

Teaching *from* Zion

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah
and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem." -Isaiah 2:3



WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

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Teaching from Zion - Volume 31 - May 2014 - Iyyar 5774

Published by Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, Jerusalem, Israel

Editor - Beth Shulam

Layout - Shaul Zofef

Cover Painting - Ruth in the Fields - by Arthur Hughes (1832-1915)

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News from Netivyah

It is customary for me to write in every “Teaching from Zion” Magazine the “News from Netivyah.” Those of you who receive The Jerusalem Prayer List every week are already up-to-date with what is happening in Netivyah, the congregation and in Israel. I suggest to all of our readers that if they don’t receive The Jerusalem Prayer List – to go to the Netivyah website and register for it. It is free and it is informative and every week I try to write it and give you a list of prayer needs and information and almost always some small teaching. You can go to www.netivyah.org and register. It is on the front page on the right side.

The big news from Netivyah now is that the building project is progressing and so are financial needs. The building now is in the critical stage of choosing the flooring, the wood work, the electrical equipment, and the air-conditioning system etc. etc. etc. These are now the more expensive stages of the construction. We need your prayers and your contributions for this building. I have always had a spiritual allergy to building projects, especially when it was in fashion in the United States to build buildings with Gymnasiums, and Cafeterias that looked better and more luxurious than the country-club and in the end were used very sparingly. Now, when we are doing the construction we obviously have mixed feeling and that makes us

do things as simple as an utilitarian as possible. On the other hand our building has always been like a bee-hive full of people coming and going. Just in the few minutes that I have been trying to write this short report we had a young student who came to receive her scholarship check and another brother who came for counseling and another brother who came to borrow some photographic equipment. This is all in less than one hour and that is how our days go every day, except on the days when more than 180 people, representing more than 180 families, come to receive their coupons (cards) for purchasing food. So, you can be assured that the Netivyah building will not be a church building, it will be much more like a community center and even more than a community center because it will have both educational and academic and humanitarian and spiritual and social functions. Above all, it will be like it was and like it is even now in our offices in the City Tower. We have several different groups who use our offices and meeting space very often and some do it weekly. We have an inter-congregational youth group that uses the meeting space, and we have soldiers that are on furlough that come on Fridays to celebrate, fellowship, study and play Ping-Pong. The Netivyah building was a beacon of light and it will be now a light-house for those who are seeking.

The latest addition to the staff is a young man who was a part of our fellowship here when he was growing up and now is a scholar in his own right. He is now working on the Escorial Manuscript of The Book of the Wisdom of God. This is a manuscript from Spain from the Palace / Monastery of Escorial. It is a Hebrew Manuscript of 306 pages that was written by a Jew who believed in Yeshua and used only rabbinical material to prove that Yeshua is the Messiah. It is a fascinating work written in the 15th or 16th century. We are deciphering it, cross-referencing it and we will write a commentary of it and publish it first in Hebrew and later translate it to English and other languages.

The work of Kol HaYeshua Radio is going on well and so are the different YouTube teachings in English and in Hebrew. Material is being produced and the responses that we get are mostly wonderful and enrich our zeal to continue doing this work for the Kingdom of God and for Israel.

The best of all news is that we have a wonderful team of young people who are dedicated and conscientious, who are zealous for the people of Israel and for the God of Israel and have a rich sense of responsibility. Netivyah has a greater future than the wonderful and rich past that is behind us. Please keep us in your prayers!

Joseph Shulam

The Drunken Woman and the Sleepy Priest

Samuel's mother Hannah, teaches some valuable spiritual lessons to Eli the High Priest. These lessons are still worthy for us to heed today

One of the most fascinating women in the Bible is one that is practically forgotten. I speak about Hannah, the mother of Samuel. The story is a model of three major themes that are so necessary these days for both Jews and Christians.

The story of Hannah begins with the words, "And there was one man from Ramathaim Zophim from the hills of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite." This interests me very much. The hero in this story is not the man, Elkanah. In fact after he is mentioned a few times in the very beginning of the story and then loses his relevance. The second character in the story is Peninnah, his first wife, who is fertile and has children. The third and main character in the story is Hannah, Elkanah's second wife, who doesn't have any children because the Lord had shut her womb. The fourth, fifth and sixth characters are Eli the Priest, Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's two sons. This is the whole cast in the first act of this story.

Now to the meaning of the names:

Elkanah = God is Jealous or it can also mean God is Zealos.

Jeroham = He will receive mercy.

Elihu = He is my God.

Tohu = Disorder.

Zuph = Nectar.

Peninnah = A pearl.

Hannah = Favor and Grace.

Eli = My God.

Phinehas = A Bold aspect or a face that you can trust.

Hophni = It is not clear what this name really means, but from my understanding it means "My handful."

In the Bible most of the names of the characters play a role in the story itself and the meaning in Hebrew plays out in the end. This is true in the Old Testament and it is also true in the New Testament.

Now to the story: The pattern of this story is a classic Cinderella story, or, if you wish, a story of "from rags to riches."

Elkanah is a very religious man. He goes every year to Shiloh with his whole family to celebrate the feast of the Lord and offer sacrifices to the Lord. Some of the sacrifices that are offered were shared with the priests and also, people who offered them, received a share. In fact during those times in Israel there was no such thing as to eat meat whenever you wanted to eat meat. The only place that you could eat meat and the only ones who could slaughter the animal were the Priests or the Levites and in fact there was an altar to the Lord in every city and village. Only after the discovery of

the Book of Deuteronomy, in the days of King Josiah, was the practice of killing animals for food allowed by anyone and in any place. The reason for that was the centralization of worship in Jerusalem only.

So, Mr. Elkanah offered the sacrifice in Shiloh and gave his wife Peninnah and her children a worthy portion of the meat. To Hannah, who didn't have children because the Lord had shut her womb, Elkanah gave a double portion of meat because he loved her.

Since Peninnah knew that Elkanah loved Hannah, gave her favor and showed her mercy because she did not have children, there was jealousy between the two women. Peninnah became an adversary to Hannah and provoked her in order to make her angry. This provoking and probably taunting of Hannah by Peninnah, caused her to not eat and be unhappy in the house of the Lord and to cry every year for her sad situation.

I will leave the story for an interlude. This is a classic pattern in this kind of story. The evil step sisters of Cinderella do the same – they find the weak point in their target and then dig in as deep as they can in order to draw blood and to cause pain and suffering to the poor victim, who is already in a disadvantaged position.

This provoking, taunting and demeaning of Hannah, by Elkanah's other

wife, did not happen one time. It always occurred in the House of the Lord and it happened year after year. Hannah just wept, cried and could not eat, because of her bitterness toward Peninnah, who had children, unlike her, who did not have children because the Lord had shut her womb.

As you can notice I keep repeating the phrase: “The Lord had shut her womb.” I am convinced that ultimately God was and is responsible for so much of the events that bless us in this life and also so much responsible for the events that beset us in this life. Some of these events that beset us in this life are for the purpose of His Glory and for the education of our souls, to train us for greater things to come.

Elkanah saw but did not understand what was really going on between his two wives. He came to Hannah and asked her: “Hannah, why do you weep? Why don’t you eat? Why is your heart so grieved?” He then tried to console Hannah with words that not only didn’t console her but made things even worse “Am I not better for you than ten sons?” This kind of statement, in this circumstance, only made things worse and rubbed salt on the wound. I realize that Elkanah wanted only to help, but sometimes trying to help makes things worse. This is especially true in the relationship between “He and She,” in much of the cases.

These words of Elkanah her husband made Hannah so angry that she finally decided to do something about her situation and go to the only ONE who could really help her; to her Father in Heaven, to the Almighty One of Israel, to the Creator of the World. The words that describe Hannah’s reaction are: “So Hannah rose up . . .” Everyone had eaten and drunk. After people eat and drink and have a good barbeque of beef and some wine, what they want to do is go have a sleep; but not Hannah! She got

up and went to the High Priest – the representative of God, the one who has access to the Holy of Holies. She came in like a storm, full of anger and bitterness; her skirt was blowing in the wind because she was walking fast and angry. She found Eli, the High Priest, leaning against his chair in the temple of the Lord. You need to just imagine a fat old man with his belly sticking out, his hands are folded over his big belly and his chair is leaning backward against the wooden post of the temple. Maybe he is even taking a short sleep after a busy day with many guests and sacrifices during the Feast of the Lord!

The key to understanding any story is to see the light and the shadows in it. Here is Hannah, full of anger and sorrow, storming into the temple court, while at the same time, here is the High Priest who is relaxed, resting and calm, taking a nap. Eli did not even pay much attention. Hannah was praying ecstatically. The Word of God says that her soul was bitter. She was crying and weeping unto the Lord. Finally she took a leap of faith and was willing to make a vow. She understood that in order to get answers she couldn’t only come to the Lord with demands and requests and a shopping list. There comes a time when you become a partner with God and share what you want to have with the Lord. Hannah understood that in order to get something, she had to promise to give it back to the Lord. She understood this very important principle; that you don’t come to the Lord empty handed, and at times the answer to your prayers is also the desire of the Lord Himself. We must remember that sometimes God also has requests from us. We are used to thinking that everything from God comes free, but in this case, Hannah had to understand that crying and being bitter would not help her. Hannah understood that vowing the thing that was most precious to her, to God, was

the way to have God hear her prayer and her cry and she had to give her most prized possession and dedicate him in a vow to God’s service.

Here are the words that Hannah spoke to the Lord in prayer: “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.”

The points that are important for all of us to learn from are:

1. Hannah talked to God and did not hide her affliction, but spelled it out.
2. There was no demand, but a humble request, “If you will indeed look . . .”
3. A request for God to remember his maidservant is an indication that Hannah believed that God is aware of every human being and that He keeps an account of all the issues that beset each one. This idea that Hannah expresses here with a few words, is of great significance for all those who believe in prayer.
4. The positive faith that God “will give [her] a male child.” The idea is that “if He looks on [her] affliction,” He will give her a male child. This is a positive expression of strong faith in God and in His ability to answer her request.
5. She also did not express any doubt or wavering on her commitment to give her male child to the Lord for all the days of his life, and dedicate him in a vow.

These points are worth your notice if you wish to pray effectively and ask God for something really significant for your life. Praying to God to resolve some of the deepest desires of your heart, might benefit from the pattern of Hannah’s prayer.

Hannah's story does not end here. The word of God is setting up the dichotomy between the expression of deep prayer and the sincere personal relationship between an individual and the Almighty God, and the obtuseness of the establishment representative, Eli the High Priest.

Eli the High Priest is, in this story, a representative of the Religious establishment that should have spiritual sensitivities and understand the deep sorrow of the worshipper, but the opposite is true. Instead of understanding and looking for the expression of spirituality, he turns and accuses the weeping and intensely praying woman. Eli saw Hannah and instead of looking at her and seeking the highest and best in her, he actually thinks the worst of her and accuses her of being drunk. This is a very important lesson for all leaders, elders, preachers and shepherds in God's service to learn. We are not office holders. Our task is not to look at our service as a job, but as a divine appointment to bridge the chasm between the weight of life in this world and our citizenship in a heavenly Kingdom.

Hannah was able to express her sorrow and her faith with her whole body and emotion. Eli the High Priest could not understand that deep and close relationship between the worshipper and the Almighty God. Eli was an office holder. He did his job well, as a kind of religious technocrat, but he did not really understand the deep personal relationship that Hannah had with God. The High Priest just did not have the tools to understand. He had seen people come into the temple of God with all kinds of behavior and he automatically thought the worst of them. I am sure that he had seen many worshipers who came to the House of the Lord to enjoy the fellowship and eat the meat from their sacrifices and also have a nip here and there and get drunk. Eli said to

Hannah: *"How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"* If he had just been able to see Hannah, year after year, begging for a son, suffering the abuse of Peninnah, the other wife of Elhkanah who had sons, Eli could have understood what was happening with Hannah. As a spiritual leader with years of experience, Eli should have had more empathy for the suffering people who came to the house of the Lord with pain and needs that only the Good Lord could answer for them. Eli, however, **was** an honorable man. All the High Priests had to be honorable men. Mostly honorable men become professional "servants of God."

Hannah answered Eli respectfully but with candor: *"No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now."*

I really think that these words of Hannah should and ought to be taught in every seminary or Bible school the whole world over, and especially to all those teachers and preachers and church workers who want to be professional religious industry workers. I would venture to say that most of the people who go to church sincerely and with a true seeking heart, at least in some point of their life and faith, have come to seek the Lord with the spirit of Hannah – with the pain of Hannah (maybe not for the same needs, but with other human needs that are painful) that only the Almighty God of Israel and Yeshua the Messiah can resolve. Those who serve God must at all times think the best of those who come under the shadow of their ministry and give them the credit and the respect that they deserve and need and open the way of the Lord for the needy and suffering. I am not writing this from an

aloof position of being right all the time, I am writing this to all of us, and to me first as someone who, at times, does not have the respect and empathy that a man of God should.

We will see that Eli actually learned from this experience and learned to respect people who had an experience with the Lord and to guide them to hear and answer the Lord in their visions and dreams. He did so with Hannah and blessed her as she was leaving. Later we see that Eli became more sensitive to spiritual experiences and gave Samuel the right instruction as to discern and know when the Lord is speaking to him, and follow the instructions of the Lord.

We are back to Hannah now! Here are some things for us to learn from this story about how the Lord works:

1. It took time for Hannah to get pregnant and to have a son. Even when the Lord answers our prayers favorably it might not be an answer instantly. There is a natural process that has to pass before the answer is visible and positive.
2. Promises and vows we make to God have to be fulfilled and kept. If a person makes a promise to God or a vow and he does not keep it, the price will be high. God does not forget His children and He also does not forget to give a just reward to all those who diligently serve Him. (See Hebrews 11:6) To give a "just reward" means that He keeps accounts and remembers our good deeds and also our promises, just as He remembers His promises to us.
3. If we sincerely intend to keep our vows and promises to God, we must be patient and wait for Him. We must have an awareness of the "I am" consciousness that the Spirit of God plants into our hearts and communicate our intent to keep the vows and promises that we make. Hannah communicated to Elkanah and to God, that



my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they worshiped the LORD there” (1 Sam. 1:24-28).

Notice please that Hannah did not come to the House of the Lord empty handed. Elkanah and Hannah brought to the Lord, the most precious gift, Samuel their son! This was their special gift to the Lord, but there was still a need to bring the regular, normal, obligated gifts, and even triple them as a sign of their gratitude to the Lord. Elkanah and Hannah were so thankful to the Lord and they wanted to show it. For this reason they brought three bulls, not one bull. When God answers our prayers and the desires of our hearts, we ought to learn from Elkanah and Hannah; to show our gratitude to the Lord in not only words, but also with deeds.

In addition to Hannah’s gifts to the Lord, she also expressed herself in a wonderful Psalm of thanks giving. The words were in addition to the three bulls, the bushel of fine flour and the wine skin. We must remember this even as Disciples of Yeshua – words and praise are **not** a replacement of our required duty.

Don’t be afraid to be like Hannah! Don’t hold back when you want something from God. Feel free to pour out your heart, even in public, and express the deep pain and sorrow in your heart with all of you, not only with your mouth. Show emotions in your relationship to the Lord.

Hannah will always be an example of faithfulness from the worshiper and the faithfulness of God Himself, to those who diligently seek Him and His favor. ■

she really intended to keep her vow and present Samuel, her son, for the service to the Lord for all of his life, and that she would keep him until he is weaned. Of course Hannah keeps Samuel as long as she can. Jewish Tradition says that Samuel was three years old when he was weaned from Hannah’s breast-feeding.

4. God understands our needs and He too sometimes waits for us.
5. *“Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, “O my lord! As your soul lives,*

Mothers of Messiah

The examination of the Gentile women in the lineage of Jesus gives us insight into the character of God and what it means to be a faithful follower of Him

The beginning of every book is important because from the introduction we can learn about the author, where he comes from, and what the objectives and goals are for writing the book.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with: *“A record of the genealogy of Yeshua, Christ the son of David, the Son of Abraham.”* These words open the first chapter of this Gospel in order to teach us about Yeshua and who He is. Both David and Abraham received this wonderful promise from God that their seed, their heir, will be the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In Genesis 12:2-3, the Lord is calling Abraham to leave his country and his household saying, *“I will make you into a great nation and will bless whoever blesses you and whoever curses you, I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* The Messiah has to come from the seed of Abraham, as it is stated in Genesis 17:19, *“I will establish my covenant to his descendants after him.”* Also to David, for his faithfulness, the Lord promises that his seed will be on the throne before God forever (2 Sam 7:11-16).

The text continues saying, *“Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac was the father of Jacob, Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar....”* Suddenly, the name of a woman appears in the list of men; and not just *any* woman, but a non-Jewish, Canaanite woman; Judah’s daughter in law, who bore Perez and Zerah by tricking Judah into intercourse.

Why is she mentioned in the genealogy of Yeshua? Why does The Holy Spirit remind us of Tamar? This is especially interesting since none of the “official” mothers of the Jewish nation are mentioned; not Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel or Leah. Why then Tamar? If we continue reading the text we will notice that several women are mentioned in this genealogy. They are women of problematic background, not all Jewish and all were married and bore sons under extraordinary circumstances. Since we know that nothing is written in the Bible

without reason, let’s explore and appreciate the reasons these women were mentioned in the opening of the New Testament.

There are several reasons to mention these gentile women in the genealogy. First, to reveal to us that Yeshua is not only the King and Messiah of Israel, coming from the long line of Judean Kings, but also that He is the Savior of all the people of earth; Jews and Gentiles alike. God is not partial in regards to salvation. What is significant to God is not the purity of our backgrounds, but the purity of our hearts and our willingness to follow Him. Second, these women show us the great power of God’s mercy and His ability to forgive us so fully and completely. God remembers what we are and what we have become, not where we came from. And third, these women willingly chose the nation of Israel to be their own and the God of Israel to be their God.

These women are independent, having great courage to take a stand against the beliefs, practices and traditions of their societies. They are not afraid to stand up for what is right, to challenge their surroundings, to risk everything they believe in for God and Israel. In this manner they resemble the character of Yeshua and other great servants of God.

Let’s examine these women and their stories and try to understand why they received this great honor to become ancestors of the Messiah and to be mentioned in His genealogy, as it is found in Matthew.

Tamar

We meet Judah and Tamar in the midst of the story of Joseph. For centuries Rabbis asked, why is this so? Is it because the two brothers, Joseph and Judah will later be associated with two kingdoms, Judea and Israel? Or is it because both heroes found themselves far from their own home and family? Joseph was sold to Egypt by his own brothers and Judah chose to leave his brothers and stay among Canaanites. Perhaps Judah

couldn't bear the suffering of his father from the loss of Joseph and living with the terrible secret of what he and his brothers had done.

Judah moves to the town called Adullam. Here he met the daughter of Shua, married her and she gave birth to three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er grows up, Judah takes a wife for him – a Canaanite named Tamar (Tamar means “date”, as relates to the date palm that is found in abundance in the dry, desert climate of the Land). Er died because he *“did evil in the eyes of the Lord and the Lord put him to death.”* Judah's son Onan then marries the widow in order to restore the seed of his brother but decides not to fulfill his duty to her. This lack of responsibility was wicked in the eyes of the Lord and he also dies. Judah is terrified by the deaths of his two sons and decides to send Tamar back to her father, while waiting for Shelah, the last surviving son, to grow up.

In order to understand the situation, we need to look at ancient customs of marriage and inheritance. We do find in the Bible beautiful stories of love and romance, such as the love story of Jacob and Rachel, the Song of Songs and Michal's love for David. However, it is clear that in ancient society marriage has very little to do with romance and courtship.



When Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, Eliezer observed the women near the well, and looked for positive qualities in them. God pointed him to Rebecca and further negotiations were made entirely by the families. The bride or groom did not participate in the decision, or even meet each other beforehand. Marriage was meant to cement and bond the tribe, to protect the fabric of the society. A family had to invest a significant amount of money (a purchase price, *mohar* in Hebrew) in order to buy a wife for a son. To some degree the return of the investment would be from the births of sons and daughters. Daughters would be married later and the family would receive a *mohar* for each of them. Sons stayed with the family, providing it with a workforce and with future offspring. This was the economic cycle of marriage and birth. In a case where a husband died childless, it was only logical, according to the family budget and economy, to let another man of the family marry the widow and have children with her.

In the book of Deuteronomy (25:5-10) we find the following commandment: *“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill a duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”* The second brother or the next closest relative in Hebrew is called **“Goel”**, the Redeemer of his brothers' seed, name and inheritance. He would also be entitled to the property of the deceased. The Bible continues with telling us that if the second brother refuses to fulfill this commandment, the woman can appeal to the elders and they would try to persuade him to do what was right. If he continued to refuse, the woman could publicly take off the brothers' sandal and spit in his face, as a sign of shame.

In our story, Onan, the second son of Judah, decided not to consummate his marriage to Tamar, refusing to have a son who will carry the name of his older brother. For this, God puts him to death. Judah, terrified that his daughter in law might be a “Femme Fatale”, sends her back to her father's house without releasing her from her obligations to his family. Tamar returns home, not as a free woman, but as a widow, promised to Judah's youngest son, Shelah. She has to wear widow's garments, dark clothing, at times made of sackcloth from black goat hair and could not continue on with her life.

Tamar is faced with a difficult choice. She could have remained unmarried until the end of her life or have gone to the elders of Adullam and asked them to intervene. Why didn't she? Our story happened before the giving of the Torah. Perhaps among the Canaanites, the solution found in the book of Chronicles was not known or practiced. Another possibil-

ity is, Tamar believes in Judah's promise, that she will remain part of his family. While living in Judah's house she learned about the one true God and heard of the wonderful promise that God gave to the descendants of Abraham, and she wanted to be part of this promise. Regardless, Tamar did not want to accept her situation and decided to take a stand in order to change her destiny. She acted and rebelled against her society's standards. Tamar wanted to have a child and she knew that she might have only one chance to conceive and that according to the culture of her time, her unfaithfulness could be punished by death. She waited and planned her every step very carefully, knowing that the most important part of her plan was the proof.

When Tamar heard that Judah, who recently became a widower, was going to shear his flocks, she disguised herself, pretending to be a prostitute, and spent a night with Judah. Her only chance of survival was to obtain the certain proof that the man she is pregnant by is Judah himself. As a pledge of payment for her services, Tamar asks Judah to give her his seal, his cord and the staff in his hand. Those were the significant tools of man's identity in the ancient world. In modern day it would be equivalent to a DNA sample and a fingerprint!

We see that with God's help, Tamar's plan was fulfilled, and the story comes to its apex, when being accused of adultery, Tamar is taken to be executed. She shouts, "The father of my child is the man whose things are these." Judah recognizes his seal, his cord and his staff and Tamar is saved. God blesses her with two sons, Perez and Zerah, thereby the promise that Judah gave to Tamar is fulfilled and she receives a double portion. She became the great grandmother of King David and entered into the genealogy of Yeshua.

So what can we learn from Tamar? She is bold and brave and she does not blindly accept the rules of the society around her. She trusts God and trusts Judah's promise, even though he fails to keep it. Tamar's methods are clearly unorthodox and she breaks several commandments, among them the one that forbids sexual relations between father and daughter-in-law. Her desire to have a son, which in the ancient world was the only way for a woman to fulfill her destiny and purpose in life, was stronger than her fear. She was willing to break the rules and to risk her own life to force Judah to keep his promise to her. We learn that at times, that rules of society could be broken for the greater good, for something with a much more significant higher purpose.

It is no coincidence that immediately after the story of Tamar the scripture moves back to the story of Joseph in Egypt and tells the encounter with another gentile woman, the wife of Potiphar. At first glance, we may find some similarities between these two women. However, it becomes clear that they

are antitheses to each other. Tamar's motives are for good: to have children, to bring honor to her family and to her deceased husbands. She has patience and plans her steps carefully and she is willing to risk her own life. Potiphar's wife, also a free and independent woman, has as her goal her own pleasure. She acts out of pure egoism, only thinking of herself not hesitating to destroy Joseph by falsely accusing him of rape. The two stories are found together in scripture to remind us that it is good, at times, to question the rules and traditions, but only if we are doing it for God and not for ourselves. If our motives are pure and selfless, God will bless us and will bless the fruit of our works. In this way He gave a double blessing to Tamar. Paul speaks to the importance of childbirth, saying: "*But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety*" (1 Tim 2:15). Tamar is saved and honored due to her great desire to have children.

Rahab the Prostitute

The next woman mentioned in the genealogy of Yeshua is Rahab, the famous prostitute of Jericho, who heard of the wonders and miracles that God had done for the people of Israel and wanted to connect her destiny with theirs.

In the book of Joshua 2:1-7, we read about two spies who crossed the Jordan River to spy on the land of Canaan. They arrived to the city of Jericho and enter into the house of the prostitute, Rahab. Her house was attached to the wall of the city and this wall would later collapse at the sound of the trumpets. When soldiers from the King of Jericho arrived at Rahab's home looking for the spies, surprisingly, she decides to hide the spies and lie to her own king. This decision came at a risk to her life and the lives of her household. The explanation for the decision lies in verses 8-12 of Joshua 2, "*Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 'I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.'*"

The rumors of the great miracles that followed the Exodus from Egypt and of Israel's great victories in Transjordan, filled

the people of Canaan with fear, Rahab explained to the spies. She asked the spies to spare her and her fathers' house when they returned to capture the Land. "... All who live in the country are melting in fear because of you....For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." Pressed by the time and situation, the spies do not hesitate and promise: "Our lives for your lives!" and make an agreement with Rahab to spare her family. They must gather inside of her house and tie a scarlet cord on the window as a sign. The two men safely returned to the Israelite camp and reported to Joshua: "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands: all the people are melting in fear because of us." They are reporting back to Joshua the exact words of Rahab. Not only is she saving the lives of the Israelites, but she is also encouraging them with her witness and proclamation of God's victory in Canaan.

The words of Rahab regarding victory were entirely different than the words of the previous spies sent to Canaan



by Moses forty years earlier. "The Land does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people are powerful and the cities are fortified and very large...We can't attack those people, they are stronger than we are... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them..." The voice of Caleb sounded lonely: "We should go up and take possession of the Land, for we can certainly do it" (Num 13:27-28, 31, 33).

What had changed in the forty years the children of Israel spent wandering in the wilderness? What was the difference in the spies' experience? Most of the people who witnessed the miracles of the Exodus were long gone. The victory over Pharaoh of Egypt and the opening of the Red Sea were merely legends to the new generation born in the wilderness. Memories of miracles and wonders fade with time and explanations of the past were rationalized. The people living in the Land were not less strong or less tall than those of forty years past and the city of Jericho was no less fortified than before.

Just before the battle with the King of Heshbon, the Lord promised Moses in Deuteronomy 2:25 "This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you." Surely an encouraging factor to the spies was the great faith of this woman, a Canaanite prostitute from Jericho. She remembered the miracles of Egypt with more trust and faith than the Israelites who actually witnessed them! She proclaims the authority of the one living God in the clearest way possible and her words bore witness in the report of the spies.

Rahab's faith in God and her absolute trust in the promises make her a great example of faith. This trust caused great change in her life; from a Canaanite prostitute to an honorable wife in Israel, the great mother of Kings and later of Messiah himself. This is the reason why the author of Hebrews says "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient" (Hebrews 11:31). Her ability to act on this faith, to risk her life and side with an unknown nation she never knew stems from her belief in God's promise to Israel. She also believed the promise of the spies and acted on that promise as well. James, in his book, uses her as an example: "The same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:25). She believed and acted on her belief, willing to put at risk everything she had, even her life and the lives of her household.

In Jewish tradition, Rahab is believed to be one of the most beautiful women in the world. She is often cited as the ultimate example of the righteous gentile, joining the destiny

of Israel and proclaiming the only true God of heaven and earth. Rabbis see in her the example of true repentance and change of lifestyle.

Rahab, in spite of her profession, was a woman of great faith. She believed and acted on her belief, siding with the God of Israel and the nation of Israel. She was wise and resourceful in a time of emergency. Rahab's story shows us the great mercy of God, who takes a gentile prostitute, accepts her genuine repentance and honors her with great descendants like King David and Yeshua the Messiah.

Ruth the Moabitess

The book of Ruth is unique. First, it is a story about women, written from a woman's perspective, and in an almost feminine voice, with points of view such as the words of Naomi encouraging her daughters-in-law to return to their mother's house and rebuild their lives; "mother's" house used instead of the more familiar "father's" house. This book is also a Cinderella story that moves from hopelessness to joy, from rejection to honor. There are no evil stepmothers here, no complex relationships, no anger, envy or greed. All the characters in this book are good people, treating one another with honor and compassion. The most perfect of all being our heroine Ruth.

Discussing the book of Ruth, rabbis ask themselves what was the purpose of this story, why was it written? R. Zeira says *"This scroll tells us nothing either of cleanliness or of uncleanness, neither prohibition nor permission. For what purpose then was it written? To teach how great is the reward of those who do deeds of kindness"* (Midrash Rabbah – Ruth 14).

Many scholars date the book of Ruth to the 5th century BC. It was written with the purpose to debate and to balance the extreme steps taken by Ezra and Nehemiah. After the return from the Babylonian Exile, the decree was reiterated that all who were of foreign descent were excluded from the nation: *"On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God..."*. *"Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and didn't know how to speak the language of Judah"* (Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-24). The book of Ruth demonstrates that even though the blood line of Ruth was not Hebrew, she was willing to fully join the nation of Israel and worship the God of Israel.

During the famine in Judea, Elimelech moved with his wife Naomi and sons Machlon and Chilayon to Moab. He

settles there and takes Moabite wives for his sons. Sadly, Elimelech and his sons die. The women remained alone with no children and no hope for the future. Naomi decides to return to her family in Bethlehem and in a very generous and selfless act she releases her daughters-in-law from any obligations to her, so that they could have a chance to marry again. Like with the story of Tamar, in the ancient society, married women were the property of their husband's family even af-



ter the husband's death. Naomi's acts contrast the actions of Judah who was not concerned with the future of his daughter-in-law Tamar.

Daughter in law Orpah weeps but returns to her home as a free woman. Ruth chooses to follow her mother-in-law back to Judea. The Bible describes this decision in the following words: *"Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good bye, but Ruth clung to her... saying: Don't urge me to leave you, or to turn back from you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; **Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.** Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me"* (Ruth 1:16–17). The decision of Ruth is selfless and contradicts any logical self-preservation. A poor foreign Moabite widow's future in Judea would be a lonely life of extreme poverty and rejection. She would have

to glean barley and wheat from morning to night, suffer from heat, thirst, hunger and harassment, while doing her best to take care of elderly Naomi.

Ruth found herself gleaning the leftover grain behind the harvesters at the field of a wealthy man named Boaz, who happened to be a relative of Elimelech. When Boaz came to oversee the work, he noticed the woman gleaning behind his servants. The new and most likely pretty face of Ruth wouldn't go unnoticed in the fields of Bethlehem. Impressed with Ruth's dedication and selflessness, he took the young woman under his protection. Boaz invited Ruth to join them in the field for pita and hummus. (The translation reads vinegar, due to the similar spelling of both words in Hebrew and it was most likely hummus that Boaz and Ruth shared in the fields of Bethlehem. However, in commentaries on the book of Ruth, later period Rabbis, who also forgot about this typical Middle Eastern dish, wrote that vinegar suggests something of the suffering of both Ruth and Boaz. In Jewish literature, as well as in the New Testament, vinegar is a symbol of suffering. The New Testament gospel account of Jesus' death reminds us of Yeshua's suffering on the cross where he was given water mixed with vinegar.)

Boaz blessed Ruth with these words: *"My daughter... don't go and glean in another field, and don't go away from here... follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars... as I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; how you left your father and mother and your home and came to live with a people you did not know before... May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge"* (Ruth 2:8-12).

It was not a coincidence, that chapter 2 opens with introduction of Boaz: *"Now Naomi has a relative on her husband's side, the man of valor, from Elimelech's family, and his name is Boaz."* The Hebrew word that describes Boaz is **"Gibor Hail"**; meaning a man of valor, mighty warrior, man of standing. Such an introduction was necessary to tell us that hope was not lost for Naomi and Ruth; that there was a redeemer who could restore their family (this theme of a redeemer is also found in the story of Tamar).

The barley harvest passed and so did the wheat harvest and the winter was getting closer. Meanwhile nothing was happening between Boaz and Ruth. Naomi must have had higher hopes for their relationship and she decided to take matters into her own hands. She knew that during winter, Ruth would have very little chance to see Boaz, and like Tamar, she arranged a meeting between the two in a more private and romantic

environment. The perfect opportunity came when the women heard that Boaz was going to spend a night on the threshing floor. Following the advice of her mother-in-law, Ruth prepared herself for this meeting. She took a bath, anointed herself with perfume, put on her best garments and went to the threshing floor. She waited in hiding for Boaz to be alone and then sneaked into his bed.

The encounter of what happened that night on the threshing floor will always remain a mystery. Beneath innocent words, the text conceals the erotic tension. A summer night at the threshing floor, a young beautiful woman, washed and anointed with aromatic oils, dressed in her best garments lies in a bed next to a man, who had a bit too much to drink. He wakes up and there is a woman beside him under his blanket! Two of the Hebrew verbs *"yada"* – to know, and *"shachav"* – lie down (the most common Hebrew words for intimacy and sex) are used here. The word *shahav* is repeated 8 times in 5 verses. What man can stand such seduction and not feel attracted to this beautiful young woman, who is asking him to take her under his wings?

Ruth's actions were wise but very risky, as she was putting herself completely at Boaz's mercy. He could have taken advantage of her that night and brushed her off in the morning or rejected her and publicly put her to shame for her actions. Ruth trusted Boaz. She trusted his dignity and his promise of God's blessing upon her. It is no wonder that he is called ***gibor hail***.

Although Ruth's methods were quite unorthodox, her motives were not selfish. She was fulfilling her destiny and trying to restore the name of her deceased husband. After the night's encounter Naomi is confident that Boaz will not let the sun go down before he takes care of the matter.

There is an even closer relative of Naomi living in Bethlehem who has the first right to redeem Ruth. Boaz waited for this man (*goel*) by the gates of the city. The city gates were traditionally where important agreements, decisions and contracts were made. By the gates of the city, in the presence of the elders, Abraham finalized the lease for the family tomb. By the gates of the city the King judged his people. The book of Ruth doesn't reveal the name of the kinsman-redeemer, who is called in Hebrew, *plony-almony* (an equivalent of modern-day John Doe). Boaz suggested that the man redeem the field of Naomi and marry Ruth the Moabite, to restore the seed of the dead. The redeemer answers: *"... I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."* As a sign of his inability to marry Ruth, the man took off his shoe in the presence of the elders and passes his right to Boaz.

The kinsman-redeemer was indicating that the beautiful, kind and humble Ruth is a Moabitess, and not permissible to marry as it is written in the Torah that *"No Ammonite and*

Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation” (Deut. 23:4). By marrying Ruth, Boaz would fulfill one commandment of God and break another. His children from Ruth the Moabitess will not be considered a part of God’s people.

It was a very hard choice to face. Boaz decided to follow his heart, to be faithful to the promise he gave Ruth and to be the tool of God’s reward for her kindness. He chose to endanger his own inheritance to do what was right, because he knew that God’s everlasting mercy is beyond the dry letter of the Law. Boaz acts in the spirit of Yeshua’s words: *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it”* (Mark 8:35). Boaz is a man of integrity, honest and merciful. He has a strong sense of what is right and just. What a great reward God gave to both Ruth and Boaz for their selfless deeds! *“Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah...Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David”* (Ruth 4:12,21-22).

Boaz admired Ruth’s dedication and sacrifice and asks blessing from God to reward her for leaving her home to go to a foreign nation. His words to Ruth are similar to the com-

mandment God gave to Abraham; to leave his country, his people, his father’s household and go to an unknown land. As the reward for obedience, God gave Abraham the wonderful promise and blessing. *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing”* (Genesis 12:2).

Even though she was a Moabitess, for choosing the God of Israel and His nation, God made Ruth His chosen one; to be the great grandmother of King David and one of the most honorable mothers in Yeshua’s lineage. Like the women mentioned so far, Ruth trusted in that promise.

Ruth also represents the righteous gentile woman who decides to follow God and to join the destiny of God’s people: *“Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”* She does it against all odds and her future doesn’t look promising. She acts on her faith and her behavior is completely selfless. She treats her mother-in-law with grace and kindness and her good deeds are fully rewarded by God. Ruth believes Boaz’s promise to her and acts on it. Her kindness, grace and humble spirit made her into the great grandmother of King David, and the predecessor of the Messiah.

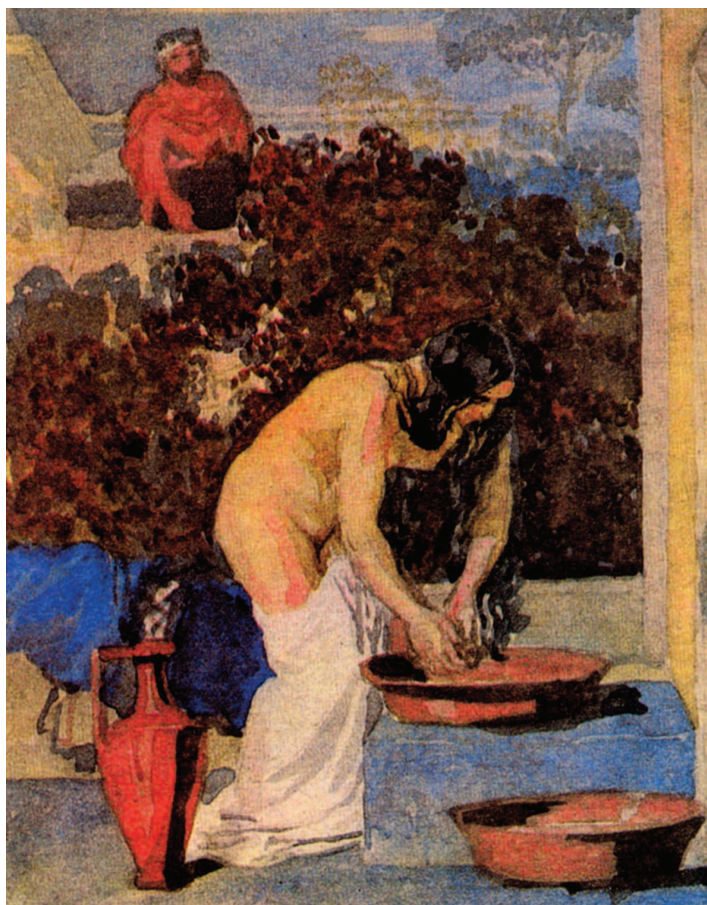
Bat Shevah - Uriah’s Wife

The fourth woman found in Yeshua’s genealogy is Uriah’s wife. Although Matthew doesn’t name her, she is Bat Shevah, daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. The Holy Spirit does not call her by her name to teach us, that as impressive as she was, the most important thing is for us to remember the events of her encounter with King David.

The first time Bat Sheva is mentioned is in chapter 11 of 2 Samuel, *“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the kings’ men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”*

The phrase *“kings go off to war... but David remained in Jerusalem.”* is critical of David. He has become very comfortable with his position as king. His enemies are gone, his kingdom is secure, the army being led by an experienced Joab, and now David has relaxed.

The city of David in Jerusalem was a small area, some 460 feet wide and less than a mile long, with the houses clinging together on steep slopes. The palace of the King stood at the highest place in the city, overlooking the rooftops and



yards of the houses below. One evening, while walking on the roof of his palace, David saw a gorgeous woman bathing in her courtyard. What was Bat Sheva doing bathing outside, in plain sight in her courtyard? Some scholars suggest that she was knowingly trying to attract the King's attention with her beauty and charm. The fact that this beautiful woman is married to one of his elite warriors didn't stop David. *"Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him and he slept with her. When she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she went back home. The woman conceived and sent the word to David saying, 'I am pregnant'"* (2 Samuel 11:4-5).

The situation immediately becomes complicated. David calls Bat Sheva's husband Uriah back to Jerusalem under the pretense of learning the situation on the battlefield. His attempts to send Uriah home to sleep with his wife, to cover his own adultery, failed and David secretly commanded Joab to make sure Uriah would be killed in the next battle.

"When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:26-27).

The words of the Bible are very laconic. One could almost believe that Bat Sheva has no responsibility; that she is an innocent victim of circumstances. However, it is most likely that our Hittite Beauty gently orchestrated the events. (Being married to Uriah the Hittite, Bat Sheva was possibly a Hittite herself. 1 Chronicles 3:5, names her Batshua, the same spelling as the Canaanite wife of Judah, and supports this understanding. This fact is not concrete, as the name of her father is Eliam and he could be the son of Achitofel the Gilai, one of David's advisors.) After meeting Bat Sheva, David did not take another wife and she had four sons with him.

Bat Sheva plays another central role in 1 Kings 1, when a dying King David appoints young Solomon as his successor, in spite of the clear commandment of the Torah not to prefer the younger son of a beloved wife over an older son. It was Bat Sheva who appeared before the king to remind him of his promise and to make sure that David's oath to her is fulfilled. *"My Lord, you yourself swore to me, your servant, by the Lord your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne'.... 'The King then took an oath: 'As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I have sworn to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place.'"*

It was Bat Sheva who ultimately convinced Solomon to execute Adonijah, his half-brother and rival for the throne. Again, she is often portrayed as a merely passive participant

of the events, but careful reading reveals to us a very strong and wise woman who masters political games and knows how to use her beauty to influence both her husband and her son.

Why is Bat Sheva only called Uriah's wife in Yeshua's genealogy? I believe it is to remind us that even such a great man as King David was not without blemish; that he sinned greatly before the Lord when he committed adultery with his neighbor's wife and had Uriah murdered to cover his sin. When Nathan the prophet rebuked David with the famous parable of the poor man's sheep, we saw the righteous king, who had fallen, honestly repent. *"Then David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord"* (2 Samuel 12:13). The punishment follows, but God's promise to David remained standing, *"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever and before me your throne will be established forever"* (2 Samuel 7:16). This promise would come through their next child - Solomon, from whom the Messiah would be born.

This story teaches that *"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins"* (Ecclesiast 7:30). The difference between the righteous man who falls and sins and a wicked one, is of true repentance. We learn that God's mercy is always standing and when we fall the way back to the Lord is always open. It is David who writes in Psalm 51, after the sin: *"Clean me with hyssop and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow."*

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8).

David promised his wife to make Solomon the king over Israel. Bat Sheva believed him and made sure that it was fulfilled. All the wonderful promises of God, promises of Abraham and his seed are fulfilled in His only Son, Yeshua.

Miriam (Mary) the mother of Yeshua

The last and the most important woman in Yeshua's genealogy is his mother, Miriam. The pure and inexperienced young virgin from Nazareth is the antithesis of the women mentioned above. According to the Gospel, she is obviously Jewish, she is a virgin, she trusts God and follows His commandments. She was never married; she never knew a man or life outside her father's house and most likely, never left the small village in Lower Galilee, where she grew up. She loves the Lord with her entire heart.

"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Miriam. The angel said to her: 'Do not be afraid Miriam, you

have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Yeshua. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” Miriam is willing to accept God’s calling and His promise. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called, the Son of God” (Luke 1:26-35). Her humble answer to this very unusual and seemingly impossible promise is: “I am the Lord’s servant... may it be to me as you have said.”

Miriam’s acceptance of the Angel’s word is a great example to us of courage and trust in God. Who knew how her future husband would take this news? Would he accept her and the baby, or would she be cast out as an unworthy woman? Is her destiny to suffer shame and abandonment for God’s sake? Surely these questions went through her head, but her love for the Lord was greater than her fears. Joseph’s first reaction to Miriam’s pregnancy was to secretly divorce her and not expose her to the public disgrace. It took the Lord appearing to him to accept Miriam as his wife and Yeshua as his legal son. Miriam is a great example of faith. She stands by God’s promises to her and is willing to walk the path of suffering and rejection, if that’s what is required from her. Her faith was strong and unshakable; she was willing to accept whatever destiny God had prepared for her.

Consider that Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience, he also had to deal with rumors and slander about Yeshua’s birth that were probably circulating among the people. Jewish rabbinical literature, including the Talmud and other books, give their own interpretation of Yeshua’s birth. The Talmud text attributes Yeshua’s birth to the forbidden relationship between his mother and a Roman soldier by the name Pantera (or someone called Ben Stada).

These stories do not mention Yeshua or his parents in a clear way, neither do they belong to the correct historical period. Some take Yeshua 100 years back in history; others 100 years forward. Nevertheless, it would be reasonable to assume that the knowledge of Yeshua’s miraculous conception from the Holy Spirit would create legends and rumors among his opposition. It was essential to debate those rumors and false accusations and to address them in some way.

The most obvious way to address these rumors was to tell the true story, which Matthew does. In addition, for the readers who wouldn’t be convinced that Matthew’s story is truth, the Bible uses another, more sophisticated approach. The same approach that King David used in his conversation in Midrash “Ruth Rabbah”, when he answers the accusations of the elders calling him an illegitimate son.

“R. Abba b. Kahana opened, Tremble, and sin not (Ps. IV, 5). David said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, ‘How long will they rage against me and say, “Is he not of tainted descent? Is he not a descendant of Ruth the Moabitess?” Commune with your own heart upon your bed (ib). Ye also, are ye not descended from two sisters? Look upon your own genealogy and be still (ib). And Tamar who married your ancestor Judah – is it not a tainted descent? She was but a descendant of Shem the son of Noach. Have you then an honorable descent?’” Midrash Rabbah – Ruth, chapter 8.

The women found in the lineage of Yeshua, with their compromised pasts, are given by Matthew to debate the doubters. Matthew is saying to his opponents, that their accusations are irrelevant. He reminded them of all these women, accepted and honored in Jewish tradition, who are part of the birth line of the Messiah. Yeshua’s deeds, his teachings, his life and death, should be proof of who He is and not the empty rumors attempting to disqualify him as the Messiah. This is Matthew’s answer to the contemporary opposition.

Conclusion

All the women in the lineage of Yeshua had tremendous faith; faith in God and faith in their destiny. They all refused to accept what they had been given and were willing to rebel against their society and the traditions of their time. Tamar would not give up her right to be a mother and have meaning in life. Rahab, by faith decided to stand with Israel, and thereby saved her household and joined the nation of Israel. Ruth refused to accept the logical solution of returning to her nation and followed her mother-in-law to an unknown future in Judea. By faith Miriam accepted the message of the Angel and let herself be used by God in the most incredible way in history.

Four of the women were not of Jewish descent: Tamar and Rahab were Caananites, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was considered a Hittite (or at least married to one.) They are present in Yeshua’s genealogy to tell the nations of the world that Yeshua, the King of Israel, came not only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel, but to save the entire world.

Four of the five women were compromised in some way. Tamar seduced her father-in-law. Rahab was a prostitute. Ruth slept at the threshing floor next to Boaz. Bat Sheva committed adultery with David while being the wife of another man. The fact that all these women became part of God’s plan and ancestors of the Messiah, should encourage us and give us hope. God teaches us, that to Him, family, background, and nation doesn’t really matter. It doesn’t matter to Him if we

made mistakes in the past. True repentance will always let us return to Him.

Believing in promises and being steadfast unites all these women. Tamar believed in Judah's promise to give her his youngest son and stood by this promise. Rahab trusted the promise given to her by the spies to save her household and acted on it. Ruth trusted God's promise in the blessing of Boaz, and this promise was fulfilled. Bat Sheva believed David's promise to make her son king and she made sure he held to his promise. And, Miriam's entire life was the fulfillment of God's ultimate promise to Abraham, who's name starts the

genealogy, that through his seed all the nations of the world will be blessed. Yeshua *is* that seed and all these women from different nations and backgrounds are part of the fulfillment of this blessing.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." ■

Bibliography: "Four Mothers" by Yochi Brandes; Midrash Ruth Rabbah; "The Story of David and Bat Shevah in the Book of Samuel - Its Nature and Purpose" by Moshe Garsiel.



The Virgin of the Lilies - Painting by William Bouguereau

The Role of Women in the New Testament

The discussion regarding the role of women in the New Testament is necessary because there is a clear need to set things in order in relationship to the role of women in the Christian world today. On the one hand, in some circles there is an over-compensation and capitulation in the community of faith to the constraints of modern society. On the other hand, there is a continuing neglect to put women in their proper role and honorable place as servants of God. The purpose of this article is simply to shine a beam of light on the Bible, specifically in the New Testament, at the important role that women have serving and building the Lord's Body.

There were women followers of Yeshua who cared for Him and accompanied Him during His ministry. Among them were Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead. There was Mary Magdalene, who, together with other women, followed Yeshua all the way to Jerusalem and witnessed His death on the cross. These women were the first to go to the tomb early the next morning to bring herbs to the grave, and the first who witnessed Yeshua's resurrection from the dead.

A special place is reserved for the woman who visited the home of Simeon the Pharisee during dinner and cried with tears and anointed the feet of Yeshua with expensive ointment. Yeshua praised this woman above Simeon the Pharisee for her noble act (Luke 7:36-50). In this incident this woman, consid-

ered a sinner by the crowd in Simeon's house, actually proclaims the death and the resurrection of Yeshua in a dramatic act that could actually only be executed by a woman.

The New Testament is filled with examples of service that women performed in the community of saints, the early Ecclesia. In the first century, women could and did pray and prophesied in the public assembly as Paul states: *"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head..."* (1 Cor. 11:5). I realize that in many Christian circles women not only pray and prophecy, but they also become "Pastors" or "Pastoras," and exercise authority over men when it is expressly forbidden by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. I will address this later in the article.

We find that there were female deacons in the Early Church. Why do some churches deny that privilege to women who are qualified and in fact do serve the Body of the Messiah as deacons: *"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant¹ of the church in Cenchrea..."* (Rom. 16:1)

We also see women like Dorcas who had a special ministry to the community and was known and recognized as a woman full of good works and charitable deeds: *"At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did"* (Acts 9:36).

In Titus, the scripture infers that there are women in the church who are required to have special qualifications, but they are called "older women" – in the Greek the same word in the masculine form, is translated as "Elders": *"The older women likewise, that they*

be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children..." (Titus 2:3-4). Please notice that the word "likewise" ties this verse to the issue presented before, which is the qualifications for elders appointed for the churches of Crete.

There are also certain restrictions concerning women in the New Testament. *"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church"* (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

This text is grossly misunderstood, simply because people ignore the context in which it was written. Paul is speaking of how to maintain order in the public meetings of the church. He begins in verse 26 of the same chapter and continues on with what should and should not be done in the meeting. In verse 29, Paul writes about prophecies and prophets: *"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent"* (1 Cor. 14:29-30). If any other prophet receives an additional revelation he is to first keep silent while the first is prophesying. The context of the discussion is order and appropriate behavior during the meetings. In the same context Paul speaks to the women of the congregation. The Greek word used in this text for "women" is "*gunaikēs*." However, this Greek word can also be translated "wives." The text continues: *"And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for gunaikēs (women or wives) to speak in church."*

It is clear that Paul addresses here only married women. Moreover, it is my opinion that he is specifically talk-

¹ The word servant here is prejudicial because the Greek word used here is: "diakōnōn" this word is normally translated in the New Testament as "Deacon."

ing to the wives of the prophets, who want to help their husbands while they are prophesying. As the text above commanded the prophets who receive a Word to be silent while others are prophesying, so in the same way the wives of the prophets are also instructed to be silent and not to disrupt their husbands. For this reason they are commanded to go home and ask their husbands at home if they have any questions.

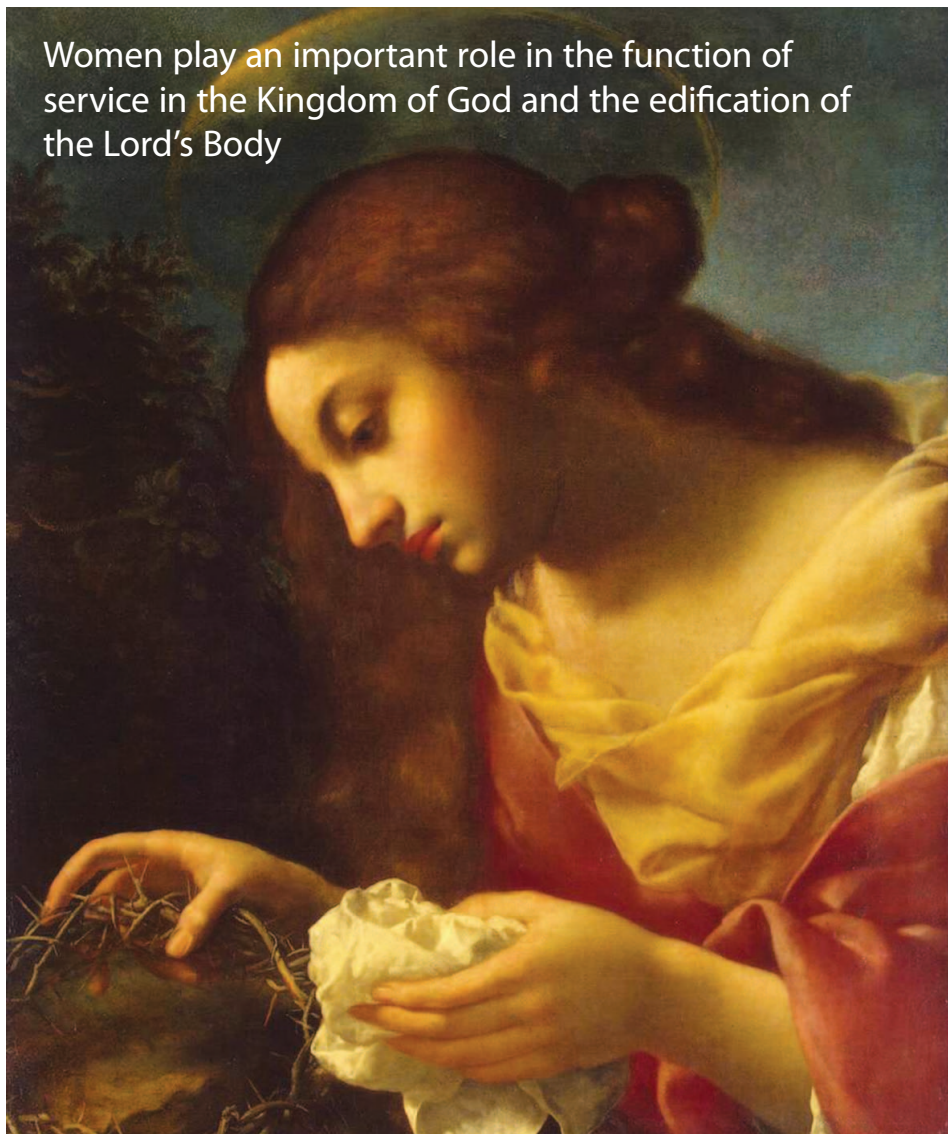
It is interesting that a very similar instruction is found in the Jewish Synagogues in the beginning of the 2nd Century A.D. In the Jewish context, different methods were tried to keep the women silent. In the end, the solution was to put them up in the balcony with a divider. To separate the women during worship might be offensive to some, but this was the solution that the Jewish Synagogue created in the second century. This is precisely the reason why, in Jewish Synagogues even today, the women are separated from the men.

According to 1 Cor. 11:5, a woman can pray or prophesy as long as her head is covered. In light of this, the command of 1 Cor. 14:34 cannot be interpreted for women as a whole to be silent in the church. In fact, if taken legalistically, this would mean that women ought not even sing or praise, because “being silent” would preclude any sound coming from a woman’s mouth. Therefore, churches that have traditionally forbidden women from praying in public have actually sinned in relationship to the biblical text and the instruction of the Apostle Paul.

Christians who command women to be silent in the assembly and interpret Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 14 without digging into the context will continue to be offensive and also biblically incorrect and abusive.

One of the most controversial texts concerning women in the New Testament comes also from the Apostle

Women play an important role in the function of service in the Kingdom of God and the edification of the Lord’s Body



Paul. He writes to his disciple Timothy: *“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression”* (1 Tim. 2:8-14).

There are a few points to make from this passage. The first is the statement of Paul in verse 8, where he instructs the men how to **pray** and suddenly he turns to the women and now he is telling them how to dress, not discussing how women are to pray. He connects the two by the phrase: *“In the like manner also.”* At first it might seem like the good Apostle is speaking about apples and oranges. However, I believe that the main subject of this text is actually the conduct and authority in the public assembly of the community, very much in keeping within the Jewish context of the First Century Church.

Secondly, Paul is building his case upon the text of Proverbs 31:10-31. In

Proverbs 31, a woman is to enjoy the fruit of the work of her hands and her good works are to be the source of her honor and praise. Paul is actually being very liberal towards women here and speaks with the spirit of Gamliel his teacher. Paul is encouraging women to study the Word of God with the provision that in the assembly they should do it in “silence and in submission.” For the modern woman this might be a somewhat condescending attitude by the Apostle, but when you hear this with Second Temple period ears, you will find it very progressive.

Paul’s instruction here does not forbid women from studying the Word of God, and he does not forbid them to teach. He forbids the women to teach and to exercise authority over men at the same time. To teach and exercise authority over other women or younger children he does not forbid. It is my understanding that Paul is also not forbidding that women should teach men, but they cannot teach men and have authority over them at the same time. In other words, Paul says that women cannot hold a position (an office) that instructs and carries authority over the men. He gives clear reasons why he thinks so: *“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control”* (1 Tim. 2:13-15).

Paul, like most of the Rabbis in the Second Temple period (and even most Orthodox Jews today), feels that these two things give men authority to teach other men and women, but at the same time preclude the same authority from women, because he says: *“Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”* Paul and other Rabbis from the First Century take into consideration

that there are tasks that women can do and do exclusively that a man can’t do (like childbearing). Since the woman was deceived and did deceive Adam, the degree of competence in Eve to teach man things from God with authority is set in doubt by the good Apostle.

This of course does not prevent women from praying in public as long as they have the sign of submission, which for Paul (and for Judaism) is a head covering for a woman. Married Orthodox Jewish women wear a head covering and see it as a responsibility and a sign of submission to their husbands. This ancient custom continues in the Orthodox Jewish community until this very day. It is interesting that there is no Jewish law for this nor for the custom that men should wear the Kippa – Yarmulke. This custom in some ways has become more important than the solid commandment of the Torah, with some Jews more anxious and eager to observe the custom and tradition.

This brings us to the question of “can women teach without exercising authority over men?” My answer is “YES!” In fact, women do teach a wide variety of subjects, even Bible and Theology in most educational institutions and they teach in classes of both males and females. Many would point out though, that this debate speaks of educational institutions and are not “the church”. This argument is partially artificial. Add to this argument that in educational institutions women do teach, but they don’t carry and ought not carry the same divine authority over the lives of the students and the community. In fact, in educational institutions, the only interest that both the school and the teachers should have is to impart knowledge and give an educational degree.

The question arises, what if a woman is not teaching under her own authority, but is asked to give a report by the person in authority who may even

be her husband? Could there be some or any circumstance under which a woman could give some instruction in a meeting of fellow believers in God? These are questions that we need to be seeking to find an answer for in the 21st Century Church. Any answer must take into serious consideration the Biblical text and the apostolic instruction.

Some Christians may not like what the Apostle Paul wrote and they might find all kinds of justifications why Paul’s instructions don’t apply to today. However, there is no way to circumvent Paul’s instructions and stay faithful to the simple reading of the Biblical text.

I realize that there might be many women who are doing a fine job “pastoring” churches. Since the Body of the Messiah today does not have a Sanhedrin and we are living in a period like the period of the judges, where each is doing what is right in his own eyes, I don’t judge what others are doing or condemn anyone. The Biblical text speaks for itself and the Word of God, read in context, ought to be the only convicting force in the lives of all of us. The leading of the Holy Spirit and God’s grace must ultimately be the only judge because we all ought to fear God much more than we fear man. However, for me, a part of fearing God is speaking where the Bible speaks and doing my best to keep silent where the Bible is silent. Could God have exceptions? Often times He does!

In conclusion, women provide a holy balance in the relationship and function of mankind in God’s scheme of redemption. We honor God’s Word in obedience and we seek ways to be blessed by our dear sisters, mothers, and wives without ignoring or denying the express instruction and rules given to us by the Apostles. Women are a gift from God to men and they are great partners for the building up of the Body of the Messiah and service in the Kingdom of God. ■

Heroines of the Exodus

The females of the Exodus story showed incredible bravery and strength and defied expectations to bring about the salvation of the people of God

When we hear the word Exodus, we see plagues, miracles and the parting of the Red Sea, but we all overlook a critical aspect of the story – the women; in this article I would like to look at the women in the Exodus story, their valor, initiative and intuition as well as the importance of women in modern times.

The Midrash has a popular saying, “The people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt through the wages of righteous women”. The list of redeeming women is long and respectful. Starting with Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives who defy Pharaoh’s decree by not killing the male babies. Continuing with Moses’ mother Jochebed, who hides her baby boy Moses after birth. After which Miriam, Moses’ sister, follows him by the river. Then, Pharaoh’s daughter shelters and raises Moses. After which Zipporah saves the life of her husband, Moses. Throughout the story of the exodus we witness strong women who gather their courage and initiate actions which lead to the redemption of Israel.

It would be a mistake to think that the phenomenon of righteous women is a one-time event or rare occurrence; rather, the Jewish history has many acts of heroism carried out by women. In fact, through the acts of righteous women in different generations, the people of Israel are alive until this very day or as we say in Hebrew “Am Israel Chai”.

One example of women’s strength that I want to point out is the Marrano women who lived 500 years ago in Spain and Portugal. The Catholic Church forced Jews to convert to Christianity. However, many of these Jews secretly held on to their Jewish religion. During those dark days it was the women who played the critical role in maintaining the Jewish identity; they kept a kosher home (the Jewish Culinary laws), lit the Shabbat candles, even if it had to be done secretly in a closet and cleaned the house of hametz (leaven) in preparation of Passover. They were the ones responsible for raising and educating the children and preserving the Jewish lifestyle.

Worldwide, from generation to generation, women play a key role in the life of churches. Women’s tremendous persever-

ing power carries the church through hardships and strengthens the congregation through prayer. This is often an underappreciated job, because most of women’s work happens behind the scenes, work which ought to get more gratitude.

In order to examine the courageous women at the time preceding the Exodus, we must first look at Pharaoh’s deeds, to which these women reacted. In the first chapter of Exodus Pharaoh is worried about the extraordinary birth rate and growth of the people of Israel, and attempts to deal with this demographic problem, which he sees as a threat to the Egyptian people. *And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land”* (Ex. 1:9-10). Pharaoh wants to “fix” this problem, and each solution is worse than the previous one.

Pharaoh’s first plan is enslaving the people of Israel. Physical and emotional exhaustion should bring a drop in the natural growth rate. Yet, the nation of Israel is stubborn and *“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew”* (Ex. 1:12). Seeing his plan fail, Pharaoh comes up with a new idea. This time Pharaoh orders the midwives to secretly kill all the Hebrew male babies using trickery. When this doesn’t work *“and the people multiplied and grew very mighty”* (Ex. 1:21). At this point Pharaoh doesn’t bother to hide his intentions. He makes a public decree to throw all male babies into the Nile River.

The list of redeeming women starts with the midwives that disobey Pharaoh’s decree and act to save instead of kill, even at the risk to their own lives. After the midwives, comes Jochebed, Moses’ mother. She too goes against Pharaoh’s decree, *“But when she could no longer hide him, she **took** an ark of bulrushes for him, **daubed** it with asphalt and pitch, **put** the child in it, and **laid** it in the reeds by the river’s bank”* (Ex. 2:3). The Bible goes into great details, contrary to most other parts



of the book to emphasize the role of Jochebed in the salvation of Israel. Miriam too does her best to protect her baby brother. Even before Pharaoh's daughter figures out what to do with the babe, Miriam addresses the princess without fear or hesitation. Miriam makes an offer to which the princess responds positively, *"Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"* (Ex. 2:7). The repetition of the word "you" is intentional to point out that the baby will remain Pharaoh's daughter's baby. And the princess responds with one word: "Go". Thus Pharaoh's daughter joins the circle of influential women. While they all had an important role, the actions of Pharaoh's daughter were the key to Moses' survival. We also see how very different she is from her father. He decrees death to all the Hebrew male babies, while she saves one. Ironically, of all the Egyptians, it is she that gives life to Moses, the savior of Israel. The compassion of Pharaoh's daughter overrules any national or patriotic feeling.

The Torah emphasizes how actions, rather than characters, are the essence. As a result, the women mentioned in this scene

remain anonymous. Miriam is not mentioned by name and is just referred to as *'his sister'*, and *'maiden'*. Likewise, Jochebed's name only appears much later in the text, just for the purpose of showing that Moses was born to a common family and not of nobility. In the entire story, God's Name is not mentioned - The Torah emphasizes the women that redeem Israel, and puts them in the spotlight while God remains behind the scenes and works through natural means. His presence is certainly felt but He doesn't intervene directly as long as people do their utmost.

One couldn't write about the actions of women that changed history without a few words about female intuition. The Bible does not explain how Pharaoh's daughter *knows* that the baby is Hebrew. However, she just *knows*. The Bible is full of women that *know*, for example:

- Rebekah *knows* that Jacob is the chosen son;
- Zipporah *knows* she must circumcise Moses' sons in order to save his life
- Michal *knows* King David's life is in danger; and
- The more relevant example of Moses' sister Miriam.

Miriam follows the basket down the river, she must be careful not to lose sight of the basket while at the same time remaining hidden. The basket floats over to Pharaoh's daughter. Miriam watches from afar, and *knows* that the princess *knows* that this is a Hebrew child that should've been drowned. Yet, what happens next? If Miriam reveals herself, her whole family will be in grave danger! Miriam uses her female intuition by leaving her hiding spot, approaching Pharaoh's daughter and asking; *"Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"* (Ex. 2:7). The Jewish sages have named this phenomenon *bina yetera* - additional wisdom or unexplainable wisdom.

Pharaoh's daughter can be compared to another princess, Michal the daughter of King Saul. When comparing these stories, many similarities can be found: both princesses are daughters of kings that wish to kill important leaders of the people of Israel and both courageously save them. Just as the princesses share similarities, Moses and David, too, are similar in their weakness. Both are completely passive and at the mercy of these women. Moses' dependency is quite obvious. How much more helpless can one be than an abandoned baby crying on the river? Likewise, David is completely passive in obeying Michal and initiates nothing despite being one of the most active figures of the Bible. However, Michal *knows* intuitively that David's life is in danger. She is the one that lowers David down the window, puts the household idol in his bed, after wrapping it in clothing and placing a goat-hair quilt around its head, and lies to Saul's emissaries who come to kill him, that he is ill (1 Sam. 19:11-14).

Here I would like to discuss the morality of lying and can be ever condoned?

Looking back at the book of Exodus, Pharaoh orders the Hebrew midwives to kill all Hebrew male babies. The midwives disobey Pharaoh's decree, which was clearly a barbaric and inhuman command. Instead, they help deliver the babies. When summoned before a furious Pharaoh who demands an explanation, they are forced to lie: *"But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?' And the midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them'"* (Ex. 1:17-19). The question arises whether lying to Pharaoh was wrong. How does the Torah respond to this lie, the purpose of which is to rescue lives? The Scripture portrays several lies told in order to save lives. Interestingly enough, in most Biblical cases it is women who tell these lies.

One example is Rahab who lies to her own people in order to save the Hebrew spies. She understands that God is about to give Jericho to the people of Israel. By helping the spies she saves her whole household (Joshua 2:4). Another example describes a woman from the city "Bahurim" who hides David's spies in a well and lies to Absalom's servants who are in search of these spies, *"Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and came to a man's house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. And when Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, 'Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?' So the woman said to them, 'They have gone over the water brook.' And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem"* (2 Sam. 17:18-20).

Jewish tradition permits lying occasionally, and sometimes even recommends it. There are four situations in which one can be dishonest:

- To stop a fight,
- To protect someone else from harm or inconvenience,
- To practice humility,
- To maintain modesty.

For instance, there is a tradition to bring joy to a bride on her wedding day. We tell her how beautiful she looks, how delicious the food is and how lovely the event is - even if it is not true. For pleasing and bringing joy to a bride on her wedding day outweighs the truth.

So, how does the Torah respond to the lie of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah? Exodus 1:20 tells us that *Therefore*

God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. God rewards them for their good work. Indeed, *And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them* (Ex. 1:21). Surely, just as the midwives gave life and not death to the Hebrew infants, so the Lord did unto them, by giving them families and many descendants. In conclusion, each lie must be examined individually. And sometimes it is better to lie than tell the truth.

In the past the main role of women was to run the home and raise the children; however, in today's modern world women have many roles, which they want to succeed in - women are mothers, daughters, friends, partners. Women want to develop a career, a hobby, the talents they were blessed with, to live in luxury, all the while still having some relaxing free time. Most of all they want to wake up each morning with a smile and the feeling that their life is one of significance.

Our modern culture sets many expectations on women. The Western world expects women to strive for positions of power in politics, business and all other fields. Today's motto is 'fulfill your individual potential' and 'reach for the stars'. Usually the problem is, that fulfilling these wishes comes at the expense of the woman's role as the chief home maker and child raiser. Today's competitive culture causes us to compare ourselves to those surrounding us. Thus, our self-value is relative to that of others. Stay-at-home mothers and/or wives, choosing their family over a career, are categorized as old-fashioned and primitive.

The New Testament teaches us that some of women's tasks are to manage the home and educate the children, *"to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed"* (Tit. 2:5), *"manage the house"* (1 Tim. 5:14). The answer for this day and age lies in having our priorities straight. My wife works as an editor, and trains other editors. She is an inspiring worker who has been nominated employee of the month and year (with rewards). Several times her managers offered her promotions and management positions that would result in a higher salary. Truth be told, she was very tempted by the offers and wanted the position, the status, and the higher salary (which would help out with our mortgage). After a long deliberation on the matter, she chose to pass on the position, because it would require many more working hours. The only reason she passed on those offers was for the sake of our children. As parents, our children have to be our top priority - we can't sacrifice their education and we must instill within them Messianic values.

You shall not covet is one of the Ten Commandments, and a very important tip for a happy life. We must find the green grass in our own yard, and be faithful to our calling and our family. ■

Between Loyalty and Reality

Examining the positions of Ruth and Orpah in the book of Ruth shines light on the human ability to choose to do God's will over seeking our own comfort

"Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:4-5).

Paul's call to the congregation in Philippi, that they will be full of love, was based on the fact that they were able to act with high moral values during the different crises within their personal relationships. Often those same 'theoretical' verses became more tangible through the stories about real living people.

More than once, life brings us face to face with different challenges, possibly the hardest of them involve relationships with other people, and especially those close to us. What motivates us to make our decisions in these crossroads of our lives? Do we consider what benefits us, or what benefits others? In the scroll of Ruth, we encounter a number of individuals whose lives are spread out before us, as are their challenges and how they handled them.

By comparing the main characters (Naomi, Ruth and Boaz) and the secondary characters (Orpah, and the next of kin) in the book of Ruth, we get the opportunity to examine their attributes in volatile situations, where they could 'explode' (as happen so often in our lives...). In contrast to the secondary characters utilitarianism and pragmatism, we see the loyalty and moral integrity of the main characters.

Here is a comparison between the characters and their decision making process – the first being the accepted 'normal' one: Orpah, who listens to the sensible words of her mother in law and turns back to Moab to build her life. The second, the non- conventional one: Ruth, who against all reason, continues to stick to Naomi bringing into conflict her loyalty and her utilitarianism.

In the conversation that takes place between Naomi and her daughters in law (1:7-18), she tries several times to convince them to return to their land.

She turns to them and requests that they *"Go back, each of you, to your mother's home."* They refuse and say *"We will go back with you to your people."* But Naomi persists: *"Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me?"* She tries to persuade them with positive arguments, like the hope of a new life in Moab. She tries with negative arguments like the uncertainty of following her. At some point Orpah's will cracks because of Naomi's persuasion and she continues to try to convince Ruth as well. *"See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* Surprisingly, Ruth responds with an absolute refusal *"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."*

The atmosphere as seen from the dialogs' here is one of a caring family environment: *"At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her"* (1:14). There is no judgment or criticism as to Orpah's actions, after all, both daughters in law do not owe anything to Naomi after the death of their husbands. In addition, Naomi is the one that requests they leave her to go their way.

Orpah is convinced by Naomi's words that she will not have a future with her: *"Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"* Maybe the chilling words of Naomi struck a cord with Orpah's fear of the future, and she turns back on her heels. It is precisely because there is nothing wrong with Orpah's actions - she reacts in the 'normal' way, that shine a light on Ruth's unique character.

Ruth's words show us that although she is aware of the apparent hopelessness of her decision *"Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried,"* she doesn't retreat from the solidarity she expressed to her departed husband. Orpah backs away from her initial intention to tie her fate with that of Naomi, but Ruth's devotion was able to stand against the temptations for a better life.

More than once in our life we are called to go outside the camp and identify with the Messiah (Hebrews 13:3), with His values. Whether it is decisions at work or personal relationships, what values motivate us? It is clear that without the Lord's grace it is hard to rise above our basic need to do what is good for us; all the more so in a world that encourages such actions. Thus meeting the character of Ruth, certainly makes us think.

Orpah's departure from Naomi and Ruth 'breaks apart' the package. Until that point the three of them shared a fate. From here, one went one way and the others take a different route. There

also was a spiritual unity and in order for it to exist it must have come from a place of love that was willing to sacrifice, understand others, and care for their needs. It is not for naught that Paul calls on us to Be completely humble and gentle; *“be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Orpah’s journey back to Moab was most likely one of the loneliest journeys she had ever undertaken in her life. Even though her decision was practical (returning to a place of security), in contrast to the uncertainty that lay ahead for the two other women, she must have certainly felt pain. Every decision we make gives up another possibility. A utilitarian or pragmatic decision often sacrifices other values, such as identity, loyalty and persistence. Also, the other two women must have felt pain and maybe disappointment by Orpah’s decision. Despite the fact that the author does not judge Orpah’s character negatively, when Orpah kisses her mother in law, Naomi does not kiss her back.

It is easy to judge between white and black but not so easy when we enter grey areas. In those areas, no one is entirely right or wrong, just like the situation before us. There is only the reality which exposes the values by which each character acts. It doesn’t look like Naomi and Ruth held a grudge against Orpah in regard to her decision. They knew what they had to do and didn’t dwell upon what the other should do. Just as in an entirely different situation, Peter was called not to dwell in comparisons: *“When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me’”* (John 21:21-22).

The author of this scroll presents a similar moral dilemma near the end of the story, comparing the characters

of Boaz and the redeemer. Also here, the family member wants to fulfill his duty, but backs away from it when he understands the price it will cost him; compared to Boaz, who despite the difficulties of marrying Ruth (the gentile), stands by his promise. The redeemer is the prototype of a person who is willing to do his duty but is not disconnected from the financial calculations. His actions are those of a person with normal convictions for our world and His answer to Boaz’s call to request to marry Ruth was superficial and did not stand the test. After he understood that his marriage to Ruth would cause his inherited land to be lost to his family name, he went back on his agreement to marry Ruth. If the redeemer had taken Ruth as his wife, according to Boaz’s terms (Levite marriage, Deut. 25:5-6), Elimelech’s land would pass to the first born son of Ruth and the redeemer *“The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel”* (Deut. 25:6). This action certainly had a price from the point of view of the redeemer, the cost was sacrificing his land. That price was too high for the redeemer. The calculations of the redeemer show just how much Boaz’s actions were true grace; that Boaz’s decision about Ruth were not materially based.

Today, Yeshua calls us as he did back then. *“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life”* (Mark 10:29-30). Of course, he is not speaking of just “fields” but about a spiritual principle; the willingness to leave what is known and comfortable, for the Lord and for the calling that the Lord puts on our lives.

The pragmatism of Orpah and the redeemer is expressed by the boundaries they put on their loyalty. They are not presented as negative people, just practical ones. They do not possess the spiritual sensitivity to understand what is beyond the physical reality. Orpah retreats after understanding that practical devotion to Naomi would be useless from a material perspective. Likewise, the redeemer, when he understood that taking Ruth as a wife would endanger his land plot.

Thus, in contrast to the secondary characters in the story, we bear witness to the nobility of the primary characters. Unlike the pragmatic redeemer, we see Boaz as a positive light and unlike the practical Orpah, the character of Ruth is seen as unselfish.

Orpah might have gotten the “good life” she wanted but the legacy she left behind according to Jewish tradition is negative: “One was named Orpah, and she turned her back (Oreph) on her mother in law (Midrash Ruth Raba B:9). Likewise, the redeemer received his land plot, but his name isn’t even recorded in the scroll: “when the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken passed by. “Such-and-such,” he said, “come over, and sit down”. The point is not to abandon practical considerations, but to weigh the moral or spiritual value which might be more important.

The story of Ruth examines the feelings and moral attributes of the characters based on the decisions that they made in real time. In the modern pragmatic world which we live in, characters like these look ‘romantic’ to us. But if we want to follow the Lord, this is the model before us: *“For even the Messiah did not please himself”* (Romans 15:3). Even if all we can do is admit our inability to live according to such high standards, at least we can profess a willingness to do so, and ask the Lord’s grace to do so. ■

The Noble Messianic Community

The Bride of the Messiah is called to be of noble character like the woman of Proverbs 31

Lists... lists... lists. There is no shortage of lists. Top 10 Favorites Lists. The Best and Worst Lists. There are lists of achievement and lists of vices. In all of these lists there is nothing new. However, sometimes how we examine them leads to new insights.

The common misconception is that with technology we have gotten better at multitasking. That thanks to technology we are able to do work on multiple items at the same time. This article was written on a flight from Nashville to San Francisco to Microsoft's Conference about the future of technology. The first draft was not fit for publishing. Recent research has shown that we are not good at multitasking and in fact we fall short of the high opinion we have of ourselves regarding multitasking. Data from recent research shows we actually switch from task to task in a quick fashion paying little bits of time to each task never really doing anything well but doing a mediocre job on all the tasks. In other words we take longer but complete multiple average activities at the same time.

The Bible has many lists; some are hanging on walls, like the 10 Commandments from Exodus 20. We consider it to be a good list, it is favorable in our eyes and we have something in common with others that share the same positive view of it.

Romans 12:9-19, another list we look favorably upon, gives all the ways

Love can be good and how it is put into practice, *"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord"* (Romans 12:9–19, NIV11).

However, for many reasons the Proverbs 31 list is love/hate, especially with most women. These verses are more than just a "To Do List"; they are an Achievements list. Achievements take more effort and have measureable results. Achievements take much more time than accomplishing daily tasks such as answering email and sending text messages while we stand in line at a coffee shop.

Who is the wife of Noble character?

The Beatles famous song says, "I don't care too much for money, money can't buy me love" in some way they are paraphrasing Proverbs 31:10, "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."

What makes a wife have a noble character is not the flowing list of accomplishments in verses 11-27. If you are hoping that you made the right choice and that your wife is of noble character by measuring her achievement to Proverbs 31, then you are treating these verses as a "To Do List" and you have things all backwards. Notice the noble character is already there in the wife. Because of her Character she has accomplished the achievements, not the other way around.

As you progress through the verses we find the wife fulfills two roles that can be carried out in a noble way. The first role involves her husband i.e. the center of her world. In this world she has her husband's heart and the husband has no lack of gain. It's an interesting contrast where she is compared to be worth more than money and yet the husband does not lack anything of value. Our treasure is not in things made by man. Our treasure is in someone made by God. God made Adam and Eve and the world cannot compete with his creations. Don't chase the world when you have what God creates. Read Proverbs 18:22, *"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD."*

The second role involves the investment she puts in her children and her dealings with the poor and needy. Imagine looking at a mother's hands that have changed from the years of washing dishes, peeling potatoes, mending clothing, putting toys together, holding children, and knitting blankets. The Bible does not describe the noble woman's

hands but they have character written all over them.

A woman's hands are not idle, but instead are busy and worn. Her meals are known and loved at the potluck meals. Her kind words lift other's spirits with a message of hope.

The Messianic Community as the Bride

We, the Body, both male and female, are called the "bride of Yeshua" (Ephesians 5:25-27). We are called to be of noble character. Proverbs 31 is applicable in context to what the Body of followers of Yeshua should accomplish. Look at your hands and ask do the hands of the members of your assembly look new and soft like a baby's hands, or do they look like the hands your oldest member who has worked hard.

We are all called to spread the Good Message, the one of hope and reconciliation, the one of the love of God. God has entrusted us to be his hands here on earth and we are to do good and not evil. We should be full of the joy of the Lord, (Nehemiah 8:10), being renewed to work as needed day or night for the kingdom. We are called to be more than reactive. We are called to be proactive in our tasks, thinking ahead preparing for what we know is coming. We may have lost heart while waiting for the bridegroom. However, He will come and the question to ask yourself is, have you prepared, do you have extra oil. Or, are you hoping for someone else to share oil with you. The time is now to reach out to the poor and needy. Only you can make that difference in another person's life.

As we look outside of our home to the work ahead, we can accomplish all things because we have prepared inside our home first. We don't have to worry about the brothers and sisters in the body when snow and winter comes because we have already prepared clothing

for them. This is the proactive forward thinking "wife" (Messianic Body) where strength and dignity are her clothing. It is what others see. The World is looking at our achievements to hear us able to speak wisdom and faithful instruction. For us to know what to say to the World we must study the Word.

The fear of The Lord is to be praised. Start praising wives; wives praise your children and husbands. Church start lifting up your members to the calling they have been given.

Start up your engines because the race began a long time ago; the bridegroom values us more than rubies. ■



The White Girl - Painting by James Abbott McNeill Whistler

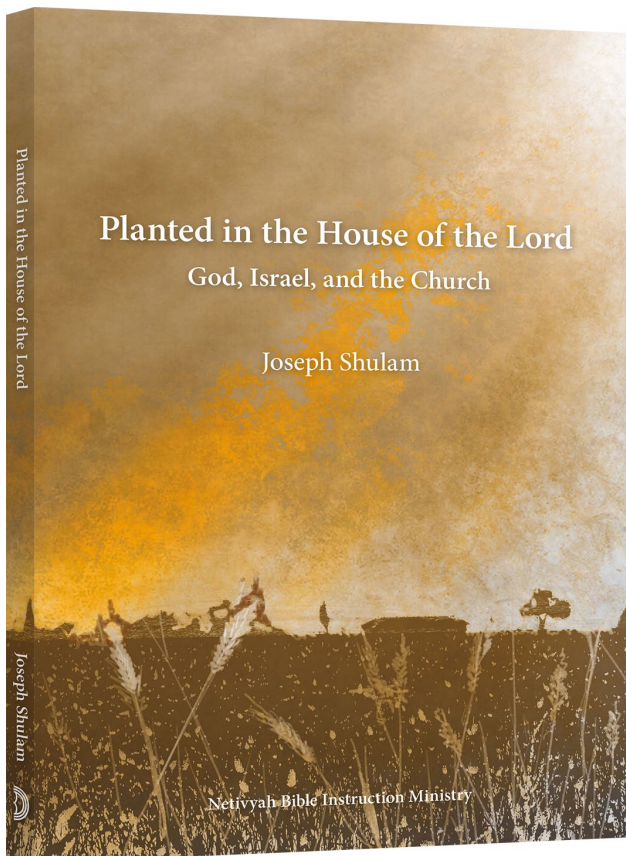
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Planted in the House of the Lord: God, Israel, and the Church

By Joseph Shulam



This book is a must-read for all thinking believers who have ever asked themselves questions like the following: Who are God's people? Are the Jews still the chosen people, and if so, what is the Church? What are the spiritual callings of Israel and the Church, and have they been fulfilled yet? How does monotheism work out with the Trinity? Where can one find grace and truth in the Torah, and what did Yeshua (Jesus) say about the Written and Oral Law?

These pages investigate these questions and many others. Written from the unique perspective of Israeli Messianic Jews, it faces these old-age debates armed with the truth of the Bible and its Jewish context. It addresses the Jewish task of bringing monotheism to the world, the importance of Jerusalem, and the interconnected relationships between God, Israel, and the Church. Along the way we discover vital biblical models for identity, community, election, and lives of faith and good deeds. *Planted in the House of the Lord* is a reader-friendly book that explores the relationships God has with his people and their complementary roles in his great plan to redeem creation from idolatry and sin and to restore his kingdom to earth.

Since its release in 2011, *Planted in the House of the Lord* has enjoyed resounding success among Messianic Jews and Christians all over the world. It has been the topic of seminars and articles and has been highly praised by its readers. It has already been translated into Dutch, German, Hebrew, Portuguese, Finnish, Japanese and Korean.

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