

One Woman, Three Kings

The Story of Deborah, Saul, David and Solomon

By Steven Liebowitz, ED.D

The Bible tells us that 175 years after Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt, there arose a woman, Devorah, a daughter of Ephraim, to be a Judge over her people, a prophetess and a righteous example unto them. The Bible also tells us of Devorah's husband, Lappodoth; Barak, the great Hebrew general; Sisera the Canaanite general; Yael the Kenite, slayer of Sisera; and of Sisera's mother, Bethena. The Bible touches only the high points of their lives. What follows is a more complete story.

Chapter Six

Yael sat before Devorah in the majlise. She'd come as did nearly 150 others, men, women and children to seek answers to the oppression and lack of safety they'd been experiencing. But she did not have high expectations. She knew Devorah to be an exceptional woman, and a good and fair judge, but a woman, none-the-less. She also knew of Devorah's reputation as a prophetess, but was unsure of how this 'ability,' if that was the right word, worked. Did God take over her body? Did she writhe and twist, yell or speak softly? Or did God just take hold of her mind and mouth?

Yael was curious, not only about Devorah's relationship to God, but about her own. Her recent few experiences, suggested 'taken over' might not be too far from the truth. Though she hadn't writhed or yelled, she'd seen things, real things just as in life..

The people milled around in the grove. Now there were perhaps two hundred men, women and children. Haber moved a few feet ahead of Yael to the front and center of the throng. He stopped a few cubits from the slight elevation Devorah would sit upon and spread his blanket. Yael joined him and they sat down. A few men in what passed for military uniforms were on either side of Devorah's place. Seeing them made Yael think of Jereboam, her captured cousin. She closed her eyes and prayed silently for his safe return. I will ask Devorah about this harassment from the Canaanites, she thought. Something had to be done.

Lappodoth, Devorah's husband came forward, spread a carpet on the rise and sat down. The murmuring from the multitude grew louder. Yael had seen him before, but not this close. He was bigger and younger than she'd thought, with rough features but a gentle demeanor. No fighter there, either, she thought. Then she caught herself. *How fierce you've become,*

daughter! Her cheeks flamed. It's so; but the times demand fierceness, she thought. We're naked here; we have NO protection; and they're deliberately provoking us!

Lappodoth stood as Devorah came forward. The crowd quieted down. She too, seemed younger than Yael remembered. Her jaw was chiseled and set and her green eyes blazed with banked fire. No lack of fierceness there, Yael thought. She has enough for us all. *She has to.*

Devorah gestured for the multitude to rise.

"The Lord God, Yahweh, is the One God," she prayed, arms outstretched, palms up, head tilted back, eyes closed. "His love brought us forth from Egypt. We are his chosen ones, made in his image and likeness. What can befall us?"

"The Canaanites." It was a man's voice deep and rich, without anger or fear. It came from behind the multitude. Devorah's guards stood taller, hands tightening on swords, necks craning.

"Indeed, brother," Devorah said, opening her eyes and looking around. "Would you stand that we may see you?" Her voice was deep and soft.

A man with one leg pushed himself up leaning on a rough-hewn crutch. Yael thought he was in his mid-thirties. A jagged scar ran across his clean shaven face from where his left ear should have been to his jaw. He wore a clean, short, white woolen tunic that ended at his knees.

"The Canaanites took your ear and cut off your leg?" Devorah asked.

The man nodded. "I am Dovid ben Ami of the Nephtali."

Devorah smiled warmly. "A fine and stalwart tribe."

"Indeed," Dovid said, smiling back as warmly. "Those at your left side are Nephtali and on the right, Zebulun." Devorah bowed her head in acknowledgement. "Two tribes that will forever put the People of the Covenant before their own smaller interests."

"Oo's" and "Ah's" from the crowd as some agreed; grumbles and coughs from those of Asher and Benjamin and the other tribes who disagreed.

"Yet you seem in good spirits, Dovid ben Ami of the Nephtali; even grateful," Devorah said.

"I am, Devorah, Sar of Israel."

"But when I prayed acknowledging God's power, you spoke of the Canaanites."

"I did."

“Are they,” Devorah asked, “separate from God’s power?”

He smiled more deeply, held out his right hand to her, the hand not holding the crutch, palm up and cocked his head to the left. “Devorah, you of all our people.” He shook his head. “How can *you* ask that?” Dovid paused. “Of course they are not separate from God’s power. They are the instruments of God’s power, chosen as we are chosen.”

A gasp erupted from the multitude, punctuated by muffled shouts of, “shame” and “blasphemy!”

Devorah raised her arms for silence. The voices died away.

“Go on, Dovid. Complete your thought.”

“It is said that all things, good and bad, are echoes of the voice for God.” Devorah dipped her head in agreement. Yael did also. Though she hadn’t heard that phrase before, it resonated deeply in her and Yael thought there was a great truth in it. Dovid continued: “The Canaanites befall us, because it is God’s will that they befall us. And when we are ready to return to God’s will, they will cease to be a problem. It is not God who makes the Canaanites a plague in our lives, but our own imagined separation from God. When we no longer feel separate from the all encompassing power It is, but accept responsibility for our actions and the uses we make of It, then we shall be victorious.

“So long as we *feel* like a divided petty people,” he gestured to the men of Asher and Benjamin, “we will think and act and so become a divided petty people. The power does not need us to be great or petty. The power is indifferent to us; It is ours to use.”

Dovid sat down and Devorah continued. “But the Covenant is a commitment to greatness, not pettiness. The Covenant calls us to greatness. The Covenant says, ‘do ye thus, and thus shall be done unto you.’ It is a promise. If we honor our part, the all-power we call God, will honor Its part.” She paused, looked at the hundreds of faces before her and saw doubt, confusion, fear and emptiness in most, and comprehension and acceptance in only a few. I will speak to those, she thought, but *for* those who do not understand.

“My people, my family,” she said, voice eager and enthusiastic, “brothers and sisters, wise ones, mothers and fathers, soldiers, shepherds, farmers, merchants, artisans, children,” Devorah extended a hand and the young people stood and cheered.

“All things *are* echoes of the voice for God. Dovid, our brave warrior, is proof of this great truth. Is Dovid, happy, content and productive?” Many nodded. “Did God punish him?” A chorus of “no!” echoed around the crowd. “Did God allow the Canaanites to take his ear and his

leg?” Hesitation. “Who made the decision to defend his people?” “Dovid!” “Who knew what could happen in war?” “Dovid.” “So, who made the decision to risk his leg and ear, Dovid or God?” “Dovid.”

“God allows everything and nothing. God allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust man alike. My people,” Devorah reached up and out in a wide, inclusive gesture, “God is the ever-present power within and around us; you, me and everyone, even the Canaanites.” Angry shouts of “no!” “they worship Baal!” “they blaspheme!”

“Justice is mine, sayeth the Lord,” Devorah said. “This means the deed itself, carries with it its own reward or punishment. It is not for us to punish. How can it be, if God Itself shuns it? Dovid lost an ear and a leg. Is that punishment or reward? Judge for yourselves. Look at him and judge! He chose with divine guidance to defend his people and though he seems punished, he is not.

“What we take to be real and true are only temporary conditions, appearances. The greatest reality is here,” Devorah touched her heart, “and here,” she touched a finger to her head. “These are the places we comprehend and experience God’s eternal reality. The Covenant lives here, in everyone, whether they know it or not; even in the Canaanites. It is here, not in the Ark, or temple. It is for this that we have been chosen; to awaken ourselves and all human kind to the truth of our being and our relationship to God.

“And what is that truth? All things are echoes of the voice for God. We are to love first; we are to honor the divine within and around us; we are to be mindful and responsible for our thoughts, feelings and actions, first, and then respect and enable every person’s power to do and be likewise. The Covenant tells us, as ye sow, so shall ye reap. *This* is God’s will for us and in this way do we best honor and use the power that God is.

“Once there were people who experienced the fierce power of the Covenant directly. They were our ancestors. They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, saw the Pillar of Fire, ate Mana. Now we have only the law and the tales to tell us what it was like. We have no experience of the Lord’s fierce power of our own.

“Now we have only Its gentleness and the still small voice within. But this is enough! *If* we honor and attend to It. The Law and the tales are helpful and we use them, but they are not the thing Itself. They are reminders, mile markers; the finger pointing to the moon, and once we see the moon, we need no longer point our finger.

“The power that is God is always responsive to us; returning what we put into it, what we sow. Use the Power that is God consciously, instead of unconsciously. Always present and receptive, It receives the impression of our everyday, habitual thoughts and feelings and returns to us what we dwell upon. Therefore, raise your hearts and minds, lest you attract what you do not want. True worship is awareness of how Spirit works and acceptance of our responsibility for how we use It, not empty ritual and slavish obedience to the Law and the tales.”

But their faces told Devorah that the Law and the tales were their meat, their bread and honey; all they wanted. *Oh, Abba*, she prayed, *if only I can waken them*. But really, what chance did she have, a mere woman, when even Moses with all God’s miracles, could not bring them to an awareness of their divinity, and they bowed down before the Golden Calf and wandered in the desert for forty years?

She *had* reached a few though, Devorah saw awareness in a few more faces as she looked around. *All I can do is be a clear channel for, You, Abba*, she prayed again. *To keep myself mindful, open and aware and share what You give me to share*.

Then, as it had many times before, time stopped and Devorah heard His voice. Not a *voice*, actually, and certainly not a male voice. She called it “Abba”, the masculine form, because she was comfortable with the tradition of her people. But really, and she’d thought about this often and deeply, if one were to reflect seriously about it, how could the One God be masculine? If it was ‘one’ wouldn’t that have to be *both* feminine *and* masculine? The masculine without the feminine was bereft, out of balance, lacking wholeness, and hardly ‘one.’

There was no voice, really, for the power was not human. It was beyond everything human at all. The ideas simply filled her, her head and heart, and she knew with every fiber of her being that this was good and right and healthy and should be acted upon or shared.

I am well pleased, daughter. To keep yourself mindful, open and aware is all I ask. You cannot behave appropriately unless you perceive correctly. Since you and your neighbor are equal members of one family, as you perceive both so you will do to both. Look out from the perception of your own holiness to the holiness of others. You are the work of God, and Its work is wholly lovable and wholly loving. This is how you must think of yourself in your heart for this is what you are.

Devorah blinked. The ideas were hers now. The Majlise continued. A family of shepherds wanted a better price for its wool. The merchant resisted any change, then, as they dialogued, he agreed to an adjustment. Devorah had done nothing. A question of boundary

stones was also amicably settled in the same way. A young woman rose. Devorah nodded to her.

“I am Yael, wife of Haber the Kenite, descendant of Jethro.”

“Speak, Yael.”

“I have a cousin very dear to me, Jereboam, who guarding a caravan, was wounded and taken in a raid. I would like him restored to us.”

“That would be my wish as well,” Devorah said.

“What you said earlier,” Yael continued, “about all things being the echoes of the voice for God and the Canaanites being chosen as we have been chosen to share the power of God.” She paused.

“Please continue, Yael.”

“I have prayed and Jereboam has not returned. Must I pray to Baal to send my cousin to me? Is Baal the equal of Yahweh?”

“Baal is an idol empty of power.” Devorah looked hard at Yael. “But you know that don’t you Yael?” Yael nodded. “Then why....”

“I am tired of pious words,” Yael said bitterly, long black hair swirling around her head and full breasts shifting as she gestured aggressively. “Actions; deeds are called for! We have prayed for 20 years and now, each year, the Canaanites become bolder and bolder. I say, enough! When will we fight, Devorah?”

Dovid stood. “I am ready!” he said. “Who will stand with me?” The guards around Devorah stepped forward; here and there in the crowd a man stood, altogether perhaps 16 or 17 in a multitude of 500. Yael looked around her and spat.

“Our people are not yet ready, Yael,” Devorah said, gesturing for those standing to be seated.

“Will they ever be?” Yael said, staring down at her husband who looked away.

“They will, Yael,” Devorah said. “Some of us will; you and I,” she gestured, “those standing. We will feel the guidance and act upon it. Not everyone, and not a great many. But enough will be called and heed the call as our good Dovid has done and then, the Lord God of Hosts will be with us. To act before we feel the power, without being called, to act from an empty, heathen space will destroy us.”

“And in the mean time?” Yael’s voice was sarcastic, her pretty face pinched.

“Make yourself and yours ready. Open to guidance. Help others be guided. Feel your love and compassion for Jereboam; live from your heart out and know the truth of your own divinity; as you sow, so shall you reap.”

Haber was pulling on Yael’s hand trying to get her to sit. Yael, who’d been staring deeply into Devorah’s eyes, nodded and sat. Perhaps, she thought, she would accept her anger and frustration; if all things were echoes of the voice for God, then these too, were of Him. Not accept them and do nothing, not feel guilty and suppress them, but accept them as part of her guidance; to embrace them and move to include them productively in her life. She glanced at Haber, squeezed his hand; he squeezed back without looking at her. Perhaps her sexual disappointment with Haber, her desire for something more exciting, even glamorous might be embraced also. Yael smiled, could the desires she’d been suppressing and denying most of her life also be echoes of the voice for God?

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