

Handout for class on Deborah, 9:30am, Feb. 28, 2022 (taught by Susan Kristol)

The class may be more meaningful if you familiarize yourself with Judges Chapters 4 and 5 beforehand, but this is not a requirement. Biblegateway.com offers many different translations of the Bible and is fun to use.

This class will discuss Deborah, and the second class will discuss Jael and Sisera's mother.

At the end is a bibliography for further reference.

Debbie Friedman "Devorah's Song" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-40yilvgJwY>

Text of Judges 4-5 from New International Version (2011)

Chapter 4 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. ² So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. ³ Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

⁸ Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

⁹ "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." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.

¹² When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵ At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

¹⁶ Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. ¹⁷ Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

¹⁸ Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

¹⁹ "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

²⁰ "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say 'No.'"

²¹ But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

²² Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.

²³ On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴ And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

The Song of Deborah

Chapter 5 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

² "When the princes in Israel take the lead,
when the people willingly offer themselves—
praise the LORD!

³ "Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers!
I, even I, will sing to the LORD;
I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel, in song.

⁴ "When you, LORD, went out from Seir,
when you marched from the land of Edom,
the earth shook, the heavens poured,
the clouds poured down water.

⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai,
before the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁶ "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned;
travelers took to winding paths.

⁷ Villagers in Israel would not fight;
they held back until I, Deborah, arose,

until I arose, a mother in Israel.
⁸ God chose new leaders
 when war came to the city gates,
 but not a shield or spear was seen
 among forty thousand in Israel.
⁹ My heart is with Israel's princes,
 with the willing volunteers among the people.
 Praise the LORD!
¹⁰ "You who ride on white donkeys,
 sitting on your saddle blankets,
 and you who walk along the road,
 consider ¹¹ the voice of the singers at the watering places.
 They recite the victories of the LORD,
 the victories of his villagers in Israel.
 "Then the people of the LORD
 went down to the city gates.
¹² 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
 Wake up, wake up, break out in song!
 Arise, Barak!
 Take captive your captives, son of Abinoam.'
¹³ "The remnant of the nobles came down;
 the people of the LORD came down to me against the mighty.
¹⁴ Some came from Ephraim, whose roots were in Amalek;
 Benjamin was with the people who followed you.
 From Makir captains came down,
 from Zebulun those who bear a commander's staff.
¹⁵ The princes of Issachar were with Deborah;
 yes, Issachar was with Barak,
 sent under his command into the valley.
 In the districts of Reuben
 there was much searching of heart.
¹⁶ Why did you stay among the sheep pens
 to hear the whistling for the flocks?
 In the districts of Reuben
 there was much searching of heart.
¹⁷ Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan.
 And Dan, why did he linger by the ships?
 Asher remained on the coast
 and stayed in his coves.
¹⁸ The people of Zebulun risked their very lives;
 so did Naphtali on the terraced fields.
¹⁹ "Kings came, they fought,
 the kings of Canaan fought.
 At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo,
 they took no plunder of silver.
²⁰ From the heavens the stars fought,

from their courses they fought against Sisera.

²¹ The river Kishon swept them away,
the age-old river, the river Kishon.
March on, my soul; be strong!

²² Then thundered the horses' hooves—
galloping, galloping go his mighty steeds.

²³ 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD.
'Curse its people bitterly,
because they did not come to help the LORD,
to help the LORD against the mighty.'

²⁴ "Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.

²⁵ He asked for water, and she gave him milk;
in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.

²⁶ Her hand reached for the tent peg,
her right hand for the workman's hammer.

She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.

²⁷ At her feet he sank,
he fell; there he lay.

At her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.

²⁸ "Through the window peered Sisera's mother;
behind the lattice she cried out,

'Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?'

²⁹ The wisest of her ladies answer her;
indeed, she keeps saying to herself,

³⁰ 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoils:
a woman or two for each man,
colorful garments as plunder for Sisera,
colorful garments embroidered,
highly embroidered garments for my neck—
all this as plunder?'

³¹ "So may all your enemies perish, LORD!
But may all who love you be like the sun
when it rises in its strength."

Then the land had peace for forty years.

Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen. Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (Anchor Bible Reference Library) (1998)

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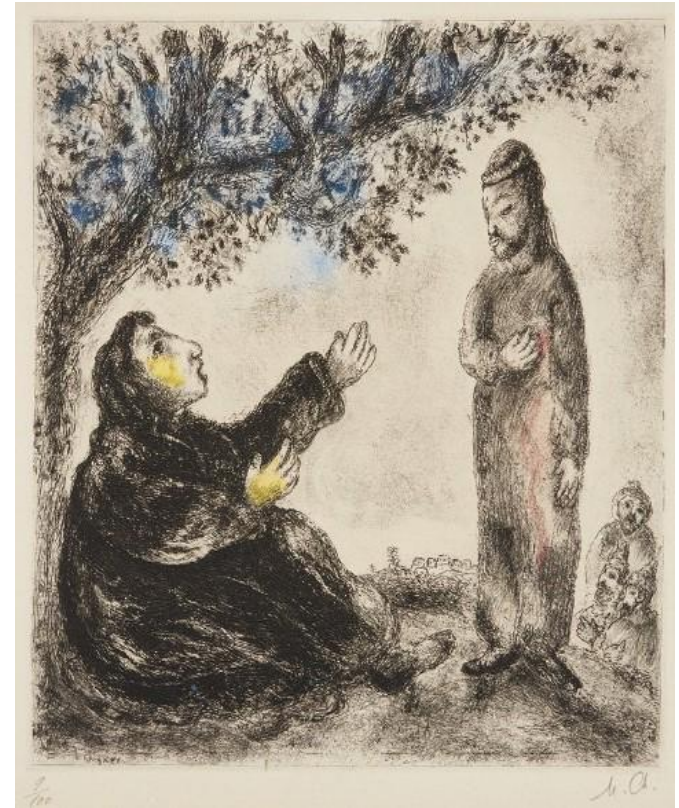
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Deborah

Judges 4–5 (Shoftim)

- Haftarah for Parshat B'Shallach— “Shabbat Shira”
- Two parts: Chapter 4 (prose) and Chapter 5, the Song of Deborah
- Book of Judges lays the groundwork for a king to be chosen in book of Samuel
- Historical and geographical setting—Northern Israel ca. 1200–1050 BCE (transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age)
- Archaeological finds support some of the narrative
- How have different post-Biblical commentators and artists portrayed Deborah over the centuries?



Chagall etching 1958



Summary of Judges 4–5 Hebrew Tribes Rise Up Against the Canaanites

The land is troubled. Deborah and Barak lead a fight against the Canaanite chariot commander Sisera, who is defeated during a rainstorm and subsequent flooding of the Kishon River.

After his forces are destroyed, Sisera is killed by a Kenite woman, Jael. In Deborah's victory song, Sisera's mother is depicted as awaiting his return.

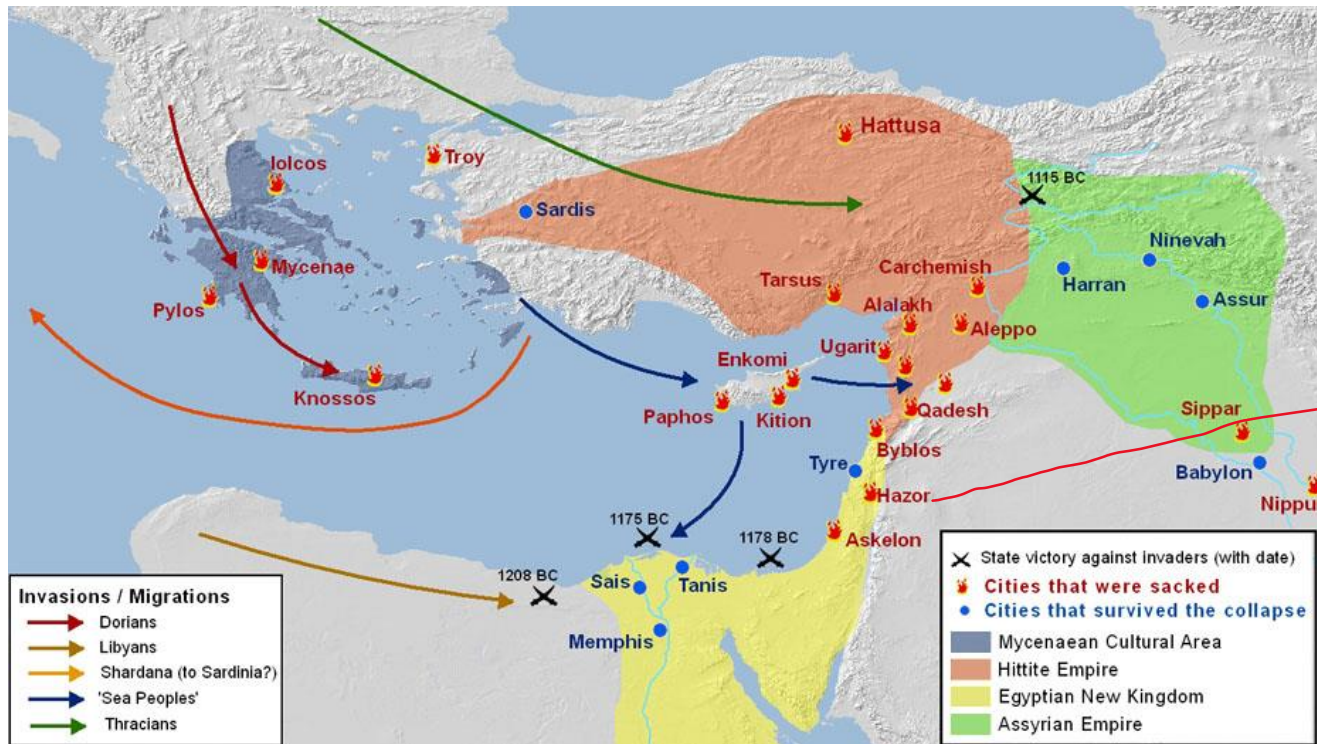
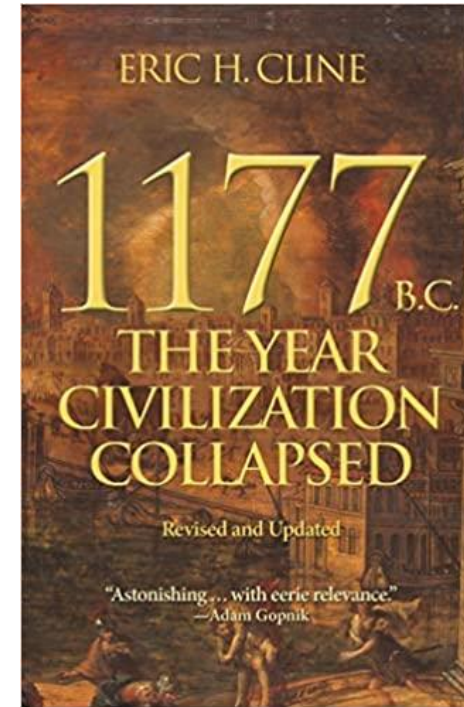
Afterwards, the land is tranquil for forty years.



The Bronze Age Collapse (1250-1150 BCE)

The entire interconnected world of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean was destroyed and collapsed in the decades following 1200 BCE. It is only with the demise of the Great Kingdoms that flourished during the Late Bronze Age that Israel, Philistia, and Phoenicia arose in the land that was once called Canaan.

Eric Cline, [*1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed*](#), Princeton 2014



Hazor

List of Judges

1. Othniel (3:7-11)
2. Ehud (3:12-30)
3. Shamgar (3:31)
4. Deborah (4-5)
5. Gideon (Chs 6-8)
6. Tola (10:1-2)
7. Jair (10:3-5)
8. Jephthah (10:6-12:7)
9. Ibzan (12:8-10)
10. Elon (12:11-12)
11. Abdon (12:13-15)
12. Samson (Chs 13-16)



The “Judicial Temperament”?



Robert Alter, Introduction to book of Judges (*Shoftim*):
“The word *shofet*, traditionally translated as “judge,” has two different meanings—“judge” in the judicial sense and “leader” or “chieftain.” The latter sense is obviously the relevant one for this book...

Book of Judges' chaos sets up the need for a king

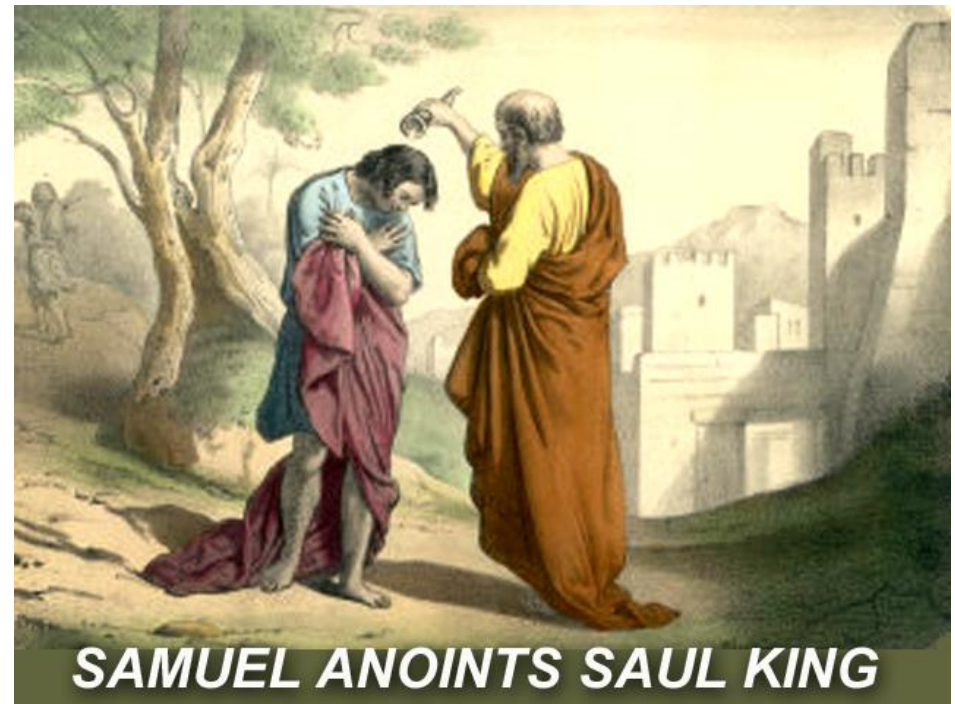
Final verse in book of Judges, 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.



...The book of Judges describes an Israel that lacks effective and unifying male authority figures...Only a king can stop the cycle of violence that spirals through the book of Judges and restore order to Israelite society. Israel crowns its first king in Samuel 1—the biblical book that immediately follows Judges.

Amy Kalmonofsky, *Gender Play in the Hebrew Bible* (2017)



The Need for a Leader: The Violent Cycle Begins Again

Judges 4:1-3

¹And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after [the previous chieftain] Ehud had died. ²And the LORD sold them into the hand of Yavin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hatzor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Haroshet-HaGoyim. ³Then the people of Israel cried to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

Finds from Tel Hazor Excavations



Archaeological mystery solved

Published by [Editor](#) at 10:49 am under [Press Releases](#)

Jul
01
2010



A 3,200-year-old round bronze tablet with a carved face of a woman, found at the El-ahwat excavation site near Katzir in central Israel, is part of a linchpin that held the wheel of a battle chariot in place. This was revealed by scientist Oren Cohen of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa. "Such an identification reinforces the claim that a high-ranking Egyptian or local ruler was based at this location, and is likely to support the theory that the site is Harosheth Haggoyim, the home town of Sisera, as mentioned in Judges 4-5," says Prof. Zertal.

University of Haifa, July 1, 2010

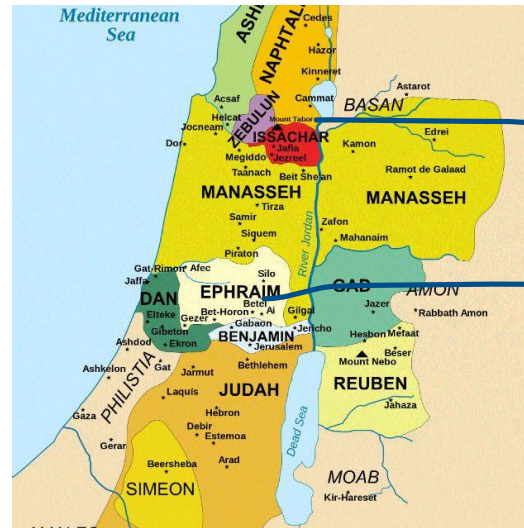


Chapter 4 continues—Meet Deborah

Judges 4:4 And Deborah¹, a woman prophetess², wife of Lappidot³, was judging⁴ Israel at that time.

5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim⁵; and the people of Israel went up to her for judgment (*mishpat*)⁶.

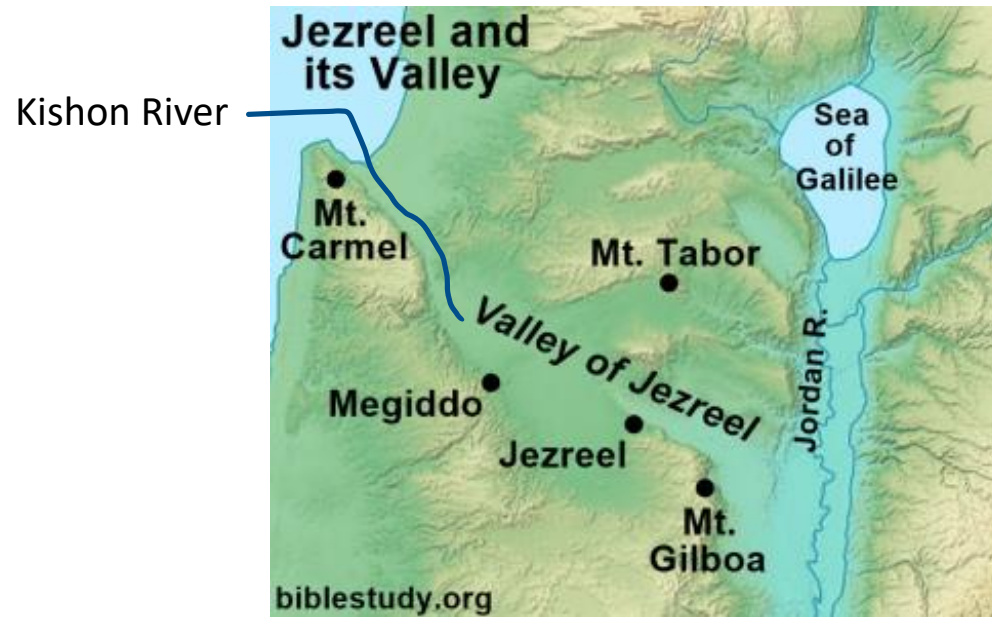
וּדְבוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אִשָּׁת לַפִּידוֹת הִיא שֹׁפֵטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵת הַהִיא:
וְהִיא יוֹשֶׁבֶת תַּחַת־תְּמָר דְּבוּרָה בֵּין הָרָמָה וּבֵין בֵּית־אֵל בְּהָר אֶפְרַיִם
וַיַּעֲלוּ אֵלֶיהָ בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִמְשָׁפֶט:



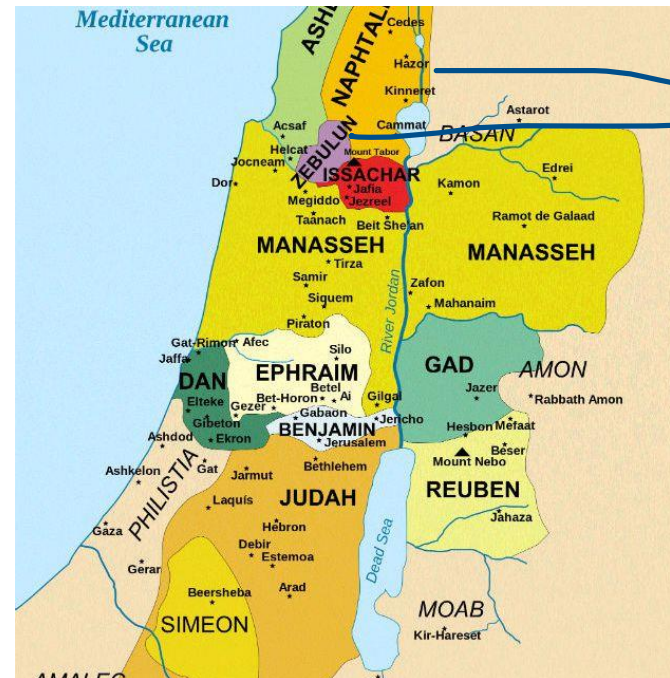
Mount Tabor

General location of
Palm of Deborah

Deborah as Prophetess
(and, we meet Barak)



⁶ She sent and summoned Barak [“Lightning”] the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun.’ ⁷ And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Yavin’s army, to meet you by the Kishon River with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him **into your hand.**”



Territory of
Naphtali and
Zebulun

The Theme of Powerful Woman Continues

Judges 4:8

And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me then I shall go, but if you will not go with me, I shall not go."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ בָּרַק אִם-תֵּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהִלַּכְתִּי וְאִם-לֹא תֵלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֶךְ:

9 And she said, "I shall surely go with you, but your glory will not be on the way by which you go, for into the hand of a woman will the Lord deliver Sisera." And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

וַתֹּאמֶר הִלֵּךְ אִלַּי עִמָּךְ אָפֶס כִּי לֹא תִהְיֶה תִפְאָרְתְּךָ עַל-הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה הוֹלֵךְ כִּי בַיַּד-אִשָּׁה יִמְכַּר יְהוָה אֶת-סִיסְרָא וּתְקֹם דְּבוּרָה וְתִלָּךְ עִם-בָּרַק קַדְשָׁה:



detail from 1635 painting by
Salomon de Bray

The Battle: Judges Chapter 4—Deborah at Scene of Battle

What role does she play?

[10](#) And Barak gathered Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand men went up at his feet; and **Deborah went up with him.**

...

[12](#) And they told Sisera that **Barak,*** the son of Abinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor.

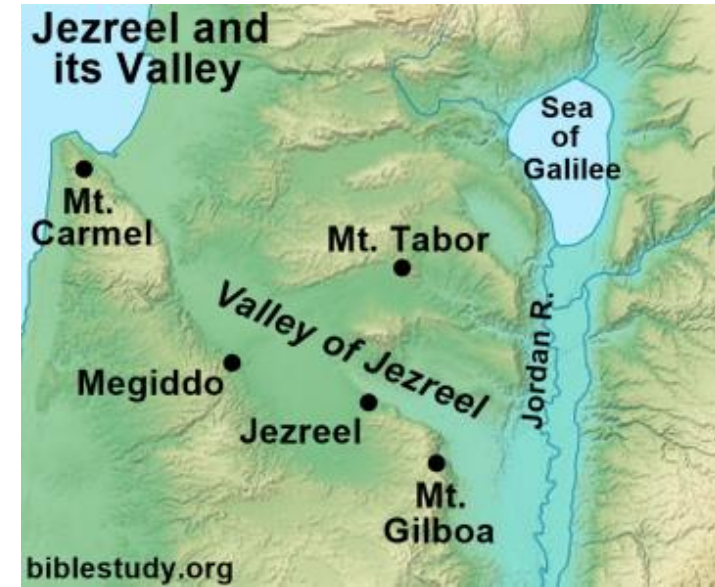
[13](#) And Sisera gathered all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people that were with him, from Haroshet-HaGoyim, to the Kishon River.

[14](#) And **Deborah said to Barak, “Rise, (קוּם) for this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand.** Did not the Lord go out before you?” And Barak went down from Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men after him.

[15](#) The Lord threw Sisera’s army into a panic..., and Sisera went down from his chariot and fled on foot.

[16](#) Barak pursued the chariots and the camp of Sisera, and all of the camp fell by the edge of the sword.

*What about Deborah?





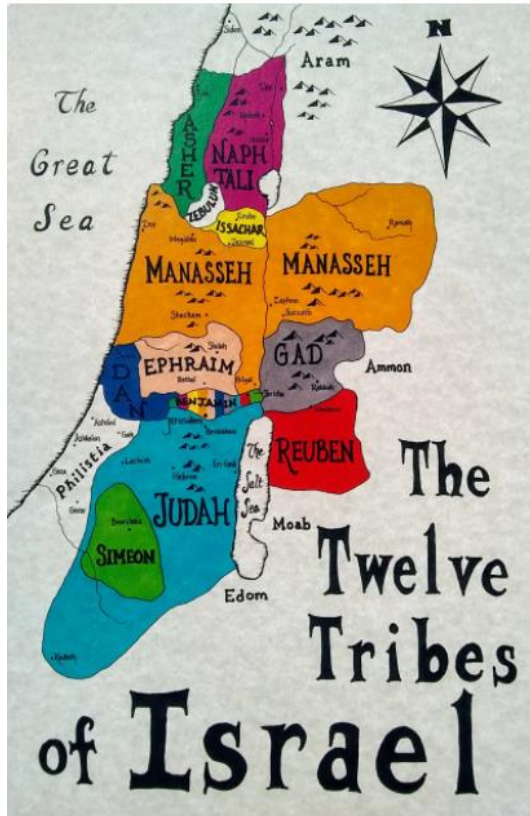
Jezreel Valley seen from Mt. Tabor



Kishon River flooding in 2020

Chapter 5: The Very Ancient Victory Song of Deborah

Some differences from Chapter 4.



Deborah sang—and Barak son of Avinoam with her—on that day. (5:1)
וַתִּשֶׁר דִּבּוּרָה וּבָרַק בֶּן-אֲבִינֶעֱם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:

Chapter 5: Deborah mentions ten tribes in the “Roll Call”—six are in the fight, four stay out. By contrast, in the Chapter 4 narrative, only the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali are fighting. A national rebellion vs. a regional fight.

There were no caravans,/ wayfarers walked roundabout paths/ There were no unwall'd cities in Israel, none--
until you arose, Deborah,/until you arose, O mother in Israel. (5:6-7)

...the chiefs of Issachar were with Deborah (5:15)
“march on my soul, with might!” (5:21)

Dousing the Fiery Woman: The Diminishing of the Prophetess Deborah

Daniel and Cathy Skidmore-Hess, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* (2012)

The roles and identities attributed to Deborah in the biblical text are remarkable: judge, military strategist, poetess, and prophetess (*neviah*), one of only four named women* so described in the biblical texts.

*“*neviah*”: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Hulda (2 Kings 22:14),
Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and Isaiah’s unnamed wife (Isa. 8:3)

How [could] such a remarkable figure could receive so little textual attention?

...[T]he lessening and even derogation of Deborah's significance from ancient commentary to contemporary commentary [was] a process that perhaps began as early as the redaction of biblical sources.



Traditional rabbinic commentary tends to either try to domesticate Deborah or criticize her for being haughty and arrogant.

For example, the Talmud (ca. 500 CE) depicts her as an artisan:

Talmud Megillah 14a **Deborah** was a prophetess, **as it is written: “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidot.”** What is the meaning of “**the wife of Lappidot**”? The Gemara answers: **For she used to make wicks for the Sanctuary**, and due to the flames [*lappidot*] on these wicks she was called the wife of Lappidot....

This later commentary decides that Deborah was Barak’s wife. Barak (“Lightning”) was Deborah’s husband, who is also called Lappidot (“Fiery”).

--Rabbinic text Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, Chap. 10, 48-49—about 800 CE.



Talmudic References to Deborah ca. 500 CE

The rabbis valued modesty in women:

Talmud Megillah 14a:17 With regard to Deborah, it says:
“And she sat under a palm tree” (Judges 4:5). The
Gemara asks: **What is different** and unique with regard to
her sitting “**under a palm tree**” that there is a need for it
to be written? **Rabbi Shimon ben Avshalom said:** It is **due**
to the prohibition against being alone together with a
man. Since men would come before her for judgment,
she established for herself a place out in the open and
visible to all, in order to avoid a situation in which she
would be secluded with a man behind closed doors.



More Talmudic Attitudes Toward Deborah (along with another prophetess, Hulda)

[Talmud Megillah 14b](#) An additional point is mentioned with regard to the prophetesses. **Rav Naḥman said: Haughtiness is not befitting a woman.** And a proof to this is that **there were two haughty women, whose names were identical to the names of loathsome creatures. One, Deborah, was called a hornet**, [or wasp or bee], as her Hebrew name, Devorah, means hornet; **and one, Huldah, was called a marten...** From where is it known that they were haughty? **With regard to Deborah, the hornet, it is written: “And she sent and called Barak”** (Judges 4:6), **but she herself did not go to him.**



The Talmud again portrays Deborah as haughty

Judges 5:3, 7

Hear O kings, give ear O rulers—

I—to the LORD I will sing.

I shall chant to the LORD, God of Israel.

....There were no caravans,

wayfarers walked roundabout paths.

There were no unwallled cities in Israel,

none,

until you arose, Deborah,

until you* arose, a **mother in Israel**.

חֲדָלוּ פָּרְזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חֲדָלוּ עַד שִׁקְמָתִי דְּבוֹרָה שִׁקְמָתִי
אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Judges 5:12

Awake, awake, Deborah,

Awake, awake, utter a song.

עוֹרִי עוֹרִי דְּבוֹרָה עוֹרִי עוֹרִי **דְּבָרִי**-שִׁיר

Talmud Pesachim 66b **Anyone who acts haughtily, if he is a Torah scholar, his wisdom departs from him; and if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.** ...That **if he is a prophet his prophecy departs from him** is learned from **Deborah**, as it is written: **“The villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, I arose a mother in Israel”** (Judges 5:7). For these words of self-glorification, Deborah was punished with a loss of her prophetic spirit, **as it is written** later that it was necessary to say to her: **“Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song”** (Judges 5:12), because her prophecy had left her.

*archaic verb form is 2nd person, but often translated as “I.”

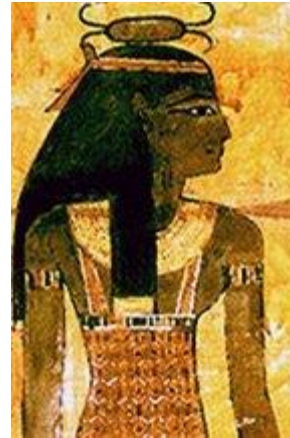
“A Mother in Israel”: Theories about the Biblical Deborah as a Faint Memory of a pre-Biblical Warrior Goddess



Bee goddess of pre-classical Greece, related to prophecy



“Great Mother” Cybele from Asia Minor, protectress of cities



Egyptian goddess Neith, warrior and fertility goddess whose temple was called The House of the Bee



Anat, the warrior goddess of the Canaanites, consort of storm god Baal

“You arose, a mother in Israel”

אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Arguing against a Catholic queen required diminishing the role of Deborah

When the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor (1516-1558) ascended the English throne in 1553, Protestants opposed her. They questioned whether Deborah served as precedent for female rule. In his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, the Scottish preacher John Knox argued that Deborah's role had been religious rather than civil, and therefore she was not a justification for Queen Mary's rule.



Catholic Queen Mary

But...when the proposed queen was Protestant, Deborah could be used to argue for her legitimacy

“Our English Deborah”

The final pageant along the route of Elizabeth's coronation in 1559 showed a young woman enthroned as the queen....Over her head was the inscription, “Deborah, the judge and restorer of Israel.”



Protestant Queen Elizabeth I



Rachel Monika Herweg, Elisa Klapheck, and Lara Dämmig (left to right), founders of Bet Debora, at the first Bet Debora conference, Berlin, 1999.

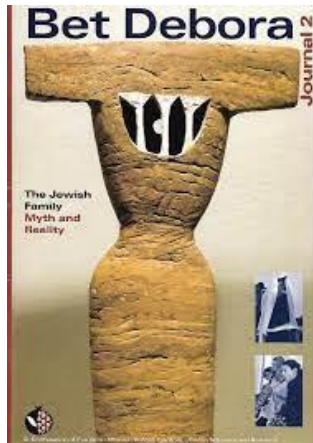
The Biblical Deborah was the inspiration for European Jewish feminists who founded Bet Debora in 1998: a forum with conferences, a journal, and a podcast.

About us

Debora's House of Learning

Bet Debora has been named after the Bible heroine Debora, who was a prophet, judge and politician.

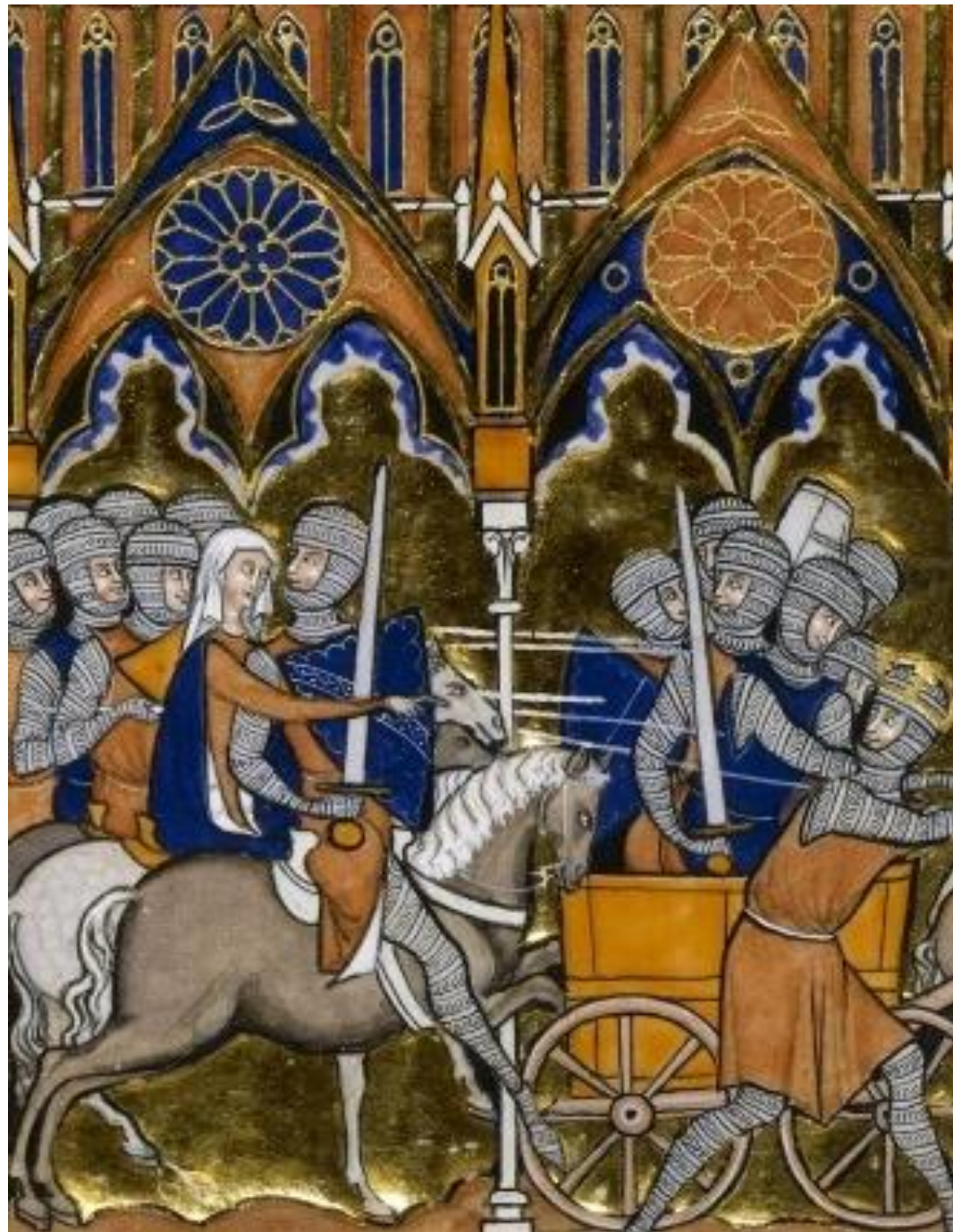
Bet Debora offers a forum for exchange between Jewish women in Europe open to women activists from all streams of Judaism, women artists, and women scholars as well as women rabbis, women cantors, and women community officials, and that it is characterized by scholarly, political, cultural, and artistic debates.



Each era views Deborah through
its own lens

Chivalric love?

Deborah and Barak go to battle.
Psalter of King Louis the Saint,
1260s





Nebraska State Capitol (sculptor Lee Lawrie, 1934)
"Deborah Judging Israel"

Which aspects of Deborah do these images reflect?



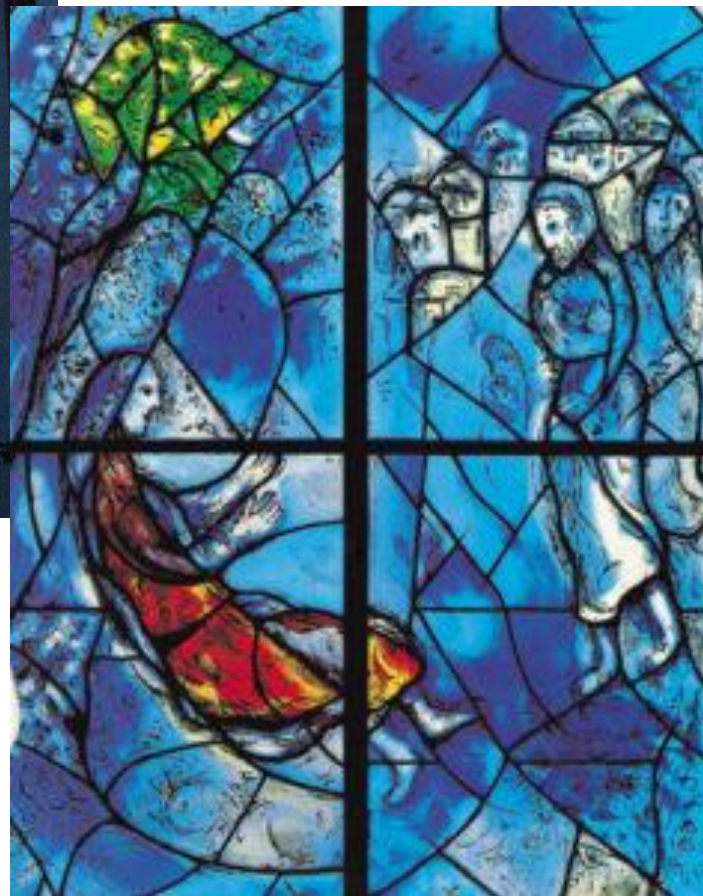
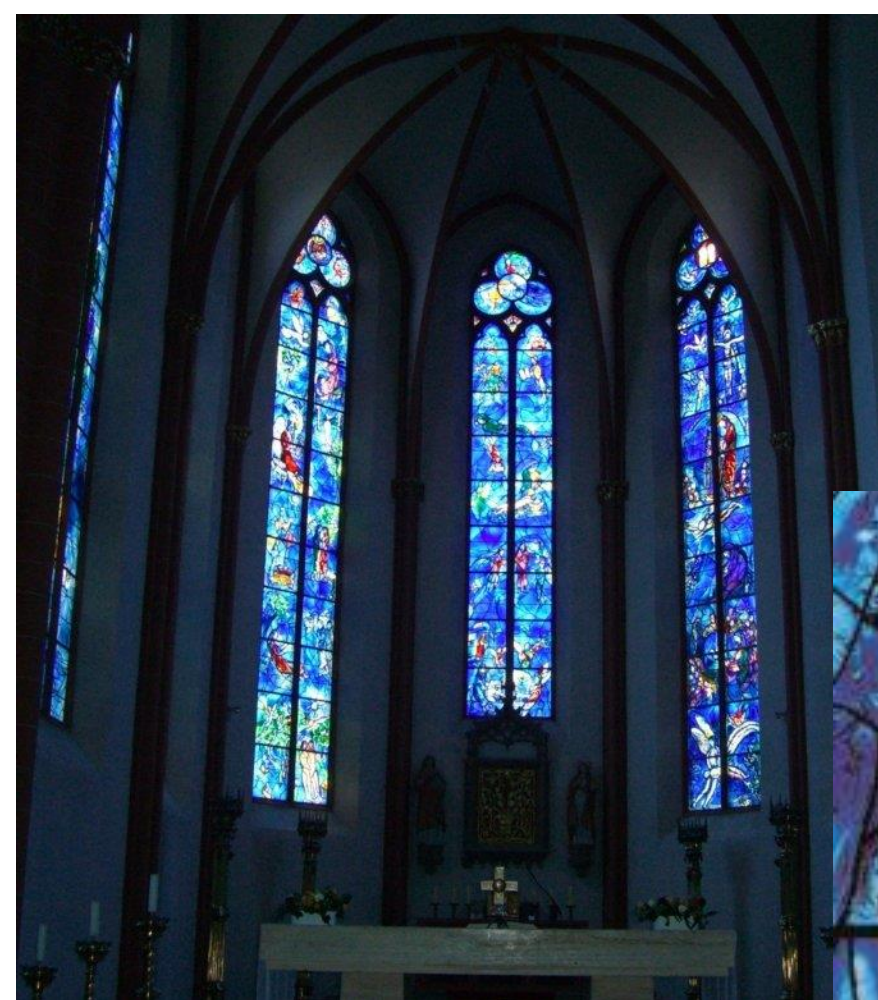
From "Tabitha's Daughters" website



Church dome in Tenancingo, Mexico



Adriene Cruz, "Deborah Under the Palm Tree" (1995)

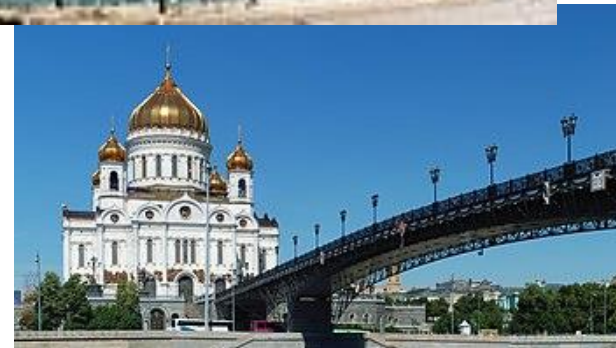


Chagall windows, Church of St. Stephan in Mainz, Germany

In 1973, Pastor Klaus Mayer contacted artist Marc Chagall (age 91) asking if he would create stained glass-windows for his church in Mainz, Germany as a symbol of German, French, and Jewish reconciliation. The project was completed in 1985.



Deborah sculpted by A.V. Loganovsky (1849)—rescued from blown-up Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow



Summary: Judges depicts a chaotic period. Discomfort with the idea of a woman leader and warrior caused reinterpretations of Deborah's image over centuries and a general sense of disapproval at times for unwomanly behavior.

Beginning in the late 20th c, however there has been increased emphasis on Deborah as a nurturing and powerful leader.

Questions?

The Modern Woman Warrior Leader



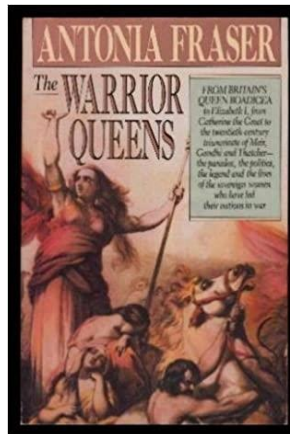
Golda Meir saluting Israeli paratroopers while carrying her handbag....part of her “grandmotherly uniform.”

Q: “What does it feel like to be a female Foreign Minister?”

Meir: “I don’t know, I’ve never been a male Foreign Minister.”



Margaret Thatcher at the 1983 G-7 Economic Summit in Williamsburg, VA. “Men were scared of that handbag. It contained secrets, it wielded power. It said ‘I am a woman, but I’m a better man than all of you.’” Forcible rebukes of other politicians came to be known as “handbaggings.”



“You arose, a mother in Israel”

אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

The persistence of goddess worship in ancient Israel:

While biblical monotheism was generally successful in absorbing the central ideas of polytheism and the functions and roles of goddesses, remnants of goddess worship remained.



Found at Megiddo
Probably Asherah
figurines



found in Lachish in Judah 800-600 BCE



Israel Museum—
Iron Age



Captive chiefs from Ramses III's Medinet Habu Palace:
a Philistine and Hittite chief
c.1184-1154 BC, tiles at Boston MFA

Archaeological mystery solved

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A 3,200-year-old round bronze tablet with a carved face of a woman, found at the El-ahwat excavation site near Katzir in central Israel, is part of a linchpin that held the wheel of a battle chariot in place. This was revealed by scientist Oren Cohen of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa. "Such an identification reinforces the claim that a high-ranking Egyptian or local ruler was based at this location, and is likely to support the theory that the site is Harosheth Haggoyim, the home town of Sisera, as mentioned in Judges 4-5," says Prof. Zertal.



Debbie Friedman singing “Devorah’s Song”

Chorus is from Judges 5:12

עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְּבוֹרָה עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְּבָרִי-שִׁיר

[“Arise, Arise, Sing a song!”]

Debbie Friedman, “Devorah’s Song” verse 3
(not included)

Devorah the prophet, a woman of fire, her
torch in hand,

She led the Israelites to victory.

Barak said “Devorah I cannot fight,

Unless you are standing right by my side!”

Devorah the prophet, Devorah a mother in
Israel...

Chorus

Arise arise, Devorah

Arise arise, and sing a song.

Arise arise, Devorah!

Uri, Uri, Dabri shir!



Erhard Schön, Twelve famous women of the Old Testament, German, ca. 1530
(Left to right: Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Jael), British Museum, Prints and Drawings, 1909,0612.6

Eve, Sarah,
Rebecca,
Rachel,
Leah, Jael,
Ruth,
Michal,
Abigail,
Judith,
Esther,
Susanna

16th Century Christian Books about Women Role Models: Chaste, Devout, and Modest

Which prominent Biblical women are missing?

Miriam and Deborah (they rarely appear in illustrations in this period).



2 Erhard Schön, *Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah and Jael*, first block of a woodcut of *Twelve exemplary woman of the Old Testament*. Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Sammlung der Kunstakademie



3 Erhard Schön, *Ruth, Michal, Abigail, Judith, Esther and Susanna*, second block of a woodcut of *Twelve exemplary woman of the Old Testament*. Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Sammlung der Kunstakademie

Early Christian Thinkers Struggled with the Role of Deborah

Paul's first epistle to Timothy, chapter 2

¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. ¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.



Saint Jerome (late 4th c CE) on Deborah: And to show that ... public duties were guided by the discipline of home life, Deborah brings forth from her home her son Barak as a leader of the army, that we may acknowledge that a widow can train a warrior; whom, as a mother, she taught and, as judge, placed in command, as, being herself brave, she trained him and, as a prophetess, sent to certain victory.