# THE WOMEN IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

*by*

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1. In the great history that spans the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, women play a comparatively minor role, whether as singular individuals or as the generic women—mother, wife, sister, daughter—of the legal materials.[1] Social roles control, to some extent, the depiction of major individuals, from Eve, proto-sister, proto-wife, and proto-mother, down to the queens of the Books of Kings.[2] The Book of Judges is exceptional in this respect: it abounds in stories involving women.[3] In the Pentateuch and in the rest of the Former Prophets the women of the stories seem to serve as points of reference in narrative strategies, against which the movements of the major, male actors may be calibrated.[4] Miriam, for example, is depicted

1. Robert Boling, Peter T. Daniels, Marsha Dutton, Adria Libolt, Clay Libolt, J. D. Quinn, and Phyllis Trible read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper, and I am happy to thank them. The Tobit, Praxilla, Martial, and Statius references I owe to Quinn, and the bell krater is on loan from him.

2. On queens and queen mothers in Israel and Assyria, see Hallo (1964, pp. 161-162) and references; on Assyrian-period Arabian queens, Winnett and Reed (1970, pp. 71-72); on Cleopatra, Bowersock (1983, pp. 40-46) and references; on Mavia, Bowersock (1980) and Mayerson (1980; note especially the comments of Theodoretus, p. 130).

3. The literature on Judges is voluminous and useful, from Burney (1918) to Boling (1975) (cited below as *Anchor Bible*) and beyond. A grammatical survey of the non-quotative prose is provided by Revell (1985), along with a detailed discussion of Judg 20:29-48. Mayes (1985) gives a summary of discussions on the book and its development, as well as an introduction to the historical debate on the early Iron Age. To the works cited by him, add Herion (1986) on social-science methodology and Ahlström's inquiry *Who Were the Israelites?* (1986).

4. On literary aspects of the depiction of women and the female in the Bible, see Trible (1978), partially summarized in Trible (1976a), and Trible (1984), which deals with texts from Judges in two major essays: "The Daughter of Jephthah: An Inhuman Sacrifice" (1984, pp. 93-116; slightly abridged as Trible 1987) and "An Unnamed Woman: The Extravagance of Violence" (on Judges 19; Trible 1984, pp. 65-91). On other aspects of women in the Hebrew Bible, see some of the essays in Gottwald (1983).

as the sister of Moses and Aaron as often as she is portrayed as a prophet in her own right.[5] It is not that these women are merely types brought in to enlarge a dramatic scheme, but they are certainly on the margins of the narratives in which they appear. Such treatment is in part a comprehensible product of the marginalization of women in virtually all of pre-modern history.[6]

The Book of Judges exemplifies this marginalization as it witnesses to it; women play a prominent role in its structure because the subject of the book is marginalization.[7] In the view of the tradents who composed the first two sections of the Hebrew Bible, there is a significant continuity before and after the period of the Judges. The patriarchs of Genesis gave rise to the Levite Moses, who passed on this central role to Joshua, both of them "Servants of Yahweh." From the failed kingship of Saul through the ultimately displaced kingship of the Davidic line a divine mandate was pursued. The period between the death of Joshua and the anointing of Saul, however, was a period of uncertainty and danger: the type of Mosaic leadership fades through stories of this period, and the format of Davidic leadership emerges only in the grotesque mockery of Abimelech's dominion.[8] This lack of human leadership is viewed as disastrous, for when "every one does what is right in their own eyes," the results are awful.

2. Historically the era between Joshua and Saul was one of transition, and the Israelite historical record illustrates the abiding dangers of

5. Contemporary English requires that *nĕbî'ā* be rendered "prophet" (so, e.g., Trible, 1976b, *contra* "prophetess" in, e.g., Barr, 1983, p. 5; Gottwald, 1979, p. 690), save perhaps in Isa 8:3, where the term may have the force "Mrs. Prophet," which might appropriately be glossed "prophetess." I gloss *'iššā* as "wife" or "primary wife" (Burney's notion that term is used with "a shade of contempt" in Judg 14:1 and 16:4 seems groundless; 1918, p. 356) and *pîlegeš* as "secondary wife" (cf. Burney, 1918, p. 265).

6. See, e.g., Harris (1976) and Trible (1976b).

7. In Jean Racine's reading of early Israelite History, as embodied in his play *Athalie* (1691), two of the women of Judges are singled out. An anonymous Levite women, protesting against Athaliah's regime, laments that she cannot like Jael "pierce the impious heads of God's enemies" (*"Des ennemies de Dieu percer la tête impie"*) (3.7.1115). When Joash's death appears imminent, three threatened children of earlier times are mentioned, first among them Jephthah's daughter (4.1.1260, cf. Isaac in 4.5.1439 and Moses in 5.2.1609).

8. Mayes remarks, "As far as the development of Israelite monarchy was concerned, Abimelek's kingship was probably a quite irrelevant episode" (1985, p. 88). This is at least the biblical view. On Judges 9, see Halpern (1978, esp. pp. 90–91).

passing-over better than the potential profit of such a development.[9] The temporal threshold is bound up with one abiding metaphor in the book, the concern with geographical borders: Where does Israel begin and end? How is it to associate with neighboring monarchies and other complex social organizations? A second abiding metaphor of the book involves women: Where does the private sphere become public? What rules govern the entangling of private and public? Women, here as elsewhere in pre-modern society, are set to do duty as representatives of the private, as men do duty as tokens of the public. Women are typically of the inside, the domestic sphere, while men are of the outside, the common sphere.

The thematic shape of the Book of Judges is thus a configuration of thresholds. Israel is moving toward the society which, in the Books of Samuel, grows into the Davidic monarchy. Its uncertain and ugly growth can be figured by two other sets of thresholds—the uncertain boundary around that society, the topic of the first chapter of the book, and the uncertain boundaries within a society of a distinctive sort, particularly the male-female boundary, itself the topic of the last chapter of the book. The complex of *limbus* or threshold themes is not simply a feature of the Book of Judges in its final form; it is deeply inscribed in the source materials used in the redaction of that form.[10] I intend to examine some aspects of the theme of women in the book; I shall address myself to the shape of the received text.

3. Women appear in the book in three expected roles—mother, mate, and daughter—and several unexpected. In the expected roles the women characters are involved in narrative explorations of the ways in which women participate in the structure of society; in the unexpected roles female figures are part of a consideration of how the role of women itself may be defined. The thresholds in those stories that involve women in expected roles are those of the dying and reviving generations as they

9. Modern historical approaches tend to discount the view of the period as transitional: "It is a distortion of the nature of Israel in the pre-monarchic period to think of it in terms of a society steadily progressing towards the establishment of the monarchy" (Mayes, 1985, p. 87, cf. pp. 87–90). Cf. Gottwald (1979, pp. 119–125).

10. The same is true to some extent of the angelic material: whatever the deuteronomistic coloring of the prose stories involving angels (Judg 2:1–5, 6:11–23, 13:1–25, cf. 9:23; see Boling, 1975, pp. 62, 66–67, 136), the divine messenger in Judges 5 is archaic (pace Burney, 1918, p. 151).

succeed each other: woman is daughter, mate, and mother, successively involved with the progress of generation or excluded poignantly from that ongoing sweep. The second group of stories, those involving women in unexpected roles, tend to center, much more often, on literal thresholds and the like; in this smaller group of stories, the thematic tends to evolve by replicating itself.

4. Of the three expected roles, motherhood is the most basic. Two maternal roles are touched on: descent and rearing. The less basic, legally regulated role is more discussed. The primary feature of descent treated is rank: the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah crucially depend on the status of their mothers, respectively secondary wife (Judg 8:31) and prostitute (Judg 11:1).[11] Property is another aspect of descent; in both cases where inheritance is apparently relevant, however, it is paternal descent that is at issue (Achsah, Judg 1:12–15; Ibzan's daughters, 12:8).[12] Child rearing is an implicit feature of the Samson and Micah sections. Samson's mother adheres to the divine stipulation of nazirite status for her son (Judg 13:3–5, 7, 13–14).[13] In contrast, Micah's mother seems indulgent in overlooking her son's theft of money from her (Judg 17:1–3).

The role of mate is the most intensively treated. There are two wives who are considered at some length, both of whom outdistance their husbands in initiative. Manoah seems unnecessarily incredulous, in contrast to his wife's careful attention to the divine messenger (esp. Judg 13:22–23), and Achsah takes it on herself to provide her husband Othniel with property (Judg 1:14). Two groups of wives are alluded to. The non-Israelite wives are a source of danger (Judg 3:5–6), while the presumably quasi-Israelite wives of Jabesh-Gilead (Judg 21:10–12) and Shiloh (Judg 21:23) are hailed as a solution to a terrible dilemma; the mass rape involved in the solution is not recognized as an outrage.[14] In addition to these primary wives, Judges tells the story of a secondary wife, a Judahite

11. On the status problems of Abimelech and Jephthah, see Boling (1975, p. 199). The term *mamzēr* is not used, probably because it did not apply; see Freedman and O'Connor (1976).

12. On property inheritance through women, see, e.g., Harris (1976) and Trible (1976b).

13. Somewhat oddly, Samson's mother seems to be bound by nazirite rules and her son seems not to be; on the relation of this text to Numbers 6 and 1 Samuel 1, see, e.g., Burney (1918, pp. 342–345).

14. Is the rape of the Sabine women the only real parallel (cf. Burney, 1918, p. 494)? If so, further consideration of the legendary quality of the two "rapes" is in order, perhaps in conjunction with Genesis 34.

married to a Levite who seems at first remarkably free in her movements (Judg 19:1-3) and is later horribly killed (Judg 19:25-26) and mutilated (Judg 19:29-30).[15] This pericope contributes a major liminal image: at the climax of Judges 19, the secondary wife, left for dead in the street, crawls toward the house where her husband is staying. It is when she gets to the threshold that she dies. There are three mates in the Samson cycle, each apparently Philistine: the wife (Judg 14:1-20, 15:1-8), abandoned if not divorced; a prostitute (Judg 16:1-3); and Delilah, apparently a primary or secondary wife (Judg 16:4-21).

The daughter role is highlighted only in the story of Jephthah's vow (Judg 11:34-40). Her exclusion from the cycle of generation complements the ensuing mass rape of Jabesh-Gileadite and Shilonite women, dragooned into that cycle.

Two women are involved in the Jephthah story: outside the narrative frame the "harlotry" of the judge's mother determines his fate; within the frame Jephthah's oath sets up another kind of fate for his daughter. The rhythm of single and multiple mate stories is found both in chapters 1-3 (from Achsah to the foreign wives) and the concluding chapters, 19-21 (from the Judahite concubine to the pillaged wives).

5. Of the five remaining women in the Book of Judges, four are found in the Deborah complex of Judges 4-5.[16] The remaining figure is the anonymous regicide of Thebez, the woman who kills Abimelech.

The prose story of Deborah revolves around a pair of women, Deborah, a woman of the external world, "presiding under Deborah's Palm" (Judg 4:5, *Anchor Bible*),[17] and Jael, the woman of the tent (4:20-21).[18] The opening episode focuses on Deborah (Judg 4:4-10) and includes her ambiguous reference to Yahweh exerting power over

15. I think the remark about her freedom applies no matter what verb is read in Judg 19:2: *zny* (MT), *z'p* (Burney, 1918, pp. 459-460; Boling, 1975, pp. 273-274), *znḥ* (?), or *z'm*. On this Judahite woman, see Trible's essay cited in note 4.

16. On the relationship of Judges 4 and 5, see, in addition to the commentaries, Lindars (1983), who also discusses the connection between Jael and Judith (pp. 173-175).

17. On the participle in Judg 4:5, see Revell (1985, pp. 418-419, cf. p. 424).

18. As Boling often has occasion to note, the names in the Book of Judges seem transparent, often comic; see also Halpern (1978, p. 92 nn. 31, 34; p. 96 n. 47). The names of Deborah, Baraq, and Jael's husband Heber all raise questions. Is there a link between Deborah ("honey bee") and the bees of Samson's lion (cf. Boling, 1975, p. 94)? Are Baraq ("lightning"), Deborah's general, and Lappidoth ("torches"), Deborah's husband, one and the same (cf. Boling, 1975, p. 95)? Is Heber's name related to the root *ḥbr* (on which see O'Connor, 1987)?

(*yimkōr*) Sisera through a woman (*běyad ʾiššā*).[19] The second episode (Judg 4:11) sets the Qenite scene for Jael without mentioning her; the battle setup is then described (Judg 4:12–13). Deborah orders the battle to begin (Judg 4:14), and after the event (4:15–16) comes the scene of Jael's attack on the refugee general (4:17–22). Deborah, a senior military advisor, is overshadowed by Jael, acting at the boundary of the tent (Judg 4:20) and within it, and extending the private sphere to include Sisera, as she extends her role in diplomacy to altering her clan's treaty relations (4:17).

In the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), the Deborah-Jael pair is joined by another pair, Sisera's mother and her attendant.[20] To understand the disposition of these four women it is necessary to review the structure of the poem in some detail. There are four major sections (or staves)[21] in the 106-line poem; Deborah is alluded to in the first two staves, while the other women are mentioned in the last. In the first stave (Judg 5:2a– 9b), the opening small section or batch (2a–3e) sets the scene of the war, taken up in the concluding batch (9a–9b), and introduces the divine warrior Yahweh, whose northern progress is the subject of the second batch (4a–5c). The third batch (6a–7d) of the first stave serves to date the divine action.[22]

    6a. In the days of Shamgar, Ben Anat,
    6b. In the days of Jael, caravans prospered,
    6c. Path followers followed circuitous routes.
    7a. Warriors prospered in Israel,
    7b. They prospered on booty,

19. On the ambiguity, see Boling (1975, pp. 96, 160).

20. The treatment of the Song is based on O'Connor (1980, chapters 2 and 10, Appendix), to which I refer for philological discussion and references; the line designations also follow that treatment—the usual attempts to correlate verse divisions with lines of verse are no clearer than this system and less precise. No treatment of Judges 5 is satisfactory, not least because of the lexical problems; I try to focus on the clearer aspects of structure. I take the unity of the poem as given; the notions of it as a "triumphal song" "expanded" for "cultic use" arose perhaps in response to the poem's difficulty, but they are not particularly useful responses (contrast, e.g., Mayes, 1985, pp. 22–24). Barr's remark of the Hebrew Bible as a whole is notably true of Judges 5: "A great deal of material was retained . . . not because later redactors were able to make changes . . . but for the opposite reason, that no one could account for its peculiarities . . . and so . . . it was left as it was" (Barr, 1983, p. 95).

21. The terms stave and batch refer to large (ca. 28 lines) and small (ca. 7 lines) sections.

22. The vocabulary in these lines is particularly difficult; lines 7ab are virtually conjecture.

7c. When you arose, Deborah,
7d. When you arose as a mother, in Israel.

Jael is part of the background of the pre-war situation, while Deborah is
more to the fore, more of an agent.

The second and third staves deal with the battle. The second (10a–
16c) opens with an invocation by the poet (10a–11c), followed immed-
iately by a call to the war (11d–12e). In this second batch, the song
leading up to the battle is incorporated into the song after battle.

11d. The army of Yahweh went down to the gates.
12a. Get up, get up, O Deborah,
12b. Get up, get up.
12c. Sing the song.
12d. Arise, Baraq.
12e. Capture your captives, Ben Abinoam.

Deborah is paired with Baraq in the conduct of war: she initiates the
action as he will conclude it. The remainder of the second stave is taken
up with counting out the muster; Deborah and Baraq are particularly
associated with Issachar (15a–c).

The prime figure in Deborah's war is Yahweh, and the second stave,
relating the success of her muster, is followed by the third (17a–23e), in
which the battle is won despite gaps in the array. The stave opens with
references to the no-show tribes (17a–18c) and closes with a special curse
on the rulers of Meroz (23a–e).[23] These frame the battle story: the
advent of Yahweh's enemies, the kings (19a–d), and of Yahweh's troops,
the stars (20a–21b), with the ensuing retreat (21c–22c).

The concluding stave of the poem (24a–31b) is divided among the
women. The angelic speech, begun in 23a with the curse on Meroz,
continues with the blessing on Jael, blessed "among women in the tent"
(24c). Deborah's role in the poem has been to call the muster and some
of those called do not respond; Jael, in contrast to Deborah, responds in
silence to the request of another, when Sisera asks for water (25a). The
doubling of speech acts in the second stave is found here also: the poet's
invocation contains Deborah's call (which leads to the poet's song), just
as the angel's blessing focuses on Sisera's request and Jael's silent
compliance. The murder of Sisera follows, with an emphasis placed on

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23. On *yōšēbîm* 'rulers', see Gottwald (1979, p. 529, cf. p. 573).

the instruments of Jael, the unlikely agent, and the mocking mechanical actions of the dying Sisera, who now, unable to act properly, suffers action.

The speech of the angelic messenger ends in line 27e, and the following lines introduce two further "inside" women, women who function in the domestic sphere, Sisera's mother[24] and an attendant peering through a lattice (28–29).[25] When the mother asks why Sisera delays

24. Note also Urbrock's treatment (1986) of this figure.

25. There are some intriguing commonalities among various ancient Near Eastern (and allied) figurations of women at windows, but there is by no means a uniform trope involved, a definitive *femme à la fenêtre*.

Literary and artistic sources are best considered separately.

In literary sources there are four sets of figures. (1) Those involving *hope or expectation* for a returning soldier include the picture of Sisera's mother in Judges 5 and that of Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9:30–37. (Simon Parker presents evidence suggesting that Jezebel sets out, in appearing at the window, to seduce Jehu—cf. (3) below; Parker, 1978, pp. 69–70.) This figure is parodied in Michal's hate-filled appearance during her husband's entry into Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:16). Martial speaks of women at the windows of Rome awaiting the return of the victorious Trajan in 98 C.E. (10.6.3–4: *omnis/Lucebit Latia culta fenestra nuru*, "Every window shines, decked with young Latian matrons"). Related to this group may be Statius' description of the women of Carthage looking down on the Trojan games *de turribus altis* (*Silvae* 5.2.122–24).

(2) The type of *sexual danger* is the woman in the early chapters of Proverbs who tempts young boys (she is a danger to them): Prov 5:8, 7:6–9, 9:14–18; cf. Sirach 26:12, perhaps too ribald to belong here. (On the interpretation of the early chapters of Proverbs as essentially directed to adolescent males, see Skehan, 1971.) The sexual danger is reversed in Sirach 42:11 (Heb; the couplet is lost from the LXX), where a daughter is in need of protection from outsiders. The late Greek lyric poet Praxilla of Sicyon (fl. 450 B.C.E.) writes of seeing through a window a woman who looks like a maiden in face but is a wedded bride below (Page, 1962, p. 390).

(3) This type is related to a more general pattern associating windows or doors with *waiting for a lover*, a pattern known in Sumerian sacred marriage texts (e.g., *ANET* 639), the Song of Songs (2:9, note the use of *parakyptō* in LXX; 3:4; 5:4–6), and in medieval *kharjas* from Spain in Arabic, Hebrew, or Romance (Monroe, 1979, esp. pp. 170, 176).

(4) *Rescue* is another focus for these figures, as when Rahab rescues the Israelite spies (Josh 2:15) and Michal rescues her husband (1 Sam 19:12) (cf. Berlin, 1983, p. 143, n. II.2); it is this rescue that is reversed in Michal's later repudiation of her husband. Rahab is, to be sure, associated with harlotry (cf. Holladay, 1986, p. 170).

The common feature of all these figures is expectation, whether in situations of hope (groups 1 and 3) or danger (groups 2 and 4). (Sarah bat Raguel prays by a window, Tobit 3:11, but there the point is that the prayer should go up, out, and probably, as with Dan 6:11, in the direction of the Holy City.) In some cases noted here substantial buildings seem to be involved, and cool upper stories well ventilated are mentioned by Jeremiah (22:14; see Holladay, 1986, p. 595, comparing Jer 4:30). There is no special association of death with windows, pace Christensen (1984, p. 402, quoting Grace Lorenz). His reference to the window in Baal's palace in the Baal Cycle is misleading, since it is only certain that

(28cd), the attendant replies with references to the women being divided up as spoil (30a–e). The violence of the contrast between the speech of these women and the angelic blessing and curse provides the poem's climax: there is no need to work out the terms of the contrast—a simple coda suffices.[26] The counting motif of the attendant's speech echoes Deborah's activity of severally calling the allied tribes to battle: the Israelite woman counts out tribes, the Canaanite woman counts out human chattel.

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the window was installed (UT 51 = CTA 4.V:120–VI:9, VII:15–29), not that death (Mot) came in that way; to include Sisera's mother is also dubious, and Jezebel certainly did not go to the window in order to be thrown from it to her death. The liminal sense of death is undeniable—death is the ultimate threshold; cf. Deut 32:25ab (O'Connor, 1980, pp. 201–202, 377–378) and Jer 9:20, both texts passed over in Christensen's account; Gordon (1966, p. 22) does connect the Jeremiah passage with the Ugaritic window, while Holladay (1986, p. 314) is more cautious. (Abramsky's 1980 study of Jezebel, Michal, and Sisera's mother is not accessible to me.)

Artistic representations are somewhat more uniform but more difficult to interpret. The bulk of the images are Iron-II (9th or 8th centuries?) ivories, known from four sites: (a) Nimrud/Kalakh; the best known example is Barnett, 1975, plate IV C12 (given also as *ANEP* #131; Mallowan, 1978, p. 33; Barnett, 1982, plate 50); closely related are Barnett, 1975, plate IV C13–15 (with window) and plate V C16–20 (without window); of the windowless examples, the best known is the Mona Lisa of Nimrud (*ANEP* #782; Parrot, 1969, p. 151); (b) Dur Sharrukin/Khorsabad (Parrot, 1969, p. 147; cf. pp. 405, 346); (c) Arslan Tash; and (d) Samaria; the only example is Crowfoot and Crowfoot (1938, plate XIII.2). On the hairstyle of the ivories, see Dever (1984, p. 23). Art historians have tended to see in these figures a *divinity*, to be associated with the supposed Cypriote (or even Phoenician) cult of *Aphrodite parakyptousa/Venus prospiciens* (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.760–61) (it should be noted that *parakyptō* and *prospicio* hardly mean the same thing; for the former, note simply John 20:11); this cult would in turn be based on a Phoenician cult of Ashtart (Barnett, 1975, pp. 145–151, 172–173; Crowfoot and Crowfoot, 1938, pp. 29–30; Mallowan, 1978, p. 33). At the same time art historians have tended to associate these figures with *workers in the sex industry*, citing, for example, the frontlets of Jer 3:3, as well as the images under (2) and (3) above. The divinity and whore identifications are not necessarily compatible, however, and the pattern of the literary evidence is not so easily reduced. The evidence from the rest of the Mediterranean basin needs to be explored more systematically; note, for example, the southern Italian bell krater of the fourth century B.C.E. which shows Zeus approaching a woman at a window with a conspiring Hermes not far off—this woman is not divine and she is not a whore. (For the piece, see O'Neill, 1982, p. 191).

26. A similar shift of speakers is found in Zephaniah 3, where the first speaker is also angelic; see O'Connor (1980). I hope to return to the whole poem of Zephaniah in the future, not least because my treatment of the first chapter is in places badly in need of revision, in light of more recent work I have done on Lamentations. (That chapter is the only one of the fourteen texts treated in my book that requires basic reconsideration of its formal structure.)

The Song of Deborah is a poem rich in quotations, a fact which in part accounts for the abruptness of its transitions. Quotation is largely reserved for women, if we can refer to the poet's version of the tribal list as a paraphrase of Deborah's speech, and so, too, is action; Jael's attack on Sisera is virtually the only human act in the poem, answering Yahweh's march from Edom in the south to the northern setting of the poem. The divine or angelic speaker provides a likeness for the speaking of the three women, Deborah, Sisera's mother, and her attendant, and each of these women is associated with leadership, whether in unconventional or conventional ways. Jael is a figure of social thresholds by virtue of her mixed allegiance to both Israel and the Canaanite enemy; she crosses the (political) threshold into Israel by virtue of her inviting Sisera over the threshold of her tent. Each of the four women is placed distinctly: Deborah in the open, under her palm, and the others in houses but near openings—by the tent flap, behind the lattice window. Their liminality in space helps to define Deborah's capacity for public action, just as the "mother" role defines both Deborah and Sisera's mother.

The other unconventional woman of Judges is a sister to Jael: she acts in a woman's sphere, i. e., from the inside, in killing an oppressing male.

> Abimelech proceeded to Thebez;[27] he encamped at Thebez and captured it. Strong's Tower was inside the city, and to it all the men and women (and all the city's lords) fled and shut themselves in. They went up on the roof of the tower. Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; he got close to the tower door so as to set it on fire. But some woman (ʾiššā ʾaḥat) threw an upper millstone down on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.[28] He called quickly to the squire who carried his weapons and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me. Else they will say of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So his squire thrust him through, and he died (Judg 9:50–54, Anchor Bible).

The Thebez tower of 9:51 takes up the ruined tower of Shechem of 9:49.[29] The single millstone from above answers to the one stone (ʾeben ʾeḥāt) on which Abimelech slew the "seventy sons" of Gideon (9:5).[30]

27. To the usual considerations of Thebez, add Milik (1966).

28. Machicolation is the technical term for the opening in a wall through which things could be dropped on assailants' heads.

29. Cf. Boling (1975, p. 181). The towers in the Abimelech story in turn take up the Gideon-story tower (8:9, 17).

30. Contrast Boling: "The reason for emphasis here [on 'one stone' in Judg 9:5] is not obvious" (1975, p. 171). The Jewish traditions play on the stone-for-stone pattern, and Boogaart (1985) treats it as central to the story.

The domestic association of the woman is taken up in the stone's being a millstone, a domestic tool (see Burney, 1918, p. 288). The texture of incident here overlaps with that of the Books of Samuel: Abimelech's plea is echoed by Saul, who fears posthumous reproach as a Philistine victim (1 Sam 31:4);[31] Saul's supposed armor bearer dies for claiming to have obeyed his master's plea (2 Sam 1:15–16); and Abimelech's request fails in its hoped-for effect, as Joab makes plain (2 Sam 11:21).[32]

6. We can supplement the story of the Thebez woman with an interesting Hellenistic story, the regicide of Pyrrhus of Epirus (319–272).[33] After his abortive Italian and Sicilian campaigns and his equally unsuccessful intervention in the Chremonidian War, Pyrrhus, supreme military tactician among Alexander's generals and the greatest failure among them, turned to a civil war in Argos. Just as Abimelech turned from his complex Shechem adventures to a brief and fatal attack at Thebez, so Pyrrhus gave up struggling with the Chremonidian alliance and went to Argos (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, 30–34).

Both Abimelech and Pyrrhus enter the city they are attacking. Pyrrhus foolishly tries to make use of two features of warfare which never work

31. Parallels to the fear of lasting reproach in Herakles stories are cited by Moore (1895, p. 268)—Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* 1062–63 and Seneca, *Hercules on Eta* 1180ff.; Herakles is his poison coat, betrayed by a woman he loved, is more like Samson than Abimelech.

32. The actions of Jael raise the question of what role women can play in battle. (On the curse of ordinary male warriors "becoming" women, as in Jer 50:37, Nah 3:13, and elsewhere, see Hillers, 1964, pp. 66–68.) The majority of ancient Near Eastern references to non-divine women in battle involve some sort of prophet or monarch (Samsi, the Arabian queen mentioned in Sargon's annals, is one case; see *ANET* 286; cf. note 2 above). Goddesses—Ishtar, Ereshkigal, Tiamat, and others—are another matter altogether. Non-divine, non-royal women in Israel have no role to play in war, given that (military?) cross-dressing was prohibited (Deut 22:5); at Ugarit, Pughat, Aqhat's sister, is apparently driven to that extreme after her brother's death (UT 1 Aqht = CTA 19.203–8). The chief activities left to women in Israel are negotiation (the wise woman of Abel-Beth Maacah in 2 Samuel 20) and coming out after battle to dance—so Miriam after Yahweh's victory at the Sea, so Jephthah's daughter, and so the women after the early wars of Saul and David (see Trible, 1984, pp. 100–101). Otherwise they remain at home, looking out the windows and doors.

33. On Pyrrhus among the diadochs, see Will *et al.* (1975, pp. 363–374); on the man himself, see Lévêque (1957); on Pyrrhus' death, see Lévêque (1957, pp. 622–626), with a full catalog of the variations, often amusing, among the ancient sources. Here as elsewhere Lévêque argues for the reliability of Plutarch's account in the *Parallel Lives*, which I have rendered from the edition of Flacelière and Chambry (1971, vol. 6). In view of our theme, the active role of the Spartan woman during Pyrrhus' attack on Lacedemon is noteworthy; see Plutarch, *Pyrrhus*, 27–29. The parallel between Pyrrhus and Abimelech is noted briefly by Moore (1895, p. 268).

exclusively for one side—cover of night (he enters the city by night, but
its terrain makes fighting all but impossible) and elephants (his beasts
enter the gates only with difficulty, and one goes berserk during a
retreat).[34] Abimelech moves to set fire to the city tower, in which the
people have taken refuge, but fails. Pyrrhus is seeking at dawn to retreat
from Argos and reconsider his strategy, but his own troops and elephants
have blocked the streets and made movement almost impossible. Pyrrhus
plunges into the enemy forces; he is wounded slightly and turns on his
assailant, "who was an Argive, not of the well-born, but the son of a
poor and elderly woman" (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus,* 34). Plutarch, who gives
the fullest of the dozen ancient accounts of Pyrrhus' death, continues
thus:

> That woman, watching the battle (as were the rest of the women) from the
> roof, when she saw her son in combat with Pyrrhus, being deeply stirred
> at the danger, picked up with both her hands a tile[35] and threw it on
> Pyrrhus. It struck his head just below the helmet and broke the vertebrae
> at the base of his neck, so that his eyes were blurred and his hands
> dropped the reins (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus,* 34).[36]

Neither attack is immediately fatal. Abimelech must be finished off.
Pyrrhus is dragged by some of the enemy forces off the scene and there
decapitated, though not before he gives his ultimate assailant so awful a
look that the man is almost unable to go on (cf. 1 Sam 31:4). Abimelech's
burial is not recorded; Antigonus, Pyrrhus' one-time comrade-in-arms,
arranged an honorable funeral for his enemy.

34. The difficulty of controlling elephants in battle is a favorite theme of Roman
writers, taken up by Scullard (1975); on Pyrrhus, see p. 118.

35. This is the usual translation of *keramida,* presumably because the woman is on a
roof; anything made of potter's clay could be meant. Other ancient sources say the weapon
was a stone. A curious version has it that the woman inadvertently fell on Pyrrhus; see
Lévêque (1957, p. 625). Another has it that it was no ordinary Argive who killed him, but
Demeter herself; this seems to have been a local Argive tradition and so may have been
meant to aggrandize the city rather than slight the true assailant; see Lévêque (1957,
p. 625).

36. The role of an image like the one found in these stories of tyrannicide needs to be
considered in conjunction with other kinds of historical quasi-sources, including folk
traditions. Writing of the description of elephant warfare in 1 Macc 6:28–63, Goldstein
(1976, p. 320) suggests, "Our author may have taken his detailed account from a Hellenistic
work on the tactics to be used with war elephants. The hard-pressed Jewish eyewitnesses
could hardly have preserved such minute information." In fact, the death of the Hasmonean
Eleazar under an elephant he incapacitated (1 Macc 6:46) is "repeated" several centuries
later by the Armenian general Pacas. We are in the realm of journalistic clichés.

7. Women are absent from only three major sections of the Book of Judges: the introductory material in chap. 2, the Gideon stories (chaps. 6–9), and the tale of Danite migration. Researches into female status, role, and rank fill and shape the rest of the book. The mass marriages of chaps. 3 and 21 balance each other,[37] as do the diversity of women in the Deborah and Samson sections (chaps. 4–5; 13–16). At the heart of the book are the monstrous figures of Jephthah and Abimelech, each disenfranchised by his mother's social position, one the murderer of his daughter, the other killed by an anonymous woman.

Setting aside Deborah as a special case, we find that the four major female figures have certain points in common. Each is associated with one of the four major stories in Judges: Jael, the tyrannicide of Sisera (in the Deborah-Baraq sections, chaps. 4–5); the regicide in the Gideon-Abimelech section (chaps. 6–9); Jephthah's daughter in the Jephthah section (chaps. 11–12); and Delilah in the Samson section (chaps. 13–16). All four of these women appear near the end of the story cycles in which they figure. The first and the last of the women are named; the middle two are anonymous. The first two are involved in the ongoing business of war; the last two are caught up in its aftermath—Jephthah's daughter greeting her father after battle and Delilah forced to serve political designs prompted by Samson's previous successes. The first and last of the women both seem to violate a confidence or trust, and both use sleep (or something like it) to their advantage. Both are presented in a narrative context of women: Jael is associated with Deborah, Sisera's mother, and her attendant, Delilah with the other loves of Samson. Jephthah's daughter, the third of the group, associates herself with a company of women in her last days, though both she and the regicide of Abimelech are narratively isolated in their respective stories.

The last two of the women, Delilah and Jephthah's daughter (non-Israelite and Israelite, respectively), are both memorialized for actions involving a vow, a vow undertaken by a male in the story. One of the vows is impeccably orthodox, though Samson is hardly a model nazirite; the other vow, involving human sacrifice, has no basis in Mosaic religion. Samson's vow is broken, through no fault of his; Jephthah's vow is kept, in no way to his credit.

The tyrannicides of Sisera and Abimelech (a non-Israelite Canaanite and a Canaanizing Israelite, respectively) are not accorded balanced

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37. Achsah's tale also balances the story of the Shilonite women; see Boling (1975, p. 64). On the chaps. 3 and 21, see Boling (1975, p. 78).

treatments. The first is set in an elaborate narrative context: Jael, a woman of no office or special rank, is contrasted with both the prophet Deborah and Sisera's mother. The first contrast shapes the overall complex of chaps. 4 and 5, the second the end of the poem in chap. 5. In contrast, the death of Abimelech is narrated briefly.[38]

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## Abbreviations

*ANEP* = Pritchard 1969a
*ANET* = Pritchard 1969b
CTA = Herdner 1963
UT = Gordon 1965

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38. Different understandings of this group of women are possible. Clay Libolt (see n. 1), for example, suggests bracketing the regicide of Thebez and Deborah with the bereaved she-bear of Hos 13:8 as mother images; and Jael and Delilah with Jezebel, the dangerous woman of Proverbs, and Judith as seducers.

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Arabia.* Toronto.

Author: The Book of Judges does not specifically name its author. The tradition is that the Prophet Samuel was the author of Judges. Internal evidence indicates that the author of Judges lived shortly after the period of the Judges. Samuel fits this qualification. Date of Writing: The Book of Judges was likely written between 1045 and 1000 B.C. God sent His Angel to both women and told them they would "conceive and bear a son" (Judges 13:7; Luke 1:31) who would lead God's people. God's compassionate delivery of His people despite their sin and rejection of Him presents a picture of Christ on the cross. Jesus died to deliver His people—all who would ever believe in Him—from their sin.