

repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead!’” (Luke 16:27-31).

We have a Savior who raised from the dead! Believe in Him and His work! He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:32-34) and He rules (Matthew 28:18)!

Haftarah B'shalach **“Singing Prophetesses”**

Judges 4:4-5:31 (A); 5:1-31 (S)

This week’s deliverance of the Ancient Israelites from the clutches of Egypt is completed, as the dramatic destruction of the Egyptian charioteers in the Red Sea highlights God’s miraculous activities during the escape and early weeks of the Exodus from Egypt. Our Torah portion (Exodus 13:17-17:16) portrays visible and tangible evidences of God’s presence and provision. The ubiquitous pillars of cloud and fire that led and protected Israel from the vengeful Egyptians, not only manifested themselves, but they became a guiding fixture during the wilderness journey.⁴ Additionally, bitter water was made potable, with sweet water emerging to slake the Israelites’ thirst.⁵ Eventually, the arrival of the daily provisions of manna, separating out the Sabbath as a day of rest, provided nourishment for the next forty years.⁶ Finally, the never-ending war with the Amalekites is noted, as Joshua prevailed in this early battle.⁷

With all of these extraordinary events, it may be curious to us that the Sages focused on Miriam’s singing praises of victory over the Egyptians, connecting it to a song of victory song by Deborah in the Book of Judges. Both Miriam and Deborah are labeled as *prophetesses*, providing a connective link that draws our Torah reading and Haftarah passage together:

“Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea’” (Exodus 15:20-21).

“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment” (Judges 4:4-5).

Drawing a parallel between Miriam and Deborah at this relatively early stage in the annual Torah reading cycle, gives the Messianic student an opportunity to be reminded of the critical roles gifted women have had and *continue* to have in the Body of Messiah. The fact that these Scriptures cite both Miriam and Deborah, associating these women with the office of “prophetess” or *neviah* (נְבִיאָה), means that they possess the same authority and responsibility that similar male prophets have been given down through the ages. God looks at His chosen vessels without prejudice regarding their sex, nationality, or station in life. This is why the Apostle Paul can so confidently assert,

⁴ Exodus 13:21-22.

⁵ Exodus 15:22-27.

⁶ Exodus 16:1-7.

⁷ Exodus 17:8-16.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua” (Galatians 3:28).

The outpouring of God’s Spirit is something that is absolutely gender blind:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh [*kol-basar*, כָּל-בָּשָׂר]; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28, RSV; cf. Acts 2:17).

Recognize that up to this point in the Torah, the reference to a prophet or *navi* (נָבִיא) has only occurred twice. The first time *navi* appears is in a reference describing Abraham as a prophet, as God warned Abimelech in a dream (Genesis 20:7), and the second time *navi* appears is when the Lord designated Aaron as Moses’ prophet before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).

The third time the specific office of “prophet”—in this case “prophetess”—appears, is found in Exodus 15:20, as Miriam was recognized as a *neviah*. Miriam had, of course, played a pivotal role in the early life of Moses, being credited with saving Moses from Pharaoh’s death edict, and then actually giving him to the daughter of Pharaoh:

“Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son [Moses]; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister [Miriam] stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrews’ children.’ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?’ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Go ahead.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed him” (Exodus 2:1-9).

As the older sister of Moses and sister of Aaron, the recorded high point of her life could easily have been when Miriam was called a “prophetess” and she led the women of Israel in song and dance after the deliverance through the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21). It was only later during the trek in the wilderness where we see a somewhat tragic description of Miriam’s actions, when she and Aaron questioned the judgment of Moses for having married Zipporah (Numbers 12:1-2). If one is to attribute this “fall from grace” solely to her being a female, then it is notable that she did not commit the offense alone, but in tandem with her brother.

To emphasize the reality that women have had vital ministerial capacities down through the ages, our Haftarah selection reflects on one of the most notable heroic woman appearing in the Tanakh. The opening verses of Judges 4 describe the predicament in which Israel found itself, as the nation once again slid into evil ways:

“Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years” (Judges 4:1-3).

The Canaanite ruler Jabin was oppressing Israel precisely because of its sin, yet the people cried out to God to deliver them. We are introduced to the prophetess Deborah, a judge of Israel, who was responsible for seeing that the Canaanite army was subdued:

“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, ‘Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, “Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many *troops* to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.’” Then Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.’ She said, ‘I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.’ Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him” (Judges 4:4-10).

Judges 4 gives us all the details of the orders of Deborah and the actions of Barak, as her leadership was followed and Israel’s oppressors were defeated. As the chapter concludes, another Israelite woman, Jael, was given notable credit for slaying Sisera who was the commander of the Canaanite army (Judges 4:21-22). Obviously, the men of Israel were not only commanded and encouraged by Deborah, but the spoils of slaying the opposing leader were reserved for Jael, wife of Heber.

For years, men seeking to assert authority over women have taught that these actions by women should be taken *as a rebuke* of men for not performing their duties and responsibilities to lead properly. But if you take these actions and compound them with the recorded exploits of gifted and called women who appear throughout the Scriptures, we see a less prejudicial and more balanced perspective.⁸

Continuing in Judges 5, the parallels between Miriam’s singing and Deborah’s singing are present. Praise to God for deliverance from the oppressive Canaanites is detailed in poetic terms:

“Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel” (Judges 5:3).

Both the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-20) and Deborah’s song (Judges 5) have been memorized and sung by God’s people in order to give praise to Him and implore Him for His mercy and compassion. While not only chronicling some of the details, Israel is reminded that there is no other like the Almighty. Ultimate credit is given to Him, even though the human instruments of His deliverance—both men *and* women—had to perform their roles in each episode. Recalling the exploits of both Miriam, and in particular Deborah here in our Haftarah reading, allows us to reflect briefly on not only two other women cited in the Tanakh as prophetesses, but also three women who the Sages considered to have this gifting (even though it is not specifically declared as such in the Holy Scriptures). Huldah and Noadiah were noted prophetesses, yet with very little recorded about their lives:

“So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to **Huldah the prophetess**, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the

⁸ For a useful discussion, consult Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry: Another Egalitarian Perspective,” in James R. Beck, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 205-248.

wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her” (2 Kings 22:14).

“Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also **Noadiah the prophetess** and the rest of the prophets who were *trying* to frighten me” (Nehemiah 6:14).

On the other hand, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Abigail the wife of King David, and of course Queen Esther, have all been considered “prophetesses” in the Rabbinic tradition for a total of seven women in the Tanakh (b.*Megillah* 14a). This is important to note, because despite the elevation of the Matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah—women have frequently not been given a balanced position in the history of theology, as it has been dominated by male interpreters and leaders down through the ages (be those interpreters or leaders Jewish or Christian).

By the time one gets to the era of Messiah Yeshua, it is noted that He, as recorded in the Gospels, not only treated women equitably, but has women among His intimate followers. It is probably not unimportant that the Lord declared Himself to be the “resurrection and the life” to women, and that women were some of the first to actually recognize Him as the Messiah:

“Martha therefore, when she heard that Yeshua was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary stayed at the house. Martha then said to Yeshua, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.’ Yeshua said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Yeshua said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘**Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world**’” (John 11:20-27).

Here in this passage, our Lord Yeshua, the Son of God, not only chose to declare who He was as “the resurrection and the life” to Martha, but He also demonstrated His power by raising Lazarus. There are many other examples of women in vital roles in the Apostolic Writings with the same gifts of teaching, prophesying, and leadership that rightfully cause many to conclude that throughout God’s Word—women have been used mightily in His work in the created order.

This week we are all challenged to consider the actions and lives of two singing prophetesses. If we spent more time analyzing the roles of women used by God in Scripture, we would discover that they have done more to promote the work of God than carry a good tune! Let us thank the godly women in our lives, and encourage them to reach for high spiritual achievements—as joint heirs and **equal partners** in the work of the Kingdom!

Haftarah Yitro **“Smoke-Spoken Revelation”**

Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6[6-7] (A); 6:1-13 (S)

Encountering the Living God is an awesome experience no matter when it occurs. In this week’s Torah portion (Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]) and its corresponding Haftarah reading, two