

Deborah, Esther and Hulda in the Tanakh (Bible) - H  l  ne H. Oord, Three Jewish Prophets Who Spoke Up and Made a Difference

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Woman with an Israeli flag

Shalom H  l  ne H. Oord,

“Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.” (*Judges 4:4*)

Yesterday, International Women’s Day (IWD) celebrated the contributions of women throughout history while encouraging and empowering women for greatness today.

Great Jewish women such as the Prophet Deborah, Queen Esther, and even Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir have lived in critical times in Israel’s history, times that threatened the very existence of the nation if it weren’t for the courageous leadership of these women.



Deborah Beneath the Palm Tree,
by James Tissot

The Role of the Prophet

“Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” (*Acts 21:8–9*)

Many IWD events yesterday promoted the cause of gender equality. Yet, **probably none of them revealed the one role in which women have experienced some gender equality throughout the ages—the role of prophet.**

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.” (*1 Corinthians 14:1*)

What is a prophet?

In Hebrew, the word for prophet is **navi**. Some believe the word comes from the verb **naba**, which means **to bubble up**. But some modern linguists lean more toward the source being the Akkadian verb **nabu**, meaning **to call**.

According to *Judaism 101*, the word **navi** comes from the term **niv sefatayim**, meaning **fruit of the lips**, which emphasizes the prophet's role as a speaker.

Regardless of the source of the word, the mission of the prophet throughout the Bible is clear—to speak on behalf of God.

The only way prophets have known what God wanted them to say is when He told them through His Spirit, as He did with Ezekiel:

“Then the **Ruach [Spirit]** of the LORD came on me, and He told me to say: ‘This is what the LORD says: That is what you are saying, you leaders in Israel, but I know what is going through your mind.’” (*Ezekiel 11:5*)

A woman named Deborah was also empowered by the **Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit)** to be both a prophet and a judge during the time when Jabin, the king of Canaan, was oppressing Israel. As such, God placed Deborah as a key leader in Israel.



A neo-gothic fresco of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel by Leopold Bruckner.

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Judge Deborah the Prophet

In Judaism, women are traditionally revered as “the mother of life” and as being endowed with a deeper sense of understanding than men. Even so, the Jerusalem Talmud (4th–5th century commentaries on the 2nd century oral traditions) and the Code of Jewish Law state that women cannot judge civil or capital cases. (*Chabad*)

Despite this ruling, we read in Judges 4:5 that Deborah “used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.”

The people of Israel in 12th century BC revered Deborah for her judgment and leadership abilities so much that she even directed men in battle as their Commander-in-Chief. **She was not only a prophet and a judge, she was a warrior.**

During Deborah's leadership, the people of Israel had been living for 20 years under the oppression of the king of Canaan. They needed deliverance, so she called for a respected man of war named Barak and prophesied:

"The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" (*Judges 4:6-7*)



The Song of Deborah, by Gustav Dore

Respecting her anointing by the Ruach HaKodesh and placement by God in Israel for such a time as this, Barak told Deborah that he would not go into battle without her:

"Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.'" (*Judges 4:8*)

Barak perhaps made a common miscalculation. While he seemed certain of Deborah's anointing, he also seemed to doubt God's ability to use him when distanced from her leadership.

It wasn't enough to hear God's destiny over his life—that God would give the enemy into his hands. Barak needed His spokesperson for the destiny to be there, too, and he perhaps idolized her as a “good luck charm” or a guarantor of success.

Because Barak had more faith in God's spokesperson over God's prophetic word, God modified Barak's destiny:

“Certainly I will go with you,’ said Deborah. ‘But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.’” (*Judges 4:9*)



"Jael went out to meet Sisera" (*Judges 4:18*) Image from page 315 of *The Art Bible, Comprising the Old and New Testaments: With Numerous Illustrations* (1896)

God empowered another woman to take the glory that could have gone to Barak, if only he had enough faith to believe it would happen as God said. After all, he gathered ten thousand troops and pursued the enemy as they fled. He did the work, but it was a woman, not a soldier, who killed Jabin's army commander, Sisera.

Completely defeated, Sisera fled from Barak and went to the tent of Yael (Jael), the wife of Heber the Kenite, who was a metal smith. It is possible he went there to have his weapons of battle fixed since the Kenites were at peace with the Canaanites.

While sleeping in Yael's tent, she killed him by hammering a peg through his head, thus fulfilling Deborah's prophecy that God would deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman. (*Judges 4:21–22*)

God is not a respecter of persons that He would only give wisdom, courage, and advance knowledge about civil matters or battle strategies to men alone. He empowers women with such abilities, even in modern Israel.



Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel and Lujo Toncic-Sorinj, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (*Council of Europe photo, November 1, 1973, Strasbourg*)

Prime Minister Golda Meir

One example of strong female leadership at a critical junction of Israel's modern history is Golda Meir, the "strong-willed, straight-talking, grey-bunned grandmother of the Jewish people." (*Haaretz*)

Of course, she was not a prophet, but she was elected Israel's fourth prime minister in 1969.

While much political controversy ensued over her battle strategies and decisions, **she led Israel through the 1973 Yom Kippur War.** At the critical moment when her enemies could have captured possibly all of Israel, Meir called out to the man in charge of the most powerful military in the world—US President Nixon.

President Nixon, whom God also placed in power for such a time as this, told his reluctant staff with great urgency, "You get the stuff to Israel. Now. Now." (*Nixon Foundation*)

Through the leadership, courage, and direction of both Deborah and Golda Meir over three millenia apart, **the people of Israel were delivered from the oppression of neighboring enemies.**



A photo of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (left), U.S. President Richard Nixon (center), and National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger at the White House. From the booklet "President Nixon and the Role of Intelligence in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War." (*United States government work*)

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At this time in Israel's history, as anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism grows exponentially, let us remember to pray for the peace of Israel, keeping Israel's leadership in prayer.

Queen Esther Speaks Out

Less than a week ago, during the festival of Purim, we saw another woman who spoke out at a critical moment for the survival of the Jewish People—Queen Esther.

Empowered by her status as queen, the favor that the king lavished on her, and the prayers of her people, Queen Esther exposed a plot by the king's trusted adviser to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Although Esther risked her life in taking the problem to the king, she wisely and strategically utilized the favor she had found with the king, thus saving her people from certain annihilation.

Esther did not predict the defeat of her enemy, as Deborah did; yet, she understood she was supernaturally placed in her position for such a time in order to speak out on behalf of her people. **In doing so, she became a spokesperson for God. Indeed, in Judaism, she is considered a prophet.**



Esther Before Ahasuerus, by Artemisia Gentileschi (Metro Museum of Art)

We do not read that the Ruach HaKodesh directly indwelt Esther or that God spoke to her, so where did her courage and wisdom come from?

Esther asked for battle support in the form of hundreds of thousands of her Jewish kinsmen prayerfully fasting for her. This mass appeal to God Himself on Esther's behalf most certainly was heard and responded to.

God would not leave nor forsake Esther. **He empowered her with favor of the king, wisdom on her tongue, beauty in her appearance, and spiritual warfare in the heavenlies through the prayers and fasting of her people.**

We, too, can pray and fast, asking God to place wisdom, favor and effective strategy upon His prophets, teachers, and leaders today. It might just be that the success of a person called "for such a time as this" relies on the fasting and prayer of those who know the God of Israel.



Women pray at the Western (Wailing) Wall in Jerusalem.

The Prophet Hulda Helps Bring About Revival

The Prophet Hulda, the wife of Shullam, keeper of King Josiah's wardrobe, is perhaps one of the least known of the seven women Judaism considers prophets in the Bible (Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther).

At a time when Zephaniah was prophesying in the synagogues and Jeremiah in the marketplaces, **Hulda prophesied to the women between the two busiest gates of the First Temple.** Hulda may have also played a role in the training of King Josiah when he was a boy.

The king's court called on her to prophesy to the king, after the Torah scroll was discovered in the process of restoring the long-neglected Beit HaMikdash (Temple). Josiah became deeply disturbed when he read in Deuteronomy the curses that would come upon Israel when it fell into sin. (*2 Kings 22:8–13*)

Why did these men, including the High Priest (Kohen Gadol), turn to Hulda and not the greatest prophet of the time—Jeremiah?

It's thought that Jeremiah was away visiting the Jewish exiles in Assyria, comforting them.

Any true prophet, however, would have given the same message from God to the king.



The Huldah Gates are the two sets of gates in the Southern Wall of the Temple Mount, situated in Jerusalem's Old City. The western set is a double arched gate (the double gate), and the eastern is a triple arched gate (the triple gate). Both sets are now blocked. Huldah is thought to have prophesied between these gates.

Hulda confirmed the truth of God's word by reiterating the consequences of Israel's disobedience.

"This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read." (*2 Kings 22:16*)

She also foresaw the mercy that God places on those who humble themselves and repent. Prophesying about King Josiah, she said:

"Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people ... your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place." (*2 Kings 22:19–20*)

The king immediately summoned everyone in the Land to the Temple to hear the words of Torah, and renewed the covenant.

In this way, Hulda played an important role in the spiritual revival of the Jewish people under the reign of King Josiah.



A photographer in one of Israel's desert canyons.

All God's Women Speak Out

We might be tempted to think that only specially privileged and anointed women like Deborah, Esther, or Hulda can hear from and speak for God today.

Perhaps this was true before the ratifying of the Brit Chadashah (New Covenant), when the Ruach HaKodesh indwelt specific people for specific times and purposes. But now all followers of Yeshua (Jesus) have direct access to God's Ruach.

We might not always have words of knowledge about future events (words of knowledge is a spiritual gift of God given at certain times to certain people), but we can speak forth His truth and apply it to the current events in our lives as all great women and men of God do.

His Spirit empowers us to speak His truth in love and without fear.

Like King Josiah, people are desperately seeking answers during these times of persecution, especially against God's people. Anti-Semitism and anti-Israel are on the rise. Jews and Christians are killed just for being Jews and Christians. They are also sued, slandered and defamed for speaking out on the sanctity of life and marriage and the prophetic regathering and / or the end-time salvation of the Jewish People.

Yet, because of their call to be God's spokespersons, many are influencing changes for righteousness in their culture.

We are placed in our circle of influence "for such a time as this"—to share, teach, counsel, and caution.



A woman enters a spice store in the Mahane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem.

To prepare us for our role as God’s spokesperson, the great Rabbi and commentator Rambam said that every prophet needs great faith, moral character, and broad Torah knowledge.

It takes faith, knowledge of God’s Word, holiness, and maturity to speak the truth in love.

Although God can speak through a donkey if He wants to, we shouldn’t expect to be heard if we don’t interact with others in love and integrity, as a true spokesperson for God should.

And in these Last Days, we can expect a great outpouring of God’s Spirit to empower us in that effort, as the Prophet Joel foresaw:

“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” *(Joel 2:28)*

Yeshua prophesied that outpouring when He told His talmidim (disciples):

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” *(Acts 1:8)*

Being a true Prophet of God, Yeshua's promise happened just as He said. *(Acts 2)*



The crowds gather in Jerusalem for Shavuot.

Of course, that outpouring began after Yeshua's resurrection, when Believers in Yeshua were gathered together in Jerusalem on the Shavuot (Pentecost) in the manner prescribed by Scripture.

It was then that they received the Ruach HaKodesh.

They were transformed and from that day forward; they went from being fearful to being courageous, outspoken ambassadors for God. And **that empowerment continues today.**

1 Corinthians 14:3–5 states, "The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort" in order to build up and teach Believers. *(See also 1 Corinthians 14:29–31)*

In the Last Days, it seems that prophecy is not an elite assignment for a select few—it is open to all true servants of God. We shouldn't be at all surprised, then, when God's "man of the hour" is a woman.

"Therefore, **my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy**, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." *(1 Corinthians 14:39–40)*



Please be a part of Adonai's end-time plan for the complete restoration of Israel by helping us bring the love of God to the Holy Land and the nations.

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.... Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.... I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below... and all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved." (*Acts 2:17–21*)

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"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field." (*Luke 10:2*)

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