

**A Critical Analysis of Five Women
in the Book of Judges**

Rabbinic Thesis
Submitted by: Laurie Phillips
Presented to Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Spring 2003

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Analysis of Five Women In the Book of Judges	18
Chapter 3: Lesson Plans	54
Chapter 4: Conclusion	63
Bibliography	

Chapter 1

Introduction

The *Book of Judges* is one of the most fascinating and interesting books of the Biblical Hebrew canon. *Judges* has everything. There is drama and intrigue, emotion and intensity. The book is filled with complex characters covering a wide array of personalities. There is love and war, celebration and sadness. Chaos and despair permeate Israelite behavior. The entire book seems coated in desperation due to the fact that there is no real leader of Israel.

However, while the *Book of Judges* is filled with a multitude of dynamic elements, it is also one of the least known of all the texts in the Hebrew canon. Most people are unfamiliar with the depth and complexity of *Judges*. Therefore, in this thesis I plan to introduce the reader to that complexity and will do so through an analysis of five narratives that feature women as the central characters. I will demonstrate that the women in these narratives are crucial to one's understanding of *Judges*. They are used to reflect the situation of the Israelites, religiously, communally and politically. I also plan to demonstrate that the women in this book are examples that dispel the popular myth that women are absent in the Biblical canon.

In spite of its general unfamiliarity, there are selections that are exceptions and are very well known. Practically everyone is familiar with the legendary story of *Samson and Delilah*. It has been recreated and retold so often it is part of what makes up our cultural framework today. Initially it seems to be the quintessential story of two people who are completely and madly in love with one another. But like other stories in *Judges* the reader's expectations are undermined.

The story is filled with passion and lust. Desire coats the text as these two are joined together. The man with the overflowing curls, given to God¹ in exchange for his birth, he is handsome and strong, a seemingly unstoppable, mighty warrior hero. He has a secret. The woman, beautiful and seductive, she wants him with all her soul. She is clever and after several attempts, finally tricks him into revealing the source of his strength, his curls. Upon learning this she lures him into a trap and in the end strips him of his strength. Her true goal has been accomplished. Thus each of them has been unmasked. While emblematic of other stories of love and deceit, the *Book of Judges* is much more than a series of tangled love stories of lust and deceit. While emblematic of other stories of love and deceit, Samson and Delilah also represent the unmasking of male and female stereotypes within Judges, a pressing interest of the present work.

The book of Judges describes one of the most critical times in Israelite history. As the book opens, Israel is starting a new life in Canaan, the land that has been promised to them by their God. These are the first stages of a nation defining itself. The *Book of Judges* begins with the verse "And behold after the death of Joshua the Israelites questioned in their God saying 'who will raise us up to the Canaanites in the beginning to fight them?'"(1:1) Since no leader has been appointed the question illustrates the endless possibilities as well as the desire on the part of the Israelites to have a leader. The verse also poses the central problem of Judges: Who will lead? What kind of leader is desirable? What are the consequences of a lack in leadership or the wrong leadership?

¹ It should be noted that a variety of names will be used to represent God. This is to demonstrate that the author is not committed to any one title for the Divine. It is the hope of the author that people will become

The book of Judges should pick up where Joshua left off. "Once the great conquest of Canaan was completed, the book of Joshua related in great detail how the Israelite leader divided the land – now mostly cleared of the indigenous Canaanite population – among the victorious Israelite tribes as their eternal inheritances."² We should be able to expect a continuation of the generations of Moshe. While wandering through the desert on their way to the promised land, Moshe is busy teaching the laws of Yahweh to the people. "In Deuteronomy, Moses had promised the Israelite nation that if they strictly observed the laws of the covenant, shunned intermarriage with their neighbors, and scrupulously avoided entanglement in the pagan ways of Canaan, they would be forever secure in their possession of the promised land."³ Judges should provide a natural continuation illustrating the growth and success of the people. However this is not the case. Judges contradicts the events of Joshua and the promise made in Deuteronomy. "...the book of Judges makes it clear that many Canaanites...live in close proximity to the Israelites...intermarriage was not unheard of"⁴ Thus another problem posed in Judges concerns Israel's relationship to the indigenous population.

The seemingly positive nature of the book's opening quickly disintegrates as we read about the events leading to the demise and downfall of the people. By the book's close the country has fallen into complete despair and lawlessness. They are left fractured from one another and God. The final verse captures the state of affairs: "In those days

more comfortable with many representations for Adonai.

² Finkelstein and Silberman, "The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts." The Free Press, New York, NY, 2001, p.97.

³ Ibid, p. 97.

⁴ Ibid, p. 98.

there was no king in Yisra'el: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."(21:25)

By the end of the book, the Israelites are completely estranged from their Lord.

Throughout the Hebrew canon a pattern evolves that characterizes the nature of the relationship between the Israelites and *Hashem*. Initially there is a strong relationship between God and the Israelites. A relationship based on faith and trust. God is the savior, the redeemer. Then the Israelites become attracted to the ways of their neighbors. They transgress, thus fracturing their relationship and distancing themselves from *Adonai*. Terrible things happen to the Israelites as a result of their lack of faith and they suffer under the hands of their enemies. The Israelites call out to God for help, and God redeems them. Their faith is renewed, and the relationship is once again restored, until they transgress once more. This cycle continues throughout the narratives of the sacred texts.

The book of Judges is no exception. Indeed, it is the exemplar of the cycle. The cycle is repeated several times, casting the Israelites in a very dark light. They are a community in chaos, fractured from themselves as well as *Yahweh*. The book is filled with violence and greed. There is a significant lack of leadership. Of the few people who are leaders, most do not exhibit characteristics worthy of their title. The people are completely faithless and convey a tremendous distance between themselves and the Divine. The reader would naturally anticipate a time when the Israelites, upon realizing their mistake, call out to *Adonai* for saving. Here is where the *Book of Judges* stands in a unique

position. The Israelites call out to God only in the first half of the book. As the text progresses they seem to rely solely on themselves and do not elicit God's help.

In the second half of the book it as though they have forgotten their faith completely. At moments when one would expect God to fulfill the Divine duty of saving the people, *his* people, *his nation*, *Hashem* does no such thing. The people are left to suffer the consequences of their actions and their choices. The Israelites are never ultimately redeemed. They are never saved. They are left to their own devices to solve their problems. Their faith is not restored. The relationship between the *Divine* and the people is left in a fractured state.

There is a pattern that continues until the very end of the book. The final verse reads "In these days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right⁵ in his eyes." This can be understood to be the reason behind all of the problems the Israelites faced throughout the events of the book. The fact that there was no king, no leader is the reason why the Israelites strayed from their Lord. The lack of leadership explains why so much hardship fell upon the Israelites. This verse indicates a break in the pattern. Israel needs a king. This hint "prepares the reader for the books of *Samuel* through *Kings* which recounts Israel's dynastic period."⁶

The cyclical nature of the relationship between God and the Israelites, similar events and language are all reflected in various books of the Torah including Genesis, Numbers and

⁵ Lit. straight

⁶ T. Schneider, "Judges," xii (2000).

Deuteronomy. The distinction between the events of those books and Judges is that God is not playing the role of intervener. The people are making all of the decisions and they are made to suffer the consequences. In Genesis, an angel comes and stops Abraham just as he is about to slaughter his son Isaac's throat. In Judges, there are no angels coming down to protect and save the Israelites from harm. The Israelites are alone, they are left to their own resources to fend for themselves. There is no real plan. Their actions seem impulsive and reactionary and reflect an immature stage of communal development. The community has not fully absorbed the teachings of Moshe. They need to establish themselves as a nation and yet every step they take in that direction fails. Their actions move them farther away from reaching a stable political and social system.

Who are these Israelite people? How are we to understand the notion of nationhood during this time? "The book of Judges presents an extraordinarily rich collection of thrilling war stories and tales of individual heroism in the battles between the Israelites and their neighbors."⁷ The people know that in order to avoid punishment and be rewarded they need to remain separate from the indigenous peoples. If they do not abide by this rule "...divine punishment will be swift and severe."⁸ The people do not listen. The Lord raises up Judges and yet they did not listen. Why? Are the people simply defying the laws they have been taught? Or is there another explanation? Finkelstein and Silberman raise the issue of accuracy surrounding the events of the Bible.

Is the Bible relating a version of history as it really happened? Did the Israelites worship one God for centuries, but sometimes slip into the

⁷ Ibid, p. 99.

⁸ Ibid, p. 100.

polytheism of their neighbors? More generally, how did they live? What was their culture like? Beyond the tales of ongoing struggle with idolatry, the Bible tells us very little of the day-to-day life of the Israelites. From the book of Joshua we learn mostly about the precise borders of the various tribal allotments. In Judges we read about the battles with Israel's enemies, but we hear very little about the kind of settlements the Israelites chose to establish and how they supported themselves. After centuries as immigrant laborers in Egypt and forty years' wandering in the desolate wilderness of Sinai, they could not have been well prepared to begin farming the narrow valleys and rugged upland fields of Canaan. How did they learn to become settled farmers and so quickly adapt to the routine and struggles of settled village life?⁹

The discovery of the Merneptah stele concluded that by 1207 BCE there was a people named "Israel" living in Canaan. It did not reveal information about exact location, size or nature of this people. There were few who doubted that the Israelites were immigrants who came to and settled in Canaan. "Though the Israelites might not have marched into Canaan as a unified army, the signs of their arrival seemed to be clear."¹⁰ The encampments of the Israelites were rough. This is in direct contrast to the lifestyle of the previous inhabitants of the land. The discoveries of the Canaanite cities included fine ceramic vessels, huge structures and imported luxury items. The Israelites revealed a much lower level of civilization. In the 1920's the German biblical scholar Albrecht Alt put forth the "peaceful-infiltration" model based on this comparison in lifestyle. "Alt suggested that the Israelites were pastoralists who wandered with their flocks in fixed seasonal migrations between the fringe of the desert and the settled lands."¹¹ He concluded, although without certainty that they settled the "highlands of Canaan" at the end of the Late Bronze Age.

⁹ Ibid, p. 101.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 101.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 102.

Alt described the beginning of the process as rather peaceful and gradual. The Israelites would slowly develop more settled lifestyles represented by the establishment of permanent villages along with larger scale and more sophisticated methods of agriculture. Conflicts over land and water rights began as more and more people immigrated to the new land. This led to the struggles between Israel and their neighbors that are illustrated in the book of Judges. While the Merneptah stele only named the people "Israel," Egyptian records mentioned two groups of outsiders who came to inhabit the land of Canaan, the Apiru and the Shosu. Perhaps these two groups framed the nucleus of what came to be known as Israel?

The Apiru are described as living outside Canaanite society, uprooted from their homes as a result of famine and war. They are even described as soldiers for hire. They were often hired as laborers to help with government building projects. They were not well liked and eventually the term Apiru spread throughout the entire Near East and became a term denoting a specific socioeconomic level rather than a specific people or ethnic group.¹² According to Finkelstein and Silberman, some early scholars claimed a connection between the word Apiru and *Ivri*, or Hebrew concluding that the Apiru in Egypt were really Israelites. However, this has never been completely substantiated. The Shosu were nomads, sheep and goat herders living mainly in the frontier regions of Canaan and Transjordan.

¹² "It is possible that the phenomenon of the Apiru may have been remembered in later centuries and incorporated into the biblical narratives." (Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 103)

Alt's theory came into question during the 1970's. The new findings established the groups as being far more integrated. The American biblical historian and sociologist, Norman Gottwald, (building on the American biblical scholar George Mendenhall), suggested the Israelites were actually peasant rebels. They argued their theory based mainly on Egyptian records of the Tell el-Amarna tablets.

The tablets revealed an increase in stratification of Canaan in the later part of the Late Bronze Age, precisely at the moment that the situation in Egypt became unbearable. People had no choice but to leave and resettle in new frontiers. "Many resettled in the highlands away from Canaanite and Egyptian control. And in their new homeland these peasant rebels established amore equal society – less stratified and less rigid. In doing so, they became 'Israelites.'"¹³ This theory has no archaeological evidence to support it and there is evidence that the Canaanite society began to be impoverished as early as the sixteenth century. Therefore it would be highly unlikely that a mass of new settlers would have established themselves up in the highlands.

In the late 1960's a new wave of Israeli archaeologists began to investigate with a new goal "to explore, map, and analyze the ancient landscape of the hill country – rather than only dig."¹⁴ This new approach yielded the discovery of the remains of a dense network of highland villages. An Israeli archaeologist, Yohanan Aharoni was able to determine that these villages were established within the span of several generations around 1200 BCE. About two hundred and fifty communities suddenly sprang up and these were the

¹³ Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 105.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 106.

first Israelites. There are numerous sources confirming that people who called themselves Israelites continuously occupied this area well into the period of the monarchies. Between 900 and 586 BCE the "settlement system develops and reaches over 500 sites."¹⁵ It is also estimated that the inhabitants occupied over 500 sites with a population of about 160,000.

The study of the region continued to reveal a great deal of information about the Israelites. Between 3500 and 586 BCE there were three major settlement waves. "...each of the three waves is characterized by roughly similar material culture – pottery, architecture and a village plan – that was probably a result of similar environmental and economic conditions."¹⁶ Bones belonging to cattle, sheep and goat were discovered as was the use of the plow. When conditions were good the established communities were joined by groups of nomads. "One segment of this society specializes in agriculture while the other continues the traditional herding of sheep and goats."¹⁷ Middle Eastern societies have always been comprised of farmers and nomads. These two groups always maintained an "interdependent economic relationship."¹⁸ The nomads need the marketplace to obtain grains and other agricultural products. The villagers are dependent on the nomads for meat and dairy products. This was the situation for three centuries of Egyptian rule. However, in the middle of the Late Bronze Age the political system of the Egyptians collapsed. The pastoral nomad and the villager could no longer co-exist.

¹⁵ Ibid, see chart on p. 114.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 115.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 117.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 117.

The villagers were forced to concentrate on providing enough grain for their own needs. They could not produce a surplus and therefore the nomads had to begin producing their own. With a greater emphasis on agriculture there was a reduction in seasonal migrations. This process is the opposite of that which is described in the Bible. Israelite society was the outcome of the collapse of Canaanite culture, not the cause.

And most Israelites did not come from outside Canaan – they emerged from within it. There was no mass Exodus from Egypt. There was no violent conquest of Canaan. Most of the people who formed early Israel were local people- the same people whom we see in the highlands throughout the Bronze Ages. The early Israelites were – irony of ironies – themselves originally Canaanites!¹⁹

In other areas of the highlands, east of Jordan the same pattern of ups and downs of sedentary activity, the same crisis in the Late Bronze Age and the same wave of settlement was traced through the Iron Age I. The description of the villages in the highlands west of the Jordan can also be used as a description of early Moabite villages. The interesting fact here is that there are other biblical and non-biblical sources that indicate that people who lived east of the Jordan did not become Israelites. "They formed the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom."²⁰ What characteristic would reflect and Israelite society? How were they unique from their neighbors?

There were many similarities between the inhabitants of these areas. The material left by those who became the first Israelites "offers no clear indication of their dialect, religious rituals, costume, or burial practices."²¹ Earlier highland settlements did reveal pig bones. However, no pig bones were found at the excavations of early Israelite settlements.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 118.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 119.

"Throughout the Iron Age - of the Israelite monarchies - pigs were not cooked and eaten, or raised in the highlands."²² Data from coastal Phillistine settlements revealed large quantities of pig bones. "Monotheism and the traditions of Exodus and covenant might have come much later."²³ It is not clear why the early Israelites chose to stop eating meat half a millennium before the establishment of the dietary laws.

While we can never be absolutely certain as to the historical accuracy of the book of Judges, it is clear that the tales in the book were developed and written down through the centuries after the purported events. According to Finkelstein and Silberman: "The books most significant feature is a overall literary pattern that describes Israel's history in the period after the conquest as a repeating cycle of sin, divine retribution, and salvation (2:11-19). Only in the last verse (21:25) is there a hint that the cycle can be broken - with the establishment of a monarchy."²⁴ It is also true that while the elements of many of the conflicts between Israel and other nations "feature many different settings and characters, they are all used to illustrate an uneasy relationship between God and his people."²⁵ God delivers the Israelites from Egypt and brings them to the promised land. In return the Israelites are sinners. The people are ungrateful and Yahweh is angry and disappointed.

The book of Judges demonstrates the people's continued failure. They repeatedly betray Yahweh by running off to worship foreign gods. The punishment for this straying is

²¹ Ibid, p. 119.

²² Ibid, p. 119.

²³ Ibid, p. 120.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 120.

deliverance into the hands of their enemies. As a result of terrible pain and suffering, hopefully the Israelites will call to Yahweh for help. Upon hearing their cries Yahweh appoints a leader who will lead them to triumph over their adversaries. "Theology, not history, is central. Covenant, promise, apostasy, repentance and redemption constitute the cyclical sequence that runs throughout the book of Judges."²⁶ It is to that theology I now turn.

The faith of the Israelites in Yahweh nearly disappears by the end of the book of Judges. I will argue that the most significant feature in the book of Judges that helps reflect the theological trends of the people is the use of female characters. I will turn to the topic women as a whole in the next portion. In chapter two, I will illustrate this point through the analysis of several female characters. I will outline critical events and scenes in the book that reflect a decline in the people's faith system. No longer does Israel turn to *Yahweh* in distress. No longer do the people turn to *Yahweh* in crisis like they did in the wilderness and at Sinai. It is my belief that this system, which is portrayed throughout the Tanach was developed by men. The behavior of the women indicates a commitment to maintaining the covenantal system of previous generations. Deborah follows God's instructions, *Bat-Yiftach* does not argue with her father. In fact she insists that he follow through with his vow. The story of the *pilegish* of the *Ish-Levi* reveals only compliance. She never argues with her father or the Levite man. The women are loyalists, the men stray.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 120.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 121. The articles by Mark Smith and Ronald Hendel disagree with this claim. Their research suggests that the Israelites, just like other groups, were following the common practice of worshipping more than one Deity.

The *Book of Judges* includes a significant number of women. There are thirteen different women featured in the book. Some of the women are nameless and introduced according to the male figure that owns them. But many of them are introduced by their own name and title. They run the gamut from a judge and prophetess to a sacrificial daughter, from mother and wife to harlot and concubine. They are leaders and act independently from the expected stereotype of a silent character obeying the words of her master in order to care for the needs of her family and perpetuate the tribal name through her reproduction capabilities.

The beginning and the end of the book stand in sharp contrast to each other. During the events of the book the women move from power to ultimate powerlessness. In the beginning the voices of the women are loud and equal to that of their counterparts. The women demonstrate tremendous courage and strength. They are aware of the reality of the situation and it is the women who often take matters into their own hands in an attempt to secure a state of unity and calm. Up until the very end they preserve elements of strength, as though they refuse to give up without a good fight. But, their strength is eventually depleted and they are ultimately defeated. In the end the women are brought to a place of total silence.

The distinctions between women of strength and women who are victims are glaring.

The *Book of Judges* is filled with portraits of women defying gender expectations. They are negotiators, leaders in battle, recipients of God's message, killers, targets and idolators. The book also contains episodes of women victimized through the horrible

actions of men, foolish and cowardly men who use women to cover up their own mistakes. These women demonstrate the horrible situation in which many women lived. They are tortured and killed through no fault of their own. They remind us how dangerous life was for women during this time. Most significantly, they illustrate the depths of the despair the Israelites are now facing. The women in the *Book of Judges* are used as mirrors reflecting the character of the men with whom they are associated. They are often used to highlight negative characteristics of their male counterparts. The women in the book are often used to characterize men in a bad way. They reflect the terrible instability of the Israelite nation, especially in a time of volatile leadership and governance.

The *Book of Judges* covers the period of Israeli's tribal confederacy prior to the monarchy. The country, though unified by a common need for self-defense, is not unified politically. Public institutions and structures have not yet been developed or implemented. As a result of the Israelite's lack of formal structure of government and community room is left open for relationships that are more egalitarian between the sexes. In *Discovering Eve*, Carol Meyers writes that:

...the absence in early Israel of developed hierarchies in political and economic spheres created an atmosphere that would have allowed for nonhierarchical gender relationships... Cross-cultural analogies suggests that both males and females worked very hard and contributed nearly equally to the demands of establishing arable plots of land and eking out a living from them in the rocky, seasonably arid hillsides of the Palestinian highlands.²⁷

²⁷ Meyers, Carol. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1988, p. 169.

Meyers concludes: "When public society is not highly differentiated from the domestic realm, the role of women is significant."²⁸ This is the socio-economic situation as the *Book of Judges* opens, and it is reflected in the status of women like *Achsah*, the bold daughter and wife, *Deborah*, the prophetess and leader, and *Ya'el*, the courageous fighter. According to Jo Ann Hackett, we should not be surprised by the position of these women. Centralized governments did not exist, the line between public and private sectors was not well defined and there was serious social dysfunction among the Israelite community. This is precisely when women held more prominent positions.²⁹ By the time *Judges* ends, however, the well-being of the budding nation is completely threatened by pressures from within the society, because of an expanding population, and from without, because of the increasing military threats from the *Philistines*. Centralization is needed for survival and, indeed, *Judges* is the prelude to *Samuel* and the establishment of the monarchy.

The chaotic pre-monarchical time is reflected in the concluding portrait of the *Book of Judges*, that of the Levite's concubine, who is both gang-raped and cut into twelve pieces. Adrien Janis Bledstein observes that, at this juncture: "Men's disregard for women is symptomatic of lawlessness and violence. The place of women among men

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 175.

²⁹ For further reading see, Bellis, Alice Ogden. *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes*. Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1994, pp. 116-118. In the Oxford History of the Biblical World, Edited by Michael Coogan, Jo Ann Hackett underscores this even more by explaining that *Judges* reflects a time "without centralized or permanent religious, political and military administration, a time in which there was considerable disruption from external powers." (191) These are the precise factors that provide women with access to positions of authority. It is also a time when the leader is determined by ability and not by lineage. Hackett goes on to explain that it is a question of who can complete the mission at hand. This is a reflection of a society that acts locally and not globally. "Power is charismatic rather than regularized." (191)

reaches an all-time low."³⁰ The *Book of Judges* begins with an uncertainty as to who will lead the nation and ends with even greater uncertainty. In addition, whatever chance for unity among all of the tribes existed in the beginning of the *Book*, has completely disappeared. The images in the opening chapter are used again in the final chapter to reinforce the depth of the terrible state in which the Israelites find themselves. We have come full circle from the promise of the opening of *Judges*. This point is expressed by Danna Nolan Fewell & David M. Gunn:

The ending of the book is filled with echoes of its beginning – Judah leading the fight (1:1-2), a story of dismemberment (1:5-7), a woman on a donkey (1:11-15) – all images that have been skewed in the course of time... The woman on the donkey rides not erect and determined to secure life for herself and her family, but limp and immobile, a victim of violence, the embodiment of betrayal and death.³¹

³⁰ Bledstein, Adrien Janis. "Is Judges a Woman's Satire?" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993, pp. 51-52.

³¹ Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M. "Possessed and Dispossessed," chapter in *Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993, p. 135

Chapter 2
Five Women in the Book of Judges

At first glance one might think that the Book of *Judges* is about men. One might think that "it is about the great men who led Israel during her premonarchical days: Othniel, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon."³² This would be in line with most of the narratives in the Bible. The first verse records the death of the previous Israelite leader, Joshua. There is no mention of who shall take his place. One might expect the book to focus primarily on the particular theme of who shall be appointed to lead the people? What type of leader will best serve the Israelite nation? In fact much of the subsequent narrative struggles with this topic. We encounter many examples of leadership to help provide an answer to this very question.

The setting is a battle field, a scene typically reserved as an arena for men. The chapter continues from verse two through twenty-six recounting the actions of other men.

Joshua's name is invoked again in chapter two with a eulogizing of his many great deeds.

The book of *Judges* is about men. But the book is also very much about women. In the very first chapter we are also introduced to *Achsah*. She is the booty for battle victory.

There is a continuous intermingling of male and female concerns throughout the entire text. *Judges* attempts to determine the true character of men through their treatment of women as well as through the actions of the women themselves.

"Scattered throughout this book are....women whose stories are interspersed with tales of men and women who...exert themselves in the narrative as actors in their own right."³³

The book features a significant number of women.

³² S. Ackerman, "Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen," (1998), 2.

³³ Ibid, 3.

Ethnically, they are a mixed lot: most are Israelite, but Ya'el is Kenite, Sisera's mother is a Canaanite, and the Timinite woman is Philistine. In terms of social status, they also run the gamut, from virtual chattel – the Levite's concubine of *Judges* 19 – to nobles and aristocrats – the chieftain's daughter *Achsah* in *Judges* 1. Even more remarkable are the ways in which *Judges'* women can be depicted in defiance of traditional gender expectations. While many are identified using the typical female epithets of wife, mother, mistress, daughter, sister, and bride, others are describe in ways not usually associated with the female spheres.³⁴

There are many women in the *Book of Judges* who are introduced by name. This is not a very common feature of our sacred texts. There are women who deconstruct the typical image of women of ancient times. "Devorah, Ya'el, and the woman of Thebez, for example, are all noteworthy for the actions they take within the traditionally male domain of battle, and Devorah is also described as a religious functionary (a prophet) and as one of Israeli's political leaders (a judge). Elsewhere in biblical tradition, these offices are occupied almost exclusively by men."³⁵ They are independent, demonstrate strength and take initiative. They are cast in a light that is counter to most other portraits of female characters in the Bible. These women take charge of their own destiny. Some of these women are in leadership positions, so also take charge of the future of the nation. They act independent from their male protectors. In fact it is often the men who need protection from the women.

There are also women who defy the expected role of most women in the Bible. Most women are named as the property of their father or husband, the daughter of this man or the daughter of that man. They are the vessels that carry the next generation. They are

³⁴ Ibid, 5.

³⁵ Ibid, 5.

the vehicles by which the Israelite nation can prosper. Women of the bible are critical toward God's promise to fruition. Often the women of the Bible are generally seen as having one mission, to perpetuate the lineage. They are vessels by which future generations shall inhabit the earth. In many instances they are bystanders, onlookers to the events taking place. They are often absent and unnamed. There are examples throughout the Tanach where women are named and extend the boundaries of what is typically expected. However, even in the cases of such women as Tamar and Rebecca, their goal remains in line with the larger goal of the Bible, to increase the patriarchal line in order to fulfill God's promise to Abraham.

In Genesis there is a theme of prolonged barrenness. In Exodus, the goal of women is to preserve the lives of Hebrew sons. Generally all of the women assume the same role, continuation of the patriarchal line. They are often marginalized and set in the background to the men. Women fulfill the role of serving the "androcentric agenda."³⁶ It seems to be acceptable when women are barely seen and barely heard. However, the Book of *Judges* provides many examples of scenes containing women who are portrayed in very exaggerated terms. There are women who hold major military positions, typically reserved for men. There are women who take initiative, demonstrate independence from male characters and portray a very different picture of what normally characterizes women of this time. There are also women in the Book of *Judges* who are oppressed and abused way beyond the accepted level of discrimination. In my opinion, the scenes featuring *bat-Yiftach* and the *pilegish* of the *ish-Levi* are the two most difficult scenes in the entire Tanach. Two completely innocent women lose their lives as a result of the

actions of two men, a father and a master/husband³⁷. Men who are supposed to protect their welfare end up ignoring their responsibilities in order to protect their own interests.

It almost seems as if the women actually understand what is happening to the people. Their loyalty to the act in accordance with covenantal relationship between the Israelites and God, gives the impression that they can see the reality behind the events that are taking place. The fact that they comply and do not resist seems to convey an understanding that the Israelites have no real leader and are in a state of despair and chaos. They recognize the lack of unity between tribes and know that the situation is going to get a lot worse before it improves. Otherwise, why would they do what they do? How could they stand by and let terrible things happen? The women of this book appear during critical points. They are present before and after battle, they are also present when important decisions need to be made and they seem to appear when the Israelite nation is in a completely fractured place, in a state of despair. There are also instances where God does not speak to the men but only directly with the women. This happens with Deborah and *eshet-Manoach*. Why would *Adonai* include them in the dialogue? Why does *Hashem* select them to be the instruments for passing along the words of the Divine?

Throughout the Book of *Judges* women are used to characterize men. They are used as tools in order to reveal the weaknesses of the men. The women of *Judges* are mirrors reflecting the depths to which the Israelites have sunk. There is no leader and the people

³⁶ Ibid, 6.

are without form or unity. They are in a state of chaos and despair and it is the women who reveal this terrible situation. This section of the paper will focus on only five of the twelve women in the *Book of Judges*. *Achsah*, *Devorah*, *Ya'el*, *Bat-Yiftach* and the *pilegish* of the *Ish-Levi* are five individual women with individual stories. While they merit individual attention, weaving their stories together enables the sharp contrasts of the various elements of the book to be discovered and analyzed. They reflect the exaggerated portrayal of females throughout the book. These five women highlight the need for leadership and unification within Israelite society. The roles they play are so exaggerated that they contain a surreal like quality.

There is a level of absurdity to each of them. The absurdity exists to point to the culture of instability. How likely is it for a woman, upon being offered up as a reward, like property, would speak out in place of her husband, in order to secure her future? Could a woman really hold the primary leadership position within Israelite society? Could she also serve as the highest ranked officer of the military? Is it conceivable that a woman would be the person to defeat one of Israel's greatest enemies? Is it possible that woman would be willing to go along with her father's thoughtless vow to offer her as a sacrifice to God? And finally, is it possible that the Israelites have reached the level of despair where a man can actually be supported for allowing his "wife" to be gang raped and then cutting her up as a sign to demonstrate the need for war? This is exactly what happens to these five women in the book of *Judges*.

³⁷ Due to the use of different language throughout the text the status of the woman is unclear. Is she a concubine? Is she a wife?

There are two groups of women reflected in these five characters. *Achsah*, *Devorah* and *Ya'el* represent the strong, courageous women of the book. They are initiators and instigators. They have power and often behave in a manner that is counter to most women in the Hebrew canon. *Bat-Yiftach* and the *pilegish* are victims. Through no fault of their own they are silenced by their deaths. These two groups of women reflect the deep contrasts represented throughout the book. They help the reader understand the depths to which the Israelites have sunk. The community is not a community. They have no real leadership and as a result are suffering tremendously. The contrasts between these two groups of women reflect the critical need for the Israelites to find a strong leader who can bring them to a meaningful place communally, politically and religiously. The Israelites need a leader who can restore their faith in God, unify them as one nation and secure their place within the context of the greater society. They parallel the general state of society. Just as the women in individual stories mirror their male counterparts, so too does the fate of the women in *Judges* parallel the state of *Yisrael* by its end. These five women represent the future of the Israelites without a leader who can accomplish these goals.

1. *Achsah*

As stated above, the book begins with the question of who will be the next leader of the people. Joshua is dead and there is a question of who will follow in his place? What will happen to the people? What will they do in the meantime? We don't need to guess for very long. In verse two, God tells Judah that the land (to be conquered) will be placed in his hands. Judah responds to God's words by sharing them with his brother

Simon and the two of them rise up in battle against the designated foe. Hashem has already made it known that they will be victorious and of course they are. The tribe of Judah³⁸ invites his brother tribe Simon to join him and the two of them go on to conquer the Canaanites and Prizites. In typical biblical fashion, God is the source of all victories. "Then Judah went up and *Adonai* gave the Canannites and the Prizites into their hands; and they defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek." (1:4)

Verses five through eight describe the continuation of the Israelite victory until the final conquest of Jerusalem. The tribe of Judah continues with its troops in their efforts to wipe out all of the Canaanites inhabiting the land. They conquer Chevron, formerly Kiryat Arabah, and they defeat "*Sheshi*, and *Achiman* and *Talamai*." (1:10) From there they head towards Dvir (formerly Kiryat-Sefer). But, before taking any action Kaleb³⁹ declares that "Whoever attacks Kiryat-Sefer and takes it, I will give him *Achsah* my daughter as [a] wife." (1:13) Through Kaleb's vow⁴⁰ we are introduced to our first female character, by name. "*Achsah* is the first woman introduced into the *Judges* narrative and serves as a starting point for how women are treated at the beginning of the period."⁴¹ "She functions as the model to which other women's situations in *Judges* are evaluated."⁴² The fact that she is introduced by her name, and not her lineage, alerts the

³⁸ The person for which each tribe was named has died a long time ago. References to the individual name is a reference to the tribe.

³⁹ According to the Anchor Bible (p. 19) this is the same Kaleb listed in Joshua 15:13. Kaleb and Joshua are the only two spies in Deuteronomy who are allowed to enter the land of Canaan.

⁴⁰ According to Tammi J. Schneider, "This is the first time that a promise or oath is made before a battle in *Judges*." (p. 11)

⁴¹ Schneider, Tammi J.. "Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry," edited by David W. Cotter. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2000, p. 12.

⁴² Ibid, p. 17.

reader that she may be defined on her own terms (and that something significant might occur in the future).

It is not clear why Kaleb needs to make such a promise. The Israelites were on a consistent path of conquering the land. They were succeeding in their mission towards wiping out all of the inhabitants from Canaan. Perhaps the offering of his daughter is a sign of his lack of faith in God? Perhaps Kaleb doesn't completely trust that God will deliver as promised? While we are unable to know for certain why Kaleb makes the vow, we are certain that he does so in order to motivate the males.⁴³ Kaleb offers an incentive to the fighters. *Achsah* is the prize for victory. We will see this again, later on in chapter eleven with the daughter of *Yiftach*. She too is offered as a reward for victory, but to God. Othniel, son of Kenaz, Kaleb's younger brother succeeds and Kaleb keeps his word. Kaleb gives his daughter, *Achsah* to him for a wife.

"The text takes no note of *Achsah*'s attitude toward the marriage or the legitimacy of such a contest to win a bride."⁴⁴ In verse fourteen we experience *Achsah*'s bold independence. Initially she asks her husband to make the request but it is *Achsah* herself that approaches her father. As the verse reads, "*vatiznach me'al hachamor.*" "And she descended from upon her ass." The use of this specific verb *tz-n-ch* denotes a grand entrance.⁴⁵ She is a purposeful woman. *Achsah* is an instigator, taking charge of her own destiny. Her behavior echoes that of Zelophechad's five daughters in Numbers 27:1-11. Upon the death of their father they come to Moshe demanding an inheritance despite the

⁴³ This foreshadow's *Yiftach*'s [unnecessary] vow to offer his daughter as victory reward.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.12.

fact that they are not married and without brothers. God hears their demands and tells Moshe to grant their request. *Achsah* is dissatisfied with the land her father has given her (and her husband) and demands that he give her additional pools of water.

Her independence is marked by the construction of the story and specifically by the use of the verb *l-t-t*, "to give." In the first part of the story, when Kaleb is pronouncing the vow and again when he *gives* her to Othniel, *Achsah* is spoken of passively. She is an object of other's actions. Later, she takes control of the situation. She asks her father, "*havvah li brachah*," (1:15) to give her a blessing, and the pools of water.⁴⁶ He *gives* them to her. Through her own initiative she has moved from being acted upon to being the actor. *Achsah* makes the request very personal by stating it in first person, "and you gave it to me." (1:15) She is securing her future separate from any relationship she has with her husband.

"When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field." (1:14a) This is the turning point for *Achsah*, her switch from object to subject. *Vayehi bviah*, she comes to her husband and asks him to prevail upon her father. Lillian R. Klein suggests that *Achsah* gets her way by using her sexuality and she claims that, "...*Judges*...extols women who take the initiative within the constraints of patriarchal mores."⁴⁷ Klein accomplishes this by interpreting *bviah* "in her coming," as "a word-phrase which refers

⁴⁵ The same exact wording is found in Joshua 15:14-18.

⁴⁶ Schneider points out that this is unusual for two reasons. First "It is unusual for women to speak in *Judges*, so the use of the imperative especially with her father is shocking." Second, not only does *Achsah* ask for a blessing, "but defined the content, a specific parcel of land, leading some to translate the word in question as "present" instead of blessing (JPS, SRV) p. 15.

⁴⁷ Klein, "The Book of *Judges*: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, p. 58.

both to her coming to her bridegroom and to sexual intercourse."⁴⁸ Klein suggests that *Achsah* chooses an optimal moment to speak to Othniel: "A second implication of the phrase 'as she came' suggests that *Achsah* waited until the marriage was consummated to express her wishes; more pointedly, she waited until after sexual intercourse to make her wishes known."⁴⁹ In other words *Achsah* is astute and understands that, after sexual intercourse, Othniel would be more receptive to his wife's request."⁵⁰

I find Klein's argument interesting from a linguistic point of view. The use of the verb "to come" is used to denote sexual behaviors. And it would also foreshadow Ya'el's actions later on with Sisera.⁵¹ However, it is difficult to accept that *Achsah* waited for anything. The rhythm of the text seems to indicate that events occurred rather quickly and with intent. If this is true then why did *Achsah* initially ask her husband to make the request? Why didn't she make the request right as her father was giving her as a prize to the victor? She lives in certain period of time. She is fully aware of her position and the position of women within society. She asks her husband to make the request, rides along side him to her father. But, once they are there she leaves nothing to chance. She descends from upon her ass and makes the request herself.

Vatisiteihu, "the verb *s-w-t* means, "to allure, incite, instigate."⁵² "*Achsah*'s precise action is controversial...It is difficult to know what *Achsah*'s precise action was, but it was an attempt to persuade Othniel, through whatever means, to ask *Achsah*'s father for

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 57

⁵⁰ The sexual reference is only one possibility. It could simply mean "when she came," as in "when she arrived." The same phrasing is used in *Judges* 3:26 preceding the blowing of the shofar as a call to battle.

⁵¹ The language used surrounding the killing of Sisera also suggests sexual behavior.

property."⁵³ *Achsah* knows what she needs to do in order to reach her desired outcome. She is setting the parameters and she is mapping out the necessary course of action. Like Ruth, *Achsah* realizes that in order to secure her needs she must work within the already existing system.

Another verb in the second part of the story underlines the forcefulness of her position as she puts forth her request. In verse fourteen it reads "*vatiznach me'al hachamor*, "and she descended from [her] donkey." *Achsah* makes a grand entrance and her father immediately asks her what she wants and without any hesitation gives it to her.

This is the same verb used later to describe Ya'el's action of driving the tent-peg through the ground – after having hammered it into Sisera's temple.(4:24) "The donkey *chamor* as a mode of transportation appears infrequently in *Judges* and it is no accident that it appears in the stories of both *Achsah* and the raped *pilegish*."⁵⁴ Here the narrator speaks only to *Achsah*'s descent and in the case of the Levite's concubine the narrator comments only on her ascent. "Her use of the donkey as a mode of transportation indicates that her new abode was not near her father's but some distance away. The only other Israelite women in *Judges* to leave her father after consummating a relationship with a man is the Levite's *pilegish* at the end of the book, further cementing the beginning and end of the book together."⁵⁵ *Achsah* leaves, returns to and leaves her father's home safely. She is protected in her home and in the home of her husband, Caleb. This is not the case later

⁵² BDB, 694

⁵³ Schneider, "Berit Olam," p. 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 15.

on for Ya'el, *bat-Yiftach*, and the Levite's *pilegish*, demonstrating the deterioration of Israelite society through the violent abuse of women.

It is also worthy of note that although *Achsah* is described as asking her husband, Othniel to speak with her father, we never hear his voice. *Achsah* does all the talking. While the initial focus is on Kaleb and Othniel, the men who are going to lead the Israelites to victory, by the end they are gone and *Achsah* takes center stage. This shift in focus is the reverse of what happens to women later in *Judges*, particularly with the case of the Levite's concubine. The parallels between *Achsah*'s story and the story of the *pilegish* are not a coincidence. They highlight an important theme of the book where things start off promising and end in a place of deep despair. "The image of a woman carrying out actions to accomplish her needed result begins on a positive note, with *Achsah* receiving the desired lands, but degenerate through the period so that the *pilegish*, who carried out many of the same actions, was raped and murdered."⁵⁶

Achsah is clearly an important character. Her story describes a woman using all the skills available to her to achieve her goal. She acted on her own because the men in her life, who had authority and control over her, were not carrying out her wishes.⁵⁷

2. Devorah

The next story about women in *Judges* presents a powerful heroine, the judge Devorah.

"The Story of Devorah shows how the spiral continues downward."⁵⁸ Chapter 4 begins with the following verse: "And the Israelites continued to do what was evil in the eyes of *Adonai* and Ehud died,"(4:1) indicating a consistent deterioration of Israelite society. As

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

a result of their behavior, *vayimkerem* "And Adonai sold them into the hands of Yavin, king of Canaan." (4:2a) The leader of his army is Sisera. The Israelites call out to God for help. The deity answers their cry and after twenty years of *lachat*, "pressure" both emotional and physical, under Yavin's rule, God raises up Deborah as the new leader. We are introduced to this new leader in verse 4. "*U'Devorah ishah niviah eshet Lappidot hi shoftah et Yisrael b'et hahi.*" Not only is she named "her introduction begins with a string of seven feminine nouns, including one [possibly] defining her husband."⁵⁹

In an age when women were barely visible, let alone named, we are given a lot of information in a single verse. We know her name, to whom she is married⁶⁰ and her profession. There are many ways to translate the initial verse.⁶¹ Exploring the intricacies of each translation is not necessary at this point. What is relevant is the fact that Deborah is introduced as a prophet and a judge, both titles typically reserved for men.

"Both titles indicate her role as someone who serves as an intermediary between the human world and the divine, bringing the word of God to the people of Israel."⁶² The importance of her role is emphasized by the fact that she is "assigned a special location

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 64. It should also be noted that *lappid esh*, "torches of fire," is used in Genesis 15:17 to describe the scene at the moment when God made a covenant with Avram promising to give the land from *nahar Mitzrayim* to *nahar Prat* to his offspring. Another possible meaning is that Deborah lights the way for the people and carries that covenant forward.

⁶⁰ This is only one possible translation for "*eshet-Lapidot.*" Literally it means "a woman of torches," and according to Ackerman could be understood as "a fiery woman." (p. 38) This understanding would enable us to see her as someone who lights the way for the Israelites. Deborah is a true leader, a real leader. Perhaps her leadership style is exactly what the Israelites need in order to establish themselves as one community?

⁶¹ See Schneider's discussion on pp. 63-65 in "Berit Olam."

⁶² Ackerman, Susan. "Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in *Judges* and Biblical Israel." Doubleday, New York, 1998, p. 29.

from which to carry out her work, "...a tree known as the palm of Deborah, located in the hill country of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel."⁶³

Judges 4:5 tells us that she used to sit under *her* tree and the Israelites would "rise up toward her for judgement."⁶⁴ (4:5b) It is interesting to note that the Israelites actually came to her for judgements.⁶⁴ "...The others who held that office attained their position only after leading a military event. In this case Deborah held an office prior to her involvement in military affairs."⁶⁵ Deborah sets the parameters by which her role will be executed. She sits below *her* tree and the Israelites rise up toward her.

Judges 4:6 introduces us to Barak. Deborah summons him to appear before her. In the first reference to him Deborah is the subject and he is the object, thus reinforcing her superior position. Her position is also emphasized by the fact that she begins with a set of instructions, in the imperative for him to obey. "Deborah begins by emphasizing that the deity, the deity of Israel, commanded her actions."⁶⁶ In the case of Ehud and Othniel the text notes that the *ruach Adonai*, the spirit of God, descended upon the person indicating his appointment by God. Here there is no mention of this and "no evidence that the deity is working through Deborah but the text is explicit that she viewed herself

⁶³ This reinforces her status and associates her with several men. The only other woman for whom a tree is named is Rivka's nurse her traveled with her to Canaan. She dies and is buried near Bethel. (Gen 35:8) Her name is also Deborah. Ibid, p. 29. According to Schneider, this is not a surprising place for people to serve as judge. "...the site was frequented by many biblical characters in connection with the deity and judgment." (p. 69) Avram, Jacob, Samuel and Jerubam all visited the same location. It is also the midpoint between the southern and northern parts of Israel. This is also the same site that appears in the end of the book "...where judgments of dubious merits were made concerning the men of the tribe of Benjamin and a source of wives for them." (p. 69)

⁶⁴ Moshe is the only other person to whom the Israelites would come to for judgement. (Exod 18:13)

⁶⁵ Schneider, "Berit Olam," p. 68.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 69.

as acting on behalf of the deity. The narrator implies that Devorah was the deity's representative through her victory and the actualization of her predictions."⁶⁷

While it is God's mandate, Devorah commands Barak to assemble ten thousand men from the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun and go forth to wage war against the army of King Yavin. The enemy is being led by Sisera. Instead of complying with her demand as a soldier to his commander, Barak makes a very shocking statement, "if you go with me then I will go and if you do not go with me then I will not go." (4:8) Perhaps this is an indication that he is reluctant to go without her because she represents the deity? Perhaps his response reflects his lack of trust and faith in the deity? Perhaps he is simply not as brave as other military figures?

In verse 9 Devorah agrees to accompany him but adds a prophetic qualification that there would be no glory for him because the deity would deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman. This could be another reference to his possible lack of bravery and heroism.

By stating that no glory will come to Barak because he would die at the hand of a woman, the text highlights what women should not be doing in the story where they did it. Women should not be capturing the opponent's military commander. When women fight in battles men lose glory. The implication is that men, or maybe especially Israelite men, fought for glory or renown, not, as Devorah stated, because the deity commanded it.⁶⁸

While the author places heavy emphasis on Devorah's command, Barak's request and Devorah's agreement to accompany him to war, the only role she is assigned during the

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

⁶⁸ Ackerman, "Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen," p. 70

actual battle is in *Judges* 4:14a. Deborah provides Barak with a final exhortation to go forth and fight. "In 4:14b-16, the actual description of the battle only Barak and his victory over Sisera are mentioned."⁶⁹ Carol Meyers explains the plausibility of a woman involved in military affairs:

Localized and sporadic defense problems existed during this period, but they were met by a noncentralized, ad hoc militia system...without the formalized structure of a standing army, women could and did contribute to the defense effort. Female participation in the military realm is in fact a typical feature of pioneer societies.⁷⁰

The scene continues for another eight verses but Deborah disappears, not to be mentioned again until her poem in chapter 5.

The narrative portion of Deborah's story stresses the major theme of the entire book, "the need for Israel to rely on foreigners and women as a result of the decline in Israel's leadership."⁷¹

Judges 5 is another version of the Judges 4 story and thus recounts once again the tale of the battle that took place between the Israelite militia and Sisera's Canaanite army. But, despite the fact that these texts share a common subject, the two renditions of this war story are ultimately very different.⁷²

The prose section focuses on the important issues of the book, such as: "leadership, responsibilities of a leader, the role of women, and the role of the deity in the Israelites' battles."⁷³

⁶⁹Schneider, "Berit Olam," p. 30.

⁷⁰Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 174.

⁷¹Ibid, p. 82.

⁷²Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, p. 30.

⁷³Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 82.

The poem, using rich language and detail, describes how Deborah knew what to do, when to do it and what happened to the 900 chariots. The poem fills in much of the missing information while also introducing minor contradictions.⁷⁴ Judges 4 stems from the Deuteronomistic period of the seventh century. "Judges 5 is among the oldest of all texts found in the Hebrew Bible, and a date in the late twelfth or eleventh century B.C.E. is frequently advanced."⁷⁵ "...Judges 4, in addition to being written later than Judges 5, is literally dependent on the poem."⁷⁶ Deborah is credited as being the deliverer and the author of the poem.

There is a significant distinction between the roles played by Barak and Deborah. "...Judges 4 relegates Deborah to an advisory role in the war against Sisera, Judges 5 is unambiguous and emphatic in its depiction of Deborah as Israel's chief military commander."⁷⁷ Barak, who is cited as *the* military hero in Judges 4 (as well as in I Sam 12:11 and in the New Testament in Heb 11:32), in Judges 5 appears only as Deborah's second-in-command.

Deborah is featured in *the* primary position over Barak in Judges 5. First, she is mentioned by name in the poem four times and he is only mentioned three. "More important, in the three times that Barak is mentioned, he never appears independent of Deborah but is always cited in association with her; on each of these three occasions,

⁷⁴ Elaboration and exclusion happen often in the retelling of events by biblical characters.

⁷⁵ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

moreover, he somehow appears as secondary.”⁷⁸ For example, in 5:1 they are described as singing the victory song together. However, Deborah is mentioned first and the verb *shar*, “to sing,” listed in third-person feminine singular (*vatashar*). While it is common in biblical Hebrew for verbs to be linked to the first noun only the fact that Deborah is mentioned first is what is significant. In 5:12 and 5:15 Deborah is named first. It is only Deborah who receives the command in 5:12 “...to sing out, which is the command to stand forth and sound the cry of reveille that will summon the Israelite troops into battle.”⁷⁹ Deborah is called upon to “*uri uri*,” “*Awake! Awake!*” “*awake and utter a song*,” “...the cry to “awake” frequently goes out from the Israelite people to Yahweh.”⁸⁰ The call came to Deborah rather than Yahweh because they are “paired as divine and human equivalents.”⁸¹ Barak is called upon to “*kum*” “*stand up*,” and “*lead away*” the captives.

A significant detail reflecting Deborah’s status as a leader is found in Judges 5:7. After Deborah came into power “Canaanite oppression of the Israelites ceased.”⁸² Before that, *chadlu*, the inhabitants “ceased,” Barak is not even mentioned. In this same verse Deborah is called *em b’Yisrael*, “a mother in Israel.” While the description in 4:4 *esher Lapidot* can be interpreted as “wife of Lapidot,” she is not introduced with this description in Judges 5. There is also no mention of Deborah having any children in either chapter. It has already been established that the prose version was written later and

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 31. And according to Ackerman, Barak is merely a recipient of this call.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 45.

⁸² Ibid, p. 31.

therefore "... the prose tradition must have been aware of the poem's "mother in Israel" epithet."⁸³

Devorah is referred to as a "mother in Israel", an earthly leader of the people. "God's human representative who will actually take the lead in conducting the war on earth."⁸⁴ God is the divine warrior. In Judges 5:5 Yahweh is "the God of Israel" and in verse 7 Devorah is "a mother in Israel." God reflects the heavenly/divine presence. Devorah is the earthly/human presence, firmly rooted *in* the human world. According to Ackerman this denotes a dichotomy of cosmos/earth and of male/female since God was typically understood as male. In 5:4,5 all of the verb forms used are masculine. God delivered the Israelites from the oppressions of Egypt and redeemed the people from slavery. Devorah intends to do the same. "...she endeavors to liberate her people from Canaanite domination."⁸⁵ God and Devorah both liberate, protect and connect the Israelite nation. They are both passionate in their commitment to the Israelite community. "She and Yahweh are thus the worthiest of partners."⁸⁶

Devorah is not like the other *Judges*. The fact that she is the only female judge is noteworthy but it is not the most prominent distinction. Whereas other male *Judges* demonstrate various forms of moral weakness, Devorah is unique in her virtue and courage. "She is one of the few unsullied leaders."⁸⁷ Devorah never doubts God for a

⁸³ Ibid, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 38.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 44.

⁸⁷ Exum, J. Cheryl. "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Letty M. Russell. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1985, p. 84.

moment, unlike Gid'on, who must constantly be convinced that God is on his side, Instead of needing reassurance, she is the one to reassure her own army commander, Barak, who is reluctant to go in to battle without her. She never commits a transgression to achieve or maintain her leadership positions.

Devorah is a prophet, a judge and a military leader, and also a poet. "Significantly enough, Devorah, the ideal *Judges*, leader, and animator of the people, is not referred to as a *gibbor*. "It is obvious that the concept of *gibbor* is exclusively male. It requires no wisdom, but only violence; no insight, only bodily strength; no poetry, only cutting words."⁸⁸ Male *Judges* are shown only in their military roles. Devorah stands out by the nature of the fact that she is shown as being cast in many roles. Another great distinction appears at the end of her poem in chapter 5 with the concluding statement that her reign brought peace in the land for forty years.

It is my opinion that the notion of *gibbor* as "exclusively male" is excessive and too general. In my opinion a *gibbor/gibborah* is any person who takes initiative in order to move beyond an existing situation. There are many female characters in the Bible that deserve the honor of being a *gibborah*. There are too many to list so I will name a few. There is Hagar, she saves herself and the life of her child. God speaks directly to her and rewards her bravery by promising to make her son a great nation. There is also Rivkah. She listens to the words of God and single handedly ensures that the blessing from Isaac is given to the right son. Tamar, takes matters into her own hands and not only secures

⁸⁸ Bal, Mieke. *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of coherence in the Book of Judges*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, p. 210.

the future of her lineage, she also reveals the deception of her father-in-law Judah. In fact, in the end Judah acknowledges that Tamar is more righteous than he. (Gen. 48:26) There are also many men who merit the title of *gibbor* who demonstrate their bravery with acts that extend beyond physical strength. Abraham and Moses are just two such examples.

3. Yael

While Devorah leads her people to victory, it is Yael, another strong and independent woman, who undertakes the decisive deed, killing Sisera, captain of the enemy's army. "Thus the battle that one woman, Devorah has begun, another woman, Yael, has finished."⁸⁹ The story of Yael is told twice, once in the prose version of chapter 4, and again in the poetry version of chapter 5. The poem serves a key purpose. The prose version presents Yael as performing an act that is courageous and patriotic, no doubt, but that also suggests treachery. Yael invites a trusting Sisera into her tent with the promise of a safe haven. While he is peacefully asleep and vulnerable, she murders him. The poem, on the other hand, told from the perspective of another woman, reframes the tale and redirects our attention. Devorah's song exalts and praises this "Blessed above all women"(5:24). As the story is retold, Yael's bravery and honor are increased and she is not presented as a trickster. Yael does not entice Sisera in this version. As Fewell and Gunn note, the is "no seduction or deceit here. No ambush of a sleeping giant."⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," p. 125.

Yet both versions turn the stereotype of motherhood on its head. The story unfolds in Yael's tent, a domestic setting. Like a mother, Yael gives Sisera milk and covers him with a blanket. However this promise of motherly comfort is turned into a death warrant. Mieke Bal refers to this as an instance of "anti-mothering."⁹¹ More significantly, however, the poem increases the sexual connotations of the murderous act and, in so doing, accomplishes another reversal in the expected role of women. The poem subtly suggests that Yael's action is a kind of rape.

The depiction of Sisera's murder by Yael is loaded with sexual imagery and innuendo that convey this suggestion. Robert Alter calls her murder an "aggressively phallic"⁹² assassination. To begin with, Yael pounds a tent-peg into Sisera's head, a violent, penetrating action which is repeated three times. Sisera's fall is also repeated three times, in staccato rhythm. Further, as Niditch points out, the words used to convey Sisera's death suggest sexual submission: Sisera falls between Yael's *raglech*, and "...*raglayim*, 'legs' or 'feet' are used in Scripture as euphemisms for male or female organs."⁹³ Niditch also analyzes the verbs that describe his fall *kru* (*karah*, "he bent"), *shkv* (*shachav*, "he lay"), *cdwd* (*shadud*, "bereft of life," "ruined" or "despoiled") in the same vein. She says, for example: "The vast majority of biblical uses of *skv* in sexual context refer to illegitimate relations in rape, incest, ritual, impurity, adultery, and so forth."⁹⁴ Niditch concludes: "Double meanings of sexuality and death emerge in every line. He is

⁹¹ Bal, Mieke. *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, p. 213.

⁹² As quoted by Susan Niditch in "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, edited by Peggy L. Day. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p. 46.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 49.

at her feet in a pose of defeat and humiliation; he kneels between her legs in sexual pose...Jael...herself is the aggressor, despoiler."⁹⁵

The "rape" of Sisera can be seen as a payback of sorts for what women are generally subjected to in wartime. Indeed, the Song of Deborah alludes to this gruesome reality in the portrayal of Sisera's mother wondering at the tardiness of her son. She "naturally" assumes that he and his cohorts are off looking for "booty," i.e., captured women (literally, "wombs") they can despoil. As Fewell and Gunn explain: "...the speech makes explicit what has been implicit in the story, that is, the threat to women during the war. Women on the losing side can expect to be captured and raped if not killed. Hence the poetic justice with which the Israelite singers depict Sisera's death."⁹⁶ Yael, as depicted by Deborah, does to Sisera what he would have done to these women, i.e., rape.

Mieke Bal contrasts Sisera's murder to that of the Levite's concubine later in the book: "The murder takes the specific form and meaning of rape...Not only does the weapon entail penetration; it also leads to the same result as the rape of the [Levite's concubine]. Destroyed by the weapon, she, too, became 'none' when fallen on the ground."⁹⁷ Perhaps the narrator uses Yael's story to avenge this voiceless, nameless woman as well.

I find it difficult to agree with the characterization of Yael's actions as a kind of "rape." While there are examples of men raping women during wartime I think it is incorrect to view this episode as a reversal of roles. When men rape women during war it does not

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁶ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 125.

assist in securing victory. Typically it is done after the battle has been fought and "booty" is being collected. The women of the enemy are often seen as the prize for victory. Also, the women are usually taken as wives afterwards and added to the community, not murdered.

Yael is not initially in a position of power, nor is this a time of security. She establishes her power by tricking Sisera. She is not claiming him as her prize for anything. It is possible that Yael, aware of the situation, uses all available resources to remove one of Israel's greatest enemies. Sisera is fleeing from battle. His troops have been defeated and he is running for his survival. If he survives and continues his reign the Israelites could face significant harm. Yael's actions should be seen as only favorable.

She is doing what is necessary to save her people. Classifying her actions as "rape" implies an act of aggression over a weaker person, one who has no choice in the matter. Yael acts as a soldier defending her people. Her actions are an extension of the battle. Sisera, while understandably exhausted from fighting and fleeing, is a warrior, a leader of a great army. He simply did not expect to be defeated by a woman, this is why he flees to the tent of a woman. He is only a victim after he is assassinated. In the prose version, Deborah applauds her actions and refers to Yael as *tivorach minashim*, "the most blessed of all women." Sisera asked for water and Yael gave him milk (5: 25). She managed to put herself in a position where she had power over the enemy. Like Deborah, Yael is a

⁹⁷ Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 215.

military hero.⁹⁸ This example illustrates one of the main arguments of this work. In the book of Judges women take on unexpected roles. They complete tasks typically reserved for men.

4. *Bat-Yiftach*

The story of Yiftach's daughter represents a marked weakening in the status of women. From a focus on three powerful women who take control of their fate, we now examine a male warrior who dictates the fate of his nameless daughter. The story of the daughter's diminished autonomy can be seen as a metaphor for the decline of Israel's political and moral situation. As Donna Fewell suggests: "Perhaps, too, the death of the daughter, the silence of God, and the absence of the people are but signs of something rotten with the state of Israel."⁹⁹ Indeed, the narrator of *Judges* precedes the story of Yiftach and his daughter with the statement that "the children of Yisrael continued to do evil in the sight of the Lord."¹⁰⁰ The story appears after Yotam's parable and the ascent of a shady, murderous character, Avimelech, as judge: a sure sign of the times. It should be noted that, to his great shame, Avimelech is murdered by a woman who single-handedly throws a millstone and crushes his skull: an echo of Yael and Sisera.

Yiftach, following two non-noteworthy *Judges* after Avimelech's death, is presented as a foolish, impulsive man who opens his mouth before he thinks - doubtless, the source of

⁹⁸ Deborah and Yael are not the only examples of women being described as military heroes. The woman of Thebez in chapters 6-8 smashes an enemy's head to bring an end to a period of war.

⁹⁹ As quoted in *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, Helpmates, p. 129.

¹⁰⁰ *Judges* 10:16, Koren Tanach

his name "Yiftach," i.e., "he will open." He is also the son of a harlot, an "outcast,"¹⁰¹ who knows not the traditions of his people: He offers human sacrifice contrary to the practice of the Israelites. This story of child sacrifice has a powerful resonance with the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. This is the only other example of a child being offered as a sacrifice to God. However, that is the only parallel between Yiftach and Abraham. A glaring distinction between the two narratives is the clear fact that in the Genesis narrative (22:1-2) it is *HaElohim* who commands Abraham to take his son to the place that God will designate and offer him as a sacrifice. In Judges 11:30, *vayidar Yiftach neder l'Adonai*, "and Yiftach vows a vow to *Adonai*." Yiftach initiates the upcoming events. The binding of Isaac is divinely initiated. The vow is the result of human initiative.

Yiftach initiates the vow. Unlike Abraham who trusts implicitly in God's word, Yiftach needs assurances that God will be on his side and, for this reason, makes the fatal bargain with Him. He does this right after verse 29 which states that the "spirit of Yahweh was upon him." Why would Yiftach doubt the continuation of God's support? Phyllis Tribble calls this an "act of unfaithfulness...the working out the vow to Yaheweh has replaced the free bounty of the spirit of the Lord."¹⁰² Abraham's faith and righteousness condemn Yiftach's faithlessness. While one could certainly question the command to sacrifice a child to God, it is clear that in the book of Genesis the people have faith. The people have a relationship with the Divine. In the book of Judges people have forgotten their faith. They have forgotten the laws of Moses.

¹⁰¹ Tribble, Phyllis. "The Daughter of Jephthah: An Inhuman Sacrifice," chapter in *Texts of Terror*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 94.

Yiftach rashly offers to sacrifice whatever or whoever comes to greet him should he be victorious in battle. Chapter 11:31: *vehayah ha'yotzeh asher yetezeh midaltei beiti likrati bishuvi v'shalom...v'halitihu olah*, "and it shall be, the one who shall come out of the door of my house to greet me for that I have returned in peace...and I will offer it as a burnt offering." What was he expecting? According to Hackett, women were the ones who came out to greet returning warriors with victory songs. *Bat-Yiftach* came out of her house to greet her father with "timbrels and with dancing." (11:34) This is the same language that is used with regard to Miriam after the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus, with regard to "the women" in 1 Samuel 18:7 and among the "daughters of the Philistines" and the "daughters of the uncircumcised" who come out in 2 Samuel 1:20.

When it turns out to be his only child, a daughter, he shows only selfish concern. "Jephthah mourns for himself...he offers neither solace nor release...Nor does he wish to die instead of his child, as did the father David (2 Sam. 19:1)."¹⁰³ When he does eventually sacrifice his daughter, he expresses no emotion. Tribble contrasts the mechanical way in which Yiftach performs the sacrifice with the pain implied in Abraham's act: "Quickly, without passing judgement, the narrator tells the deed: 'He did to her his vow which he had vowed' (11:39b). How different is this story from Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, where detail heaped upon detail slows down the narrative to build suspense for the climatic moment."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 101-102.

Yiftach is presented by the narrator as thoughtless. Since it was the custom in those days for women to come forth and sing a victory song following a battle, he should have foreseen what would happen. Even if his daughter had not been the first to greet him the situation would have still been horrible. It could have been his wife. If nothing else, he should not have been so callous with regard to another's life. And while it appears that his daughter accepts her fate without exhibiting any signs of rage towards her father, Danna Fewell suggests that Yiftach's daughter subtly condemns her father for this. Fewell says that the daughter may have known of her father's bargain.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, though her father makes only oblique reference to his vow when she greets him, she instantly grasps his meaning. As it states in 11:35, *vayihi kiroto otah va'yikrah et begadav*, "and it was that when he saw her he tore his garment." Thus, in Fewell's view, the daughter is not blindly obedient to her father; rather, she actually comes forth out of the house quite intentionally. "...As she steps forth, she takes the place of someone whom he considered expendable. She thereby passes judgement on her father's willingness to bargain for glory with the life of another. Her action condemns his priorities, and perhaps those of all Israel."¹⁰⁶ This is yet another example of a woman posing as the mirror by which the fracturing of all communal systems is revealed.

I am not sure if I accept Fewell's view that the daughter knew what was happening, illustrated by her coming forth voluntarily from the house. I think it is more likely that she was simply fulfilling the customary role of the woman to sing the victory song for the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁵ This denotes another distinction between this text and that of Genesis 22. It is unclear as to whether or not Isaac knew and/or understood that he was going to be the sacrifice.

¹⁰⁶ Fewell, as quoted in *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, p. 131.

victor as he returns from battle. Her father has been away at war and is finally returning. She is probably excited to see him. Isaac does not exhibit any resistance to his father's actions and neither does *bat-Yiftach*. She willingly accepts the fate her father has chosen for her when she says to him in verse 36: *avi patzilah pi el Adonai aseh li ka'asher yatzah mipichah*, "father of mine, you have opened your mouth to *Adonai*, do according to what has come forth from your mouth." Her faith is stronger than his. She understands the power of words and accepts that one cannot reverse what has already been uttered to God.

This assigning of deliberate action to Yiftach's daughter dovetails with the narrator's framing of her story, a frame that contains a reversal of power between father and daughter. Roughly, the structure of the story is as follows:

Yiftach makes the vow;

- A. victory – he returns;
- B. daughter **comes out**;
 Yiftach blames her;
 she accepts her fate;
- B. she requests two months to leave;
- A. lamentation – she **returns**;
- B. vow accomplished – she **leaves** this world
 postscript: custom in Israel

The story is framed by the fatal vow that seals the daughter's fate. However, within the contexts of this oppressive structure, the father's ultimate control over his daughter is undermined. There are two ways in which this is accomplished by the narrative.

First, in a development reminiscent of *Achsah's* story, there is a shift in focus as the story unfolds. As it begins Yiftach is the primary actor, but his daughter subtly takes the reins

by determining how and when the vow will be carried out. Tribble notes: "Within the limits of the inevitable she takes charge to bargain for herself."¹⁰⁷ Just as *Achsah* negotiated for herself, so too does Yiftah's daughter. Secondly, the story does not end with the carrying out of the vow but with a crucial addendum: the ritual that will preserve her memory as well as the actions she took for all time. Tribble writes: "The narrative postscript, then, shifts the focus of the story from vow to victim, from death to life, from oblivion to remembrance."¹⁰⁸ The story ends with a celebration of a specifically female ritual, which Peggy Day characterizes as follows: "In terms of the ritual remembrance...her virginity is not the key issue. Rather, it is the social recognition of her transition to physical maturity that is commemorated..."¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that while women carry the memory of the daughter into the future her life was the price for the establishment of a new ritual and annual celebration.

The postscript makes another important point. It underlines the difference in the way father and daughter use speech, and these uses are metaphors for the moral stances they each represent. As Mieke Bal writes: "As opposed to the cutting speech-act of which Jephthah is the uncontested master, the role of mothers [Devorah] and daughters ["daughters of Israel" in the Jephthah story] is to perform speech-acts of memorialization."¹¹⁰ So, where Yiftah's word has fatal and sacrilegious consequences, his daughter's word, and that of her women friends, serve to remind the reader of forgotten moral values. The death knell of women's power in *Judges* has not yet been

¹⁰⁷ Tribble, "The Daughter of Jephthah," p. 103.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁹ Day, Peggy L. "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, p. 58.

sounded because, in a very real sense, it is not Yiftah, but his daughter who has the last word.

4. The Levite's Concubine

Where the *Book of Judges* begins with women of action and language, it ends with a woman who is virtually inactive and absolutely wordless. As with *Bat-Yiftach*, she is also nameless. The Levite's concubine makes her only independent move when she leaves her husband at the beginning of the story. Thereafter, she is either invisible in the text or treated purely as an object. She never speaks. Her one action, returning to her father's house, is followed by descriptions that increasingly point to her state of defeat. Cheryl Exum sees this as cause and effect: "By daring to act autonomously in the first place, she puts herself beyond male protection, and for this she must be punished."¹¹¹

The text moves quickly to establish the Levite's concubine as a non-entity. Following her departure, we are told that the Levite goes after her to "speak to her heart." We might expect that a conversation between husband and wife might follow, perhaps even a reconciliation. However, from that moment on, the focus shifts sharply away from her and onto the two men in her life. Where we are told nothing about the reception she receives upon arriving at her father's home, we learn that the Levite is greeted with joy by his father-in-law. What follows is a lengthy recounting of the interchange between husband and father. Five days go by and not a word is said about the concubine. Phyllis

¹¹⁰ Bal, *Death and Dissymetry*, p. 210.

¹¹¹ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 179. This is contrast to the first three women who were described.

Trible writes: "As these two [men] unite, the woman who brought them together fades from the scene...Rivalry between the males has replaced unity...A journey 'to speak to her heart' has become a visit to engage male hearts, with no speech to her at all."¹¹²

An ominous note is sounded by the delay of five days. Is the father worried that his daughter has been abused by the Levite? In this regard, Fewell and Gunn note: "We might wonder if the father, reluctant to send his daughter back into a situation of possible mistreatment, intentionally delays his guest."¹¹³ The concubine's status as a virtually invisible object is intensified during the journey home. When the Levite finally departs, his wife is included in the scene as an afterthought, mentioned only after his mules, ...*v'imo tzemed chamorim chavushim upilagsho imo*, "...and with him two asses saddled and his concubine with him." (19:10). In the next two verses, the Levite and his servant discuss logistics; his wife is never consulted. She is not even referred to until nine verses later when she is again mentioned after the mules, ...*v'gam teven gam mispo yesh l'chamoreinu v'gam lechem v'yayin yesh li v'la-amatechah*... "...and also straw also fodder for our asses and also bread and wine for me and for thy handmaid..." (19:19). The man who offers them lodging is said to see only "a traveller," and speaks to him in the singular. The Levite responds first in the plural, including in his "we," no doubt, servant, mules and concubine, but proceeds to speak in the singular. The old man brings him, in the singular, into his house.

¹¹² Tribble, "An Unnamed Woman: The Extravagance of Violence," chapter in *Texts of Terror*, pp. 68-69.

¹¹³ Fewell and Gunn, "Possessed and Dispossessed," p. 133.

The towns people, *anshei vnei vliyael* "the depraved people," come and surround the man's house and demand that the old man *hotzeh et haish asher bah el beitchah v'neidahenu*, "cast out the man that has come to his house so that they shall know him." In verse 23, the old man refers to the visitor as *achai* "my brother," denoting a certain level of connection. Perhaps he was hoping this would help drive them away. But he had little faith in his attempt for in the very next verse, before they even have a chance to respond, like Lot, he offers the townspeople *biti habetulah uflagsheihu*, "my daughter and his concubine," v. 24: *v'anu otam v'asu lahem hatov b'eineichem*, "and torture"¹¹⁴ them and do to them what is good in your eyes."

What follows is probably the most brutal, horrifying and degrading story about a woman in the entire Tanach. The scene at Giv'a is a close parallel to the story of Lot in S'dom, suggesting thereby a time of great sin and immorality. Like Lot who tries to protect his visitors by offering his virgin daughters, the Levite allows his concubine to be given over to the "worthless men" of the city. In Judges 19:25, ...*vayachazek haish b'pilagsho vayotzeh aleihem hacutz*, "...and the man grabbed his concubine and cast her outside to them..." Based on the ambiguity of the Hebrew it is difficult to discern if it is the Levite or the *Ish* who throws the *pilegash* out into the street. But this story is even more grotesque. As Tribble points out, "Parallel in setting, vocabulary, and motifs, the two stories now diverge to make ours the more despicable."¹¹⁵ The husband not only offers

¹¹⁴ Concordance, this follows the translation of the same verb in Gen. 16:6 in describing Sarah's treatment of Hagar. It is interesting to note that "brothers" are protected but not "daughters". There is a lot of playing on the image of going out and coming in. The image of going out is similar to the image of *Bat-Yiftach* going out of her house to greet her father. It is in contrast to the image of Yael bringing Sisera in to her tent.

¹¹⁵ Tribble, "An Unnamed Woman," p. 76.

but he seizes, *vayachazek*, his wife, to protect himself. Furthermore, Lot's daughters are not raped because the angels intervene. In this story, as in that of Yiftah's daughter, there is no angel to protect the woman. Both of these examples are in contrast to *Akeidat Yitzchak*, where an angel does appear and stops Abraham from killing his son. Once again, Divine presence is felt throughout Genesis and is absent from the *Book of Judges*. This is another indication of the terrible state of the Israelite community.

The ensuing gang rape only takes up one verse. Phyllis Tribble notes: "The brevity of this section on female rape contrasts sharply with the lengthy reports on male carousing and male deliberations that precede it."¹¹⁶ However, the story itself is told in graphic and gripping detail. Following the leisurely pace of the narrative thus far, it comes across as shocking and abrupt. The Levite's reaction is even more scandalous and alarming. The next morning, the concubine crawls back, using her last breaths, to the threshold of the house that has protected HIM and his host. The Levite has clearly forgotten about her; he opens the door and practically trips over her. What he sees are her beseeching hands, an incredibly poignant and breathtaking image. Without even flinching, he cruelly orders her to get up. When she does not move, he picks her up like a sack of potatoes and throws her on his donkey. Just as he grabbed her to throw her out to the townsfolk, he now grabs her, cuts her into twelve pieces, and sends "her" to the Israelite tribes. It is important to recognize that the same verb is used in both scenes. Tribble points out that "In the end, she is no more than the oxen that Saul will later cut in pieces and send throughout all the territory of Israel as a call to war."¹¹⁷ The same words are used when

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 76.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 81.

Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, *vayikach et ha'ma-achelet*, "and he took the knife," (Gen. 22:10). This is the only other instance in the Bible of this being used. Yet in Genesis violence was withheld and resolved for Abraham by a Divine intervention. Here, in the tale of the Levite man and his concubine, violence is given full force and a Divine presence is completely absent from the scene.

When the Levite recounts the story to the assembled tribes, he does not speak of his own action and inaction at Giv'a and he leaves ambiguous whether or not the woman was dead when he cut her up. It seems he is absolved from all responsibility and blame for the terrible fate of his concubine. The ambiguity can be seen as a literary tool implicating everyone in the crime. The response of the tribes also seems to reflect his "innocence" in the entire matter. What infuriates them is not the violent gang rape of his concubine, but, as Tribble notes "the harm done to a man through his property."¹¹⁸ Upon receiving the piece of human flesh, they don't question the events that lead up to the dismantling of his concubine.

They respond by gathering together *kish echad*, "as one man," (20:1). They don't question his actions at all until the verse 3, *eichah nihiyetah hara-ah hazot*, "how did this evil come to be?" Unlike the Levite, the narrator refers to his concubine as *ha'ishah ha'nirtzichah*, "the woman, the one who was murdered" in chapter 20:4. The Levite retells the story of his travels, referring to her as a concubine (v. 4) and conveniently omits the part where *he* casts her out or at least allows her to be cast out to the townspeople to do with as they please. In verse 5 it reads, ...*va'yasobu ali et ha'bayit*

lilah oti dimu laharog v'et pilagshi inu vatamot, "...and they surrounded the house at night intending to kill me and they tortured my concubine and she died." Not only does he lie about most of the situation, he tries to cast himself as the real victim of the situation. He is a Levite, a man who is supposed to be in the position of serving God. What kind of service to God is he engaged in if he allows this terrible event to occur?

First the tribes attack the town of Jabesh-gilead, murdering all the inhabitants save four hundred virgins; then they kidnap two hundred young women from Shiloh. Tribble concludes: "...the rape of one has become the rape of six hundred."¹¹⁹ The crime against one woman has been compounded by a crime against many women. In Schneider's terms the woman is a barometer of society. Just as she is raped and cut up so too Israel is in wretched shape. The Levite exemplifies a model of leadership that ultimately fails. He is a coward, a cheater and a liar. The woman serves as a foil to subject the Levite to scrutiny. Ultimately it is Israel itself that has failed. Israel has failed to establish a proper leader, failed to re-establish her relationship with the Divine and failed to establish a stable community.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 83.

Chapter 3

Lesson Plans

This paper has dealt specifically with five women from the book of *Judges*. All five are highlighted in very exaggerated terms, both positively and negatively. They often serve as a barometer revealing the chaotic status of the Israelite community, including the deterioration of the relationship between the people and the Divine. Three of the women are located in narratives that directly parallel texts in Genesis and Numbers. This section of the paper will outline lessons based on my reading of Judges that can be implemented in various learning environments with students starting at age fifteen. These lessons can be taught to a wide range of learners, from those who have extensive knowledge of Jewish texts to those who are just beginning their exploration.

While the content of some of the narratives is extremely violent and includes graphic details, it is material that should be studied and not discarded or passed over. There are difficult texts throughout the entire Biblical canon. The lives of ancient Israelites were not only filled with laughter and celebration. They lived lives filled with struggle and pain and loss. I believe they are difficult for us to read and study because the behavior in them is still prevalent today. We would hope that we live in a better time, a safer time, a time with new concerns and new fears. What we come to realize is that we live in a very similar time. These texts capture grim realities we witness thousands of years later. We have an obligation to learn and to teach ALL of the facets of our tradition. While we might encounter the same struggles as those of our ancestors, we need to be different in the face of those struggles. Our past is the key to understanding our present and even our future as individuals and as a Jewish community

Studying these texts can be very important to discovering different ways of thinking about God within our religion. I think it is important to struggle with texts that seem to be in contrast to our understanding of the Divine. The book of *Judges* contains important parallels found in Genesis and Numbers. There are similarities found in the narratives, identical language is shared, and even some of the results are similar. While several important differences exist, a strong distinction between the book of *Judges* and the other texts is that God often plays a passive role and is even sometimes absent from the scene entirely. Unlike the texts in Genesis and Numbers, in the texts in *Judges*, God does not intervene in order to prevent a great tragedy from happening.

Studying these texts can also improve our understanding of the role of men and women during different times in Israelite history. The texts can serve as a reflector for the changes that have occurred throughout our tradition. They can force us to be aware of issues of gender in the Jewish world we inhabit today. Studying these texts can also clarify our understanding of how leaders were chosen leading up to the establishment of the Israelite nation.

We live in a very interesting time, a time of great privilege and independence. Our tradition is more accessible than ever and we can decide for ourselves how and how much we want to include religion and text into our lives. Teaching these texts will enable people to see a significant number of female characters who defy the common stereotypes about women in the Bible. These texts push the limits of what women are "supposed" to do. These texts will enable learners to develop a more varied image of the

role women played in our history. These texts will also encourage learners to establish a theology that encompasses more than the traditional understanding of God as Divine ruler and Divine planner. They should be studied and unraveled because they blur traditional notions of God and gender roles. Unfortunately the threat of violence against women and God's silence remain compelling topics for us.

Yet in the end the women in these texts dispel the notion that women were not seen or heard in Biblical tradition, a myth that so many of us have come to understand as truth. We cannot teach our tradition in absolutes. God and human beings are much more complex than many of our teachings convey. The *Book of Judges* allows the learner to see deep into the layers of the Divine and the human. We are forced to confront our notions of God and the development of Israelite society. All of this will result in a deeper understanding of who we are and who we want to be as Jews who lead meaningful and serious lives.

"Achsa" vs. The Daughters of Zelophehad
Judges 1:12-15 vs. Numbers 27:1-11

*Students will develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between the two texts.

*Through the exploration of these texts students will:

- summarize the roles of men and women in several biblical texts
- define the notion of "vows" and its implications
- compare and contrast different understandings of God

1. The role of men and women in Jewish texts:

- a. Each person should write out her/his ideas.
- b. Each person should share what she/he wrote in small groups.
- c. Each person should select a facilitator to share thoughts with the larger group.
- d. The ideas of each group can be listed on the board. One suggestion is to make two columns; one for men and one for women.

2. As a large group discuss possible reasons for the distinctions in roles between men and women. Why didn't or couldn't men and women have identical roles?

3. Read each of the texts aloud (this can be done in small groups, *chevrutah*/pairs, or as one large group).

- a. List all of the characters mentioned in each of the texts. How are they introduced?
- b. List all of the events that occur in each of the texts.
- c. Compare and contrast the texts using two columns: similarities and differences.
- d. What role did God play in each of the texts? What names were used for God?
- e. What role did human beings play in each of the texts?
- f. Who initiated the acquisition of property? Men, God or women?
- g. Who made the final decision? Men, God or women?
- h. Did the role of men and women fit into the ideas that were expressed in the beginning of the session? How were they the same? How were they different?
- i. Do you think the writer of *Judges* knew about the Numbers text?

4. Let's talk about God

- a. Why do you think God made the final decision in the Numbers text and not in the *Judges* text?
- b. How might the behavior in the texts reflect the nature of the relationship between God and human beings?
- c. What conclusions could be drawn regarding the state of the Israelite community?

5. Wrap it up: Consider the roles of each gender

- a. Are there any modern examples that echo either of the texts?
- b. Do you consider these texts as examples for the advancement of women?

Bat-Yiftach vs. The Binding of Isaac
Judges 11 and Genesis 22:1-19

“What would you do for God?” vs. “The power of a vow”

*Students will gain an understanding of the similarities and differences between the texts in order to grasp how such a comparison sheds light on both stories.

*Students will develop a definition for the concept of “vow.”

*Students will compare and contrast their own theology with the theologies that are represented in the texts.

1. Individually respond to the questions on each sheet of paper:

a. What would you do if God asked?

b. What types of things have you asked God to do for you? Or consider what people might ask from God?

*Consider the question of “why” for each of the questions.

2. Discuss the various responses.

3. As a large group respond to the following questions (write the responses on the board in two separate columns):

a. What do you think people of biblical times did if God asked?

b. What types of things did people ask of God during biblical times?

(These questions are very broad and open-ended. The purpose is to engage the learner in the process of engaging in a conversation of this nature. There is no right or wrong answer. This point should be stressed throughout the discussion.)

4. Divide the students into groups of four.

a. Have each group read ONE of the texts.

b. Map out the sequence of events.

c. Outline the narrative of the text. Be sure to concentrate on who is speaking? Who is demanding? Who is following instructions? What is the name for God?

d. Write out the scene using contemporary dialogue.

e. Do the same exercise with the second text (Each group should study both texts. This activity could be spread over two sessions).

5. After each group has completed the exercise with both texts compare and contrast the texts while considering the following questions:

a. What is the role of God in each of the texts?

- b. What behavior did the men play? (Why did Abraham agree? Why did *Yiftach* make such a vow?)
- c. Why were each of the men willing to do what they did?
- d. What behavior did the women exhibit? Sarah? The *bat-Yiftach*? (Why did she go along? Why doesn't she have a name of her own?)
- e. Did Abraham know the outcome? Did he anticipate the outcome? Why do you think God intervened?
- f. Did *Yiftach* know the outcome? Did he anticipate the outcome? Why do you think God did not intervene?
- g. What role did angels play in the narrative?

6. Create a tablet reflecting the character traits of the main characters of each text.

- a. Genesis: God, Abraham, Isaac
- b. Judges: God, *Yiftach*, *bat-Yiftach*

7. Discuss the concept of a "vow." Based on the text in *Judges* create a definition for the word "vow." How does this definition correspond to the understanding of the concept discussed by the group?

8. How is God represented in each of the texts? List as many character traits as possible in your description. Describe the possible faith systems of Abraham and Isaac, *Yiftach* and *bat-Yiftach*. How are they similar? How are they different?

9. Think about your own individual theology. How does it compare to the theologies that are reflected in the two texts? Do you have a theology? Does the text challenge your theology? In what way?

10. You are now the writer of the text. How would the narrative play itself out? What variables might influence any changes you might include? Share the endings with the entire group.

-*Bat-Yiftach* is only known as the daughter of *Yiftach*. Choose a name for her and Explain your choice.

-What do you think she did when she went up to the mountain before she was sacrificed?

-How do you imagine the death of *Bat-Yiftach* was commemorated?

-What did the women do when they went to the mountain?

-What might *Yitzchak* have said to his father? What might Sarah have said to Abraham? To God? And to her son?

Pilegesh of the Ish Levi
Judges 19

- *Students will read and analyze the text.
- *Students will question the motivation surrounding the actions of the *Ish Levi*.
- *Students will analyze the actions, or lack of actions on the part of the *pilegesh*.
- *Students will determine an appropriate consequence for the *Ish Levi*.
- *Students will create a voice for the *pilegesh*.

****Please note, before teaching this text, please inform the learners that they will be exploring material that is violent and graphic.**

1. Set-Induction:

Brainstorm activity: What is the worst thing that could happen to a person?
Why?

- *write all of the responses on the board
- *give learners the opportunity to respond to the different suggestions

2. Read the text.

This can be done as a whole group or in small groups and even pairs.

This should be determined based on the age and level of the learners. For example, it is suggested that due to the nature of the material, high school students should read the text together as a whole group and then split into smaller groups to re-read the text.

- *sequence the order of all the events that take place

3. Share the order of events as a large group to make sure everything has been included.

4. Are there any themes that occur? Have students focus on the notions of "going out" and "coming in".

5. Discuss reactions to the text itself. This discussion should be guided by the facilitator.

**6. What are some of the possible reasons to explain the actions of the *Ish-Levi*?
How would you characterize the nature of the Levite's faith in God?**

**7. What are some of the possible reasons to explain the lack of action on the part of the *pilegesh*?
How would you characterize the nature of the *pilegesh's* faith in God?**

8. What is the difference between what actually happened and how the Levite re-tells the story to the people?

9. What do you think should have happened to the Levite?

10. What name would you give to the *pilegesh*?
11. Let's pretend for a moment that the *pilegesh* is able to respond to the Levite after her death. Craft a letter from her to the Levite.
12. What do you suppose God was thinking during this entire episode?
13. Why is this event part of the Biblical canon? What can learn from such terrible stories?

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The process of having read *Judges* has been an interesting, challenging and meaningful experience. The book reveals a tremendous amount through its many layers. It contains engaging narratives, juicy story lines, dramatic characters and events and a range of emotions. As the layers are peeled away, it is clear that this book presents the opportunity for grand exploration. The content of the book of *Judges* invites excursion and analysis. The reader has to spend time uncovering the many facets that are interwoven throughout the text. Theology, including the existing system of faith along with how people demonstrate their faith in the Divine, the stereotypical roles of men and women, as well as the notion of what it means to be part of the Israelite community are all called into question. The ties back to the book of *Genesis* and *Numbers* allow for a larger picture to be viewed. Among the most important lessons I learned throughout this entire process is how critical it is that the book of *Judges* be taught.

Growing up I was educated to believe that God was "all-knowing," "all-powerful" all everything. There wasn't any room to question God's plan. As far as my teachers were concerned there wasn't any need to question God's behavior. Everything happened for a reason. As a human being I could not possibly understand the reason. God had a plan for everything and everyone. Most of my Jewish education centered around texts from the five books of Moses. While the theology represented in the Torah is fairly complex it is often taught in a clear concise manner. Typically we are taught that God is all-powerful and all knowing. God knows exactly what is going to happen before it happens. God knows the outcome because God is responsible for planning every single thing that happens. We are, in a sense, programmed by God to do whatever it is we do. Many

teachers convey the notion of God pre-determining the actions of every event as fact. The goal is to have people believe in God's power so they will abide by the commandments. This will ensure a strong community and an everlasting faith in the Divine. This was completely unsatisfying and when I was old enough to disconnect myself from this view I did.

The book of *Judges* reveals a much different image of God than that which is represented in the Torah. God is not visible in every event. There are many situations, particularly the scenes that include the five women discussed in this paper, where God is absent or dormant. There are many situations where human beings are left to determine the results on their own. The people do not always consult their leader or God directly in order to determine the course of action. There is no Moses; no liaison between God and the people. God does not intervene to save everyone from harm. Nor does God cause the harm. It seems as though the people are responsible for all of their actions and their reactions. The people of *Judges* make what appear to be hasty decisions. They often react to a situation at hand and provide an immediate response. There seems to be little thought or concern for a long-term goal or plan. At times, the faith of the characters in this book seems to be very shaky. One wonders if there is any faith left at all?

The notion that faith is not always a constant is a very valuable lesson for people to explore. As human beings we enter a dialogue with God and our faith. The most important aspect of the dialogue is to keep it going. Our faith systems will surely be impacted by the experiences of our lives and the journeys upon which we embark. As

part of a liberal movement there has to be room to question what is greater than us.

There has to be room to explore different concepts of the Divine.

I struggled for much of my adult life with the "fact" that women were barely represented in the canon of Jewish texts. The few times women were included they were portrayed in one of two roles, a barren woman or a woman baring. I spent many years in arguing with my tradition and myself. My notion of what it meant to be a woman in modern society was in deep conflict with what my tradition espoused. How could I be fully invested in a religion that seemed fully invested in excluding me? Where could I turn to uncover a definition of self that carried with it the weight of tradition and the *kavod* of my ancestors?

My study in the book of Judges considerably complicates my previous conclusions. The book of *Judges* turns the role of women upside down. Not only are there thirteen female characters, they often hold very prominent positions within Israelite society. Some are leaders and instigators, fighters and problem solvers. Some of the women exemplify models of bravery and insight. There are those who are clever and appear to see the reality of the situation more clearly than the men. There are also women whose lives are taken as a result of the stupidity and cruelty of men. In my opinion the scene with the *Ish Levi* and his *pilegish* is the most violent and abominable act of the entire *Tanach*.

Women are reflected in ways that break the typical mold of what we might expect. We are surprised by the roles and positions of the female characters. The boundaries are expanded and enlarged.

These boundaries include male characters as well. There are men who are vulnerable and weak and men who look to women for inspiration and insight. There are men who are portrayed as simple, having forgotten their faith. There are men who are used by women and men and whose behavior reveals the depth to which the Israelites have sunk. The roles are blurred. There is no clear distinction between what is acceptable for a man or a woman. Because of this blurring labels cannot be assigned. The fact that there is such a wide spectrum of male and female characters in this specific text as well as in other Jewish texts enables us to look beyond [determining] the "truth" of each and every event.

We are able to view the larger picture. We are permitted to see the essence or the meaning behind what is presented in the text. Clearly, human beings and God are in a partnership. It seems that the theme that *is* constant throughout Jewish text is that people and God are connected and will always be dependent on one another. The texts reveal a notion that we need the other in order to survive. The interesting part is that the texts also reveal that the position human beings and God take will vary depending on the circumstances. There will be times when faith in God will be at the center of communal actions and there will also be instances when human beings and their ideas will be at the center.

God's role is constantly shifting from instigator to redeemer and from punisher to partner. God often holds back, allowing human beings to dictate the course of events. God enables us to realize the potential we have as those who are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in God's image. Part of being in dialogue with Judaism requires struggling with all aspects

of text. The struggle helps create a deeper sense of meaning and clarity. This can only help strengthen the relationship between self and religion.

The other fascinating component of the book of *Judges* is the interaction with other biblical texts. The similarities in language, narrative and scenes between *Judges* and Genesis and *Judges* and Numbers are not a mere coincidence. The parallel of events has to be intentional. We are supposed to discover something new this time. We are supposed to uncover a different meaning. The biggest distinction is that in the scenes in Genesis and Numbers God plays a very central role. God dictates what will happen and what won't happen. People turn to God for answers. Their behavior is dictated by what God wants.

In the book of *Judges*, particularly in the scenes discussed in this paper, God plays a less central role. In the beginning of the book, people seem to seek God's advice and look to God for answers. By the end of the book, people are acting in whatever manner is best in their eyes. Similar scenes reflect different theologies and different interactions between people and God. Similar scenes have very different outcomes. In Genesis and Numbers it seems God prevents terrible tragedy from happening. God is the arbiter of justice and the outcomes display a sense of fairness.

In the book of *Judges* this is not the case. Terrible things are allowed to happen and innocent lives are lost as the result of human decisions. Terrible things happen in the Torah as well but they occur as a result of Divine decree. By the end of the book of

Judges the Israelite community is in complete disarray. They have no leader, their faith seems to have vanished and they have forgotten their *brit* with *Hashem*. God's absence reveals the impossibility of building a life and community reflecting the Torah's grand design. Studying the *entire* Tanach enables us to expand our understanding of God. We see a passive God, a God who allows human beings to make choices that will determine the future.

The other powerful discovery that occurred is that history and religion can be in complete contrast to one another and still retain equal significance. Religion is important because it speaks to the question of theology. History is important because it provides a frame of reference for how things came to be. The two do not need to intersect in order to have merit. Scientific discoveries feed our intellect and they help us make sense of how things came to be in our world. Religion feeds our soul. Science and religion need to be explored in order to create a wider understanding of the establishment of religion and society. However, they do not need to merge with one another. They can remain separate and still maintain their importance. The stories of our tradition do not need to be evaluated the same way historical events are judged. The lessons we extract from our texts provide the meaning by which we can live very serious and very meaningful Jewish lives. The fact that our tradition has lasted for over two thousand years speaks to its incredible strength and power.

I invite and challenge everyone to explore the depths of the various layers of Jewish text. Search through the pages of our canon and experience the wonder as you uncover the

magic of our tradition. As you explore the texts you will discover fascinating parallels between the time in which you live and the suggested time of the text. You will also confront significant discrepancies between the society in which you live and that of the text. The world is constantly evolving. We are engaged in a process of continued growth. Our texts should be the foundation of that growth. Religion is the safeguard of humanity. It builds relationship and fuels an interdependence between people and between people and the Divine. Exploration of our texts can enable us to gain a greater understanding of ourselves and that world.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, Susan. *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges nad Biblical Israel*. Doubleday Press, New York, NY, 1998.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York, NY, 1981.
- Bal, Mieke. *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1988.
- Bellis, Alice Ogden. *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*. Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1994.
- Bledstein, Adrien Janis. "Is Judges a Woman's Satire?" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*. Ed. Athalya Brenner, 51-52. *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* 4. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.
- Bird, Phyllis A. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1997.
- Boling, Robert G. *The Anchor bible: Judges*. Doubleday & Company, INC., Garden City, NY, 1975.
- Brown, Francis and S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Day, Peggy L. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1989.
- Dever, William G. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When did They Know it?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about Reality of Ancient Israel*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 2001.
- Encyclopedia Judaica, pp. 1013-1023. Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971.
- Exum, Cheryl J. "'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Letty M. Russell. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1985.
- Exum, Cheryl J. *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*. Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, PA, 1993.
- Fewell, Danna Nolan, and Gunn, David M. "Possesses and Dispossessed," chapter in *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993.

Finkelstein, Israel and Neil Asher Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. The Free Press, New York, NY, 2001.

Fuchs, Esther. "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter." *A Feminist Companion to Judges*. Ed. Athalya Brenner, 116-130. *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* 4. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.

Hendel, Ronald. 2001, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory," *JBL* 120/4, 601-622.

Klein, Lillian R. "The Book of Judges: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women" in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*. Ed. Athalya Brenner, 24-33. *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* 4. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.

Koren Tanach. Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd., Jerusalem, 1995.

Meyers, Carol. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1988.

New Revised Standard Version Bible. Oxford University Press, NY, 1989.

The Oxford History of the Biblical World, edited by Michael D. Coogan.

Schneider, Tammi J. *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry – Judges*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2000.

Shoshan, Avraham Evan. The New Concordance. Kiryat-Sefer Ltd., Jerusalem, 1997.

Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 2001.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1984.