kgs 2:12), who is in turn called "father" by Jehoshaphat, king of Israel (2 Kgs 13:14). Similarly, an Ephraimite named Micah—and later an army of

Danites—implore a wandering Levite to be their "father and priest" (Judg 17:10, 18:19). The connotation in both narratives is that of a "spiritual guide." Finally, "a wise woman" from Abel Beth Maakah, who lived at the time of David, calls her city "a mother in Israel" (2 Sam 20:14–21, esp. 20:19). She declares, "Long ago people used to say, 'Get your answer at Abel [Beth Maakah]; and that settled it'" (2 Sam 20:18). Three things are noteworthy here: (1) Her designation "long ago" could place the origin of this proverb around Deborah's time, (2) the city is located just north of Barak's home in Kedesh of Naphtali, and (3) Israel receives spiritual guidance at Abel, just as at the "Palm of Deborah" (Judg 4:5).³⁶ Perhaps Deborah knows of this then-famous city as "a mother in Israel" and with that symbolism artfully communicates her part in the story as a person who provides guidance for her people.

Other Supporting Characters to Deborah and Barak

Leaders and Tribal Groups (5:12–23)

From the beginning of the joined prosaic and poetic accounts of Judg 4–5, the author highlights Zebulun and Naphtali (4:6, 10, cf. 5:14, 18). But seven other Israelite tribes are referenced in the song as well: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (5:14),³⁷ Issachar, Reuben (5:15–16), Dan, and Asher (5:17). Their mention puts Deborah's last prophetic words into a larger geographical context that stretches from Israel's northwestern coastal plain, to the Samarian hill country (where the Palm of Deborah stands), to the southern extremities of the eastern bank of the Jordan River³⁸—including, of course, the Jezreel Valley where the battle takes place. Only the southernmost tribes west of the Jordan stand outside the scope of her speech.³⁹ By addressing this broad audience, Deborah clarifies the extent of her influence as prophet and judge (cf. 4:5). As with most OT prophets, she praises those who "follow" Yahweh (5:14: Makir, Ephraim, and Issachar) and at other times confronts those who do not "help" him (5:23: Reuben, Gilead, Dan, Asher, and "Meroz").

Jael and the Mother of Sisera (5:24–31)

In addition to telling of Jael's assassination of Sisera in the narrative (4:17–23), Deborah adds here a brief poetic supplement regarding Jael's courage and cunning (5:24–27)—along with a dark glimpse into the heart of Sisera's mother (5:28–30). Jael's section begins abruptly, creating a sharp contrast between the Israelites who do not help their neighbors and a Kenite woman who does.⁴⁰ Jael is resumptively described as "most blessed of women," indeed "most blessed of tent-dwelling women" (5:24)—the latter perhaps intended as a pun on where she wins her victory. Her story is supplemented with language of Sisera's final position on the ground "between her feet" (5:27; ESV, NASB, NET). This description may carry ironic sexual connotations, given the allusions by Sisera's mother to rape in the following verses (esp. 5:30). A dead Sisera lying still "between [Jael's] feet" can no longer abuse Israel's daughters by forcing himself "between their feet."⁴¹

This Canaanite woman of privilege calms her anxiety and fears regarding her son's late return by imagining his violent abuse of young Israelite virgins—a common practice in ancient warfare. She exclaims (literally), "A womb or two for every head." She describes them by their reproductive organs (*raham*

rachamatayim) as “unspoiled girls” taken among the “spoils.” They may be used for instant gratification, or kept as conjugal conveniences to produce progeny for the patrilineal “heads” of Canaanite households. They are dehumanized to “colorful garments” among the “plunder” (5:30). Jael avenges these victims and protects others at risk to Sisera’s troops.

This account of Sisera’s unnamed mother contrasts with Deborah’s presentation of herself as “a mother in Israel” (5:7). Whereas Deborah secures her people’s deliverance, Sisera’s mother can only learn of the ignoble death of her son and the defeat of his troops.⁴² Further, her portrayal as peering out of the latticework that surrounded her upstairs window, with the wisest of her “ladies” in attendance (vv. 27–29), depicts her status and wealth—surely, in part, at the cost of Israel’s oppression.

Deborah’s song closes (5:31) with a twofold reference. Although the language of “enemies” applies to Israel’s clans and tribes (5:23), it may also allude to Sisera with his forces as they oppose Deborah, Barak, and Jael who “love” Yahweh. The final reference to the “sun when it goes out in its strength” (a symbol of divine judgment across scripture, e.g., Jer 4:23) also contains poetic irony as a symbol of Israel’s leaders: Deborah a woman of “fire/light,” and Barak a man of “lightning.” Because of God’s remarkable work through them—as well as through the unlikely Kenite Jael—Israel “has peace for forty years.” This single line of prose at the end of the battle hymn speaks to the positive result of, and blessing on, their obedience.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to counter still-common criticisms of Deborah in her story and song (Judg 4–5) by suggesting she and her associates act as noble persons of valor. The text portrays this woman of light and fire, this prophet and judge, in a consistently positive way throughout. Her people, whom she rescues at a time of national crisis, respect her. She acts authoritatively in challenging Barak to lead in battle, where they together receive God’s blessing. She arises as a wise and protective “mother in Israel” acting in the spirit of Moses, calling Israel to follow Yahweh.

Similarly, Barak acts as a man of faith by invoking God’s presence and guidance in battle through Deborah, even though he must serve without the customary military honor. As a result, he obtains an even greater honor among the notables of faith in the book of Hebrews. Even the Kenite woman Jael acts with courage and cunning, highlighted by the amount of space devoted to her in this text. As a migrating tent-woman she shows herself wiser than the aristocratic mother of Sisera, whose son she slays to avenge and deliver Israel’s daughters.

As the true hero and deliverer of his covenant people, God chooses to accomplish his work through mere mortals like those in the book of Judges. Though none is perfect, some show greater faith and act more faithfully than others. Among these, the book of Judges portrays no major group of characters more favorably than Deborah, Barak, and Jael.

Notes

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A longer version of this essay, written for a more general audience, is a chapter titled, “Deborah: Only When a Good Man is Hard to Find?,” in Sandra Glahn, ed., *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017).

1. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004), 134. Grudem’s assertion, “Something is abnormal, something is wrong—there are no men to function as judge!” runs counter to the work of Carol Myers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford, 1991), updated as *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford, 2012). Myers argues that women in ancient Israel played important roles in their culture in judicial and legal affairs, as well as religious observance. See the application of Myers’s earlier work to the Deborah story and song by Susan Ackerman, “Digging Up Deborah: Recent Hebrew Bible Scholarship on Gender and the Contribution of Archaeology,” *NEA* 66, no. 4 (2003).

2. Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 216.

3. Thomas J. Finley, “The Ministry of Women in the Old Testament,” *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 81.

4. Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinical Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 170–74. For a brief history of interpretations of Deborah and Jael, see Gale A. Yee, “By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4,” *Semeia* 61 (1993): 117–24.

5. When the Hebrew *hayil* is used of men, it is variously translated in the NIV as “special ability” (Gen 47:6), “capable” (Exod 18:21, 25), “strong” (Judg 3:29), “a man of standing” (Ruth 2:1), etc. Since these characteristics also describe Deborah in Judg 4–5, the use of the term seems appropriate in this essay. That being said, I am not using the term in a technical sense to imply a literary parallel with, or dependence upon, its use elsewhere.

6. This is evident in the naming of the twelve judges in this book (including Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson) and the seven foreign oppressors (also including Aram-Naharaim, Moab, Midian, Ammon, and Philistia), along with their respective years of war and peace. To be complete, however, one should include the only judge who, like Deborah, is also a prophet—Samuel, the last of the judges (1 Sam 1–8).

7. Only these four are alluded to in Heb 11:32.

8. The southern Kedesh near the Sea of Galilee is more likely the point of reference based on the geography of this story. See Kenneth C. Way, *Judges and Ruth*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), *ad loc* Judg 4:6; also, Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2015), 136–38.

9. Richard S. Hess, “Israelite Identity and Personal Names from the Book of Judges,” *HS* 44 (2003): 26.

10. Cf. “Barak, son of Abinoam” in Judg 4:6, 12, 5:1, 12; see also Deborah’s introduction in 5:1 where *lappidoth* is omitted while Barak’s father is repeated.

11. Hess, “Israelite Identity,” 33–34. This term (*lappid/lappidim*) occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible meaning “torch/torches” (Gen 15:17, Isa 62:1, Ezek 1:13, Nah 2:4, Zech 12:6, Job 41:19, Dan 10:6), although not with the feminine *oth* ending found in Judg 4:4.

12. See Way, *Judges and Ruth*, *ad loc* Judg 4:4–5.

13. See Talmud *Bavli Megillah* 14a, “a woman of flames” or “fiery woman”; cited in Wilda Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 188n42. See also Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale, 2014), 255–56; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, “Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 & 5,” *JAAR* 58 (1990): 391.

14. See Way, *Judges and Ruth*, *ad loc* Judg 2:16. For the common interpretation of Deborah as one who settles civil disputes, see Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 112n8.

15. For examples, see Judg 2:16, 18, 3:9, 15, 6:7, 12.

16. Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 404.

17. Yee, “By the Hand of a Woman,” 114–17.

18. See Belleville, “Women in the Bible,” 111n6; also, George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 116–17. This is similar to King Jehoshaphat’s insistence on obtaining wise counsel from Yahweh through his prophet Micaiah before going into battle (1 Kgs 22:5–9, 2 Chr 18:4–7).

19. Here, Samuel provides a shorter list of some of the warrior-judges: Jerubbaal (Gideon), Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel (himself). His emphasis is on divine deliverance of Israel through these persons sent by God.

20. Because Deborah is not listed by name with Barak in Heb 11:32, one might assert an argument from silence challenging the appropriateness of her judgeship. However, the six men listed together are likely grouped as warrior-judges. Additionally, the men’s names are followed by the phrase (in the same verse) “and the prophets,” which would include Deborah.

21. Such as mocking Deborah’s commissioning speech (Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC 6 [Nashville: B&H, 1999], 199), casting suspicion on her authority as a woman (Fewell and Gunn, “Controlling Perspectives,” 398–99), or even diminishing of Barak’s portrayal as a person of faith (Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 186). Similarly, *The Message* reads, “Of course I’ll go with you. But understand that with an attitude like that, there’ll be no glory in it for you.”

22. Huldah is the only other woman prophet who reveals the future and it comes to pass as she says (2 Kgs 22:3–20, 2 Chr 34:3–33).

23. The understanding of *heber* as a common collective noun was first asserted by A. Malamat, “Mari and the Bible: Some Patterns of Tribal Organizations and Institutions,” *JAOS* 8 (1962): 146. His work is followed by J. A. Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Westminster: John Knox, 1981), 65–66; as well as by Johanna W. H. Bos, “Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17–22; Ruth 3,” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 52. Despite these reasonable (perhaps compelling) arguments, most contemporary OT scholars contend with this interpretation, including Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, WBC 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 100.

24. For the argument that *heber* means “diviner,” see Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 261–71; also, “Jael, *’eshet heber* the Kenite: A Diviner?” in *Joshua and Judges*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 139–60. Although divination may be used in a positive sense as a synonym for prophetic visions (Mic 3:6), it is generally condemned as a pagan practice in the OT. For a concise discussion of this term, see “Divination” in D. R. W. Wood, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 279–80.

25. Author’s literal translation; see also Webb, *Judges*, 184.

26. Judg 5 evokes questions regarding its literary divisions and significant exegetical challenges. Regarding the former, see Michael D.

Coogan’s influential work: “A Structural and Literary Analysis of the Song of Deborah,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 143–46. Because this essay is focused on the person, status, and function of Deborah, Barak, and Jael, these issues are discussed only as they are relevant.

27. See its appraisal by Shimon Bakon, “Deborah: Judge, Prophetess and Poet,” *JBQ* 34, no. 2 (2006): 111.

28. This is my translation, although this detail of the Hebrew text is also reflected in the *New American Bible (Revised Edition)* and *Young’s Literal Translation*. Regrettably, most standard translations, including the ESV and NIV2011, give the impression that the verb is plural and generally inclusive of both persons.

29. This singular verbal suffix follows the pattern of the introduction to Moses’s song in Exod 15:1 where he is the author of the song with the Israelites joining him in singing.

30. This is a minority view—though plausible—suggested by Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 91.

31. Cf. the HCSB, CSB, NET, NIV, and ESV. In contrast, *perá* can denote “untrimmed hair,” representing ritual vows like that of the Nazirite taken before going to war (cf. NRSV, NJPS, NJB). This may be its meaning in Deut 32:42.

32. Exod 15:1 begins with the adverb “then” (*’az* = “at that time”), whereas Judg 5 clarifies the timing with the phrase “on that day”—perhaps while the aftermath of the battle was still being cleaned up (cf. 5:12).

33. Deborah’s song in Judg 5 can be likened as well to David’s victory hymn in Ps 68. There the Sinai imagery also appears (Ps 68:7–8, 17), along with the service of women in the proclamation of God’s word (68:11), dividing the plunder of battle (68:12), and celebration of victory (68:25). Although David’s song lacks a narrative basis, the recountings of David’s military conquests provide an adequate point of reference (*ad loc* in 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles).

34. It furthermore appears in the *shaphel* here, which can highlight the subject’s control over the action of the verb. Noted in personal correspondence with Jeffrey Volkmer (La Mirada, Biola University), Oct 16, 2016.

35. Or, perhaps due to their complacency, which resulted in their prospering and growing fat (cf. NRSV).

36. Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, NAC 7 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 436–38.

37. Makir (5:14) and Gilead (5:17), respectively, are clans in the southwestern and northeastern parts of Manasseh. The tribal affiliation and location of “Meroz” (5:23) are unknown.

38. The tribes from the eastern side of the Jordan Valley supported Israel’s conquest of Canaan once before (Josh 4:12).

39. Specifically, Gad, Benjamin, and Judah (the latter including Simeon). The tribe of Levi had no physical land inheritance, but were given 48 Levitical cities, including six “cities of refuge” (cf. Num 35, Deut 4, Josh 20), which included the city of Dan in the far north.

40. Shimon Bakon, “Deborah: Judge, Prophetess and Poet,” 115.

41. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 93.

42. Bakon, “Deborah: Judge, Prophetess and Poet,” 116.



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