

Exercising Authority – Women and the Church

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Part IV – Biblical Foundation - Prophetesses

CTCR 1985 refers to the examples of Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. It gives little examination of the specific contexts in which these women are depicted. It refers to Miriam as a “woman prophet” (p. 5-6). Similarly, in reference to the New Testament, it states, “Acts 21:9 and 1 Cor. 11:5 specifically indicate that women functioned as prophets in the early church” (p. 10).

The third and most recent edition of *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* defines the Greek word for prophetess (προφήτις) in the same way as it does the Greek word for prophet (προφήτης), namely, both are defined as “*prophet*.”¹ This is not surprising in a world that seeks to efface the differences between men and women and has in recent times substituted the words “actor” for “actress,” “waiter” for “waitress,” and “Sir” for “Ma’am.” Before following such a trend, however, it should be noted that the words are different in both the Greek of the New Testament and Septuagint and in the Hebrew of the Old Testament (where a prophet is נָבִיא and prophetess is נְבִיאָה). Furthermore, while the man who serves as a prophet bears that title in relation to his function of prophesying, this is not necessarily the case for the woman who bears the title prophetess. In light of these facts and given the very few times prophetesses are mentioned in the Bible, we will now evaluate the role of a prophetess, not in reference to what male prophets were or did, but in terms of what the Scriptural accounts themselves reveal about these women.

Isaiah’s Wife

We begin with the reference to a prophetess in Isaiah 8:3. In this passage Isaiah the prophet says, “And I drew near to the prophetess and she conceived and bore a son.” From the context of this verse, Isaiah’s wife appears to be called a prophetess for no other reason than that she was married to a prophet, for we have no indication that his wife was engaged in any type of

¹ Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. προφήτις, ἴδος, ἡ and s.v. προφήτης, οὐ, ὁ. The full definition given for the latter is “a person inspired to proclaim or reveal divine will or purpose, *prophet*,” while the former is merely defined as “*prophet*.” The second edition defines the latter as “*prophet*” and the former as “*prophetess*.” See Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. προφήτις, ἴδος, ἡ and s.v. προφήτης, οὐ, ὁ.

prophesying. A parallel type of situation avails today in Greece, where a priest is called a *πρεσβύτερος* and his wife is referred to with the feminine form of the same, namely, *πρεσβυτέρα*. So, in a similar way, in the case of Isaiah 8:3, we appear to have an example of the title prophetess being used not to refer to function (i.e., prophesying), but to relation (i.e., wife of prophet). CTCR 1985 states, “The term for ‘prophetess’ is used . . . for Isaiah’s wife in Isaiah 8:3. In the case of Isaiah’s wife, the word likely means ‘the wife of a prophet’” (p. 5, FN 3). Unfortunately, it relegates this statement to a footnote which has the effect of rendering it an essentially insignificant side note.

Miriam

Next we turn to the case of Miriam. In Exodus chapter 15, after God had delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh and the Egyptians through the Red Sea, we learn that Moses leads the Israelites in singing a song to Yahweh. The words of the song begin with:

I will sing (*אָשִׁירָה*) to Yahweh, for He has surely been exalted. Horse and its rider He has cast in the sea. My strength and song [is] Yah. And He became for me salvation. This [one] [is] my God. I will adorn Him [with praises], the God of my father, I will make Him exalted. . . . (Exod 15:1–2)

These are just the first two verses of an 18 verse song that Moses leads the people in. After the words of this song are given, a summary of God’s action that prompted the song is recounted again in verse 19. Then in verses 20–21 we hear:

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand. And all the women went forth behind her with timbrels and with dancing. And Miriam answered/sang (*וַתַּעַן*) to them (*לָהֶם*), “Sing (*שִׁירֵי*) to Yahweh, for He has surely been exalted. Horse and its rider He has cast in the sea.”

In this verse we are told that Miriam is a prophetess, not a “woman prophet” as CTCR 1985 asserts (p. 5). We are also told that she is the sister of Aaron. Then we learn that she led all the women with music and dancing. According to the Hebrew, Miriam answered or sang “to them (*לָהֶם*),” where the “them” is masculine plural in form. “Them” could refer to the men, who were singing the song led by Moses. In this case Miriam is responding to what Moses and the men are singing. Since it is unlikely that the men would hear only Miriam, it would perhaps need to be assumed that Miriam was joined by the women in what she sang.

Another possibility is that the “them” refers to the women and the children that would have been with them. Since the children would include males, the masculine form of “them” could then be used. In this case Miriam would be seen to be encouraging the women and children to join in with her in song. This would also account for the masculine plural imperative that

Miriam directs toward the ones to whom she is speaking (i.e., “Sing (שִׁירִי)”). Such an interpretation seems to be in line with the Septuagint translation of verse 21, where we read, “And Miriam was leading (ἐξήρχεν) them (i.e., the women), saying, ‘Let us sing (ᾠσωμεν) to the Lord, ...’”.

The words that Miriam leads the women in singing are only the first verse of the 18 verses of the song that Moses was leading the men in singing. In other words, we have no indication that Miriam received these words via special revelation from God. Rather, she hears what Moses and the men are singing and then leads the women in singing a portion of that among themselves. Another possibility is that Miriam and the women sing the full song with the rest of the Israelites when Moses leads them in singing, and then after the corporate singing is done, Miriam leads the women in song, repeating the first verse of the song with them.

We also saw that Miriam is introduced as “the prophetess, the sister of Aaron.” She is not referred to here as the sister of Moses. The reason for this would likely be to make it clear that in her role of prophetess, Miriam bears a connection with Aaron, not Moses. For as Aaron acted as a prophet in receiving the words God gave to Moses and speaking them to the people (see 4:15–16; 7:1–2), so it seems in this account of the exodus from Egypt that Miriam acts as a prophetess in taking the words that God gave to Moses and speaking them to the women.

The next time Miriam is mentioned in the Bible is in Numbers chapter 12. The pertinent verses are as follows:

And Miriam spoke (וַתִּדְבֹר) and Aaron against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he took in marriage, for a Cushite woman he had taken in marriage. And they said, “Has Yahweh indeed only spoken by Moses (בְּמֹשֶׁה)? Has not also He spoken by us (בָּנוּ)?” And Yahweh heard it. And the man Moses was exceedingly meek, more than any man who was upon the face of the earth. And Yahweh said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, “Come out (צֵאוּ), the three of you, to the tent of meeting.” And they came out, the three of them. And Yahweh came down in a pillar of cloud and He stood at the entrance of the tent. And He called Aaron and Miriam and they went forth, the two of them. And He said, “Hear now My words: If your prophet (נְבִיאֲכֶם) will be of Yahweh, I will make Myself known to him (אֵלָי) by a vision; I will speak in him (בּוֹ) by a dream. Not so with My servant Moses. Faithful is he in/with all my house. Mouth to mouth I speak with regard to him in plain sight and not by riddles. And he looks upon the form of Yahweh. Why were you not afraid to speak against my servant — against Moses?” And the anger of Yahweh burned against them and He departed. And the cloud departed from over the tent and behold Miriam was being leprous, like snow. And Aaron turned to Miriam and behold she was being leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, “I pray, my lord, do not now let sin be laying upon us because we have been foolish and because we have sinned. Let her not now be as one being dead, who when he comes out from the womb of his mother, half of his flesh has been eaten.” And Moses cried out to Yahweh, saying, “O God, I pray, heal now her.” And Yahweh said to Moses, “Had her father surely spit in her face, would not she be humiliated for seven days. Let her be shut outside the camp for seven days and afterwards let her be brought in.” And Miriam was shut outside the camp for seven days and the people did not set out until Miriam was brought in. (Num 12:1–15)

In this passage we learn that Miriam and Aaron are not happy with Moses because he married a Cushite woman. This Cushite woman may refer to Zipporah (Exod 2:21), who was from Midian, a place that is spoken of in parallel with Cushan in Habakkuk 3:7. It is also possible that the Cushite woman refers to a woman that Moses married most likely after his first wife, Zipporah, had died. In this case the negative reaction against Moses may have been ethnically motivated, for a Cushite can also refer to someone from Ethiopia and hence dark skinned. Thus, Miriam and Aaron may have been exhibiting a racist attitude.

Another possibility is that they react the way they do because they think that Moses is going against God's Word, for Moses himself had earlier told the people not to intermarry with the foreign peoples of the land to which they were going (Exod 34:16). However, the fact is that Moses had not gone against God's Word in marrying the Cushite woman. Whoever she was, she was not from the people of Canaan and we can assume that she was not a pagan, but a convert to Israel. Therefore the danger of her leading Moses to worship other gods was not a factor. Moses' marriage reveals that God's people are not confined to one ethnic group, pointing to Christ whose bride, the Church, is made up of all peoples, nations, and languages.

A third possibility is that the real problem is the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron in relation to Moses' position. In the previous chapter of Numbers, God had taken the Spirit that was on Moses and put it upon the seventy elders who would help him lead the people. When the seventy elders received the Spirit, they engaged in a one time prophesying event, showing God's approval of the elders and their role (Num 11:11–17, 25). It may be that this incident flared up the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron when they were not included in the giving of the Spirit and felt less important after the seventy men had the renown for prophesying. The issue of the Cushite wife of Moses would then really only be an apparently "legitimate" reason to attack Moses so that their real motives are not revealed.

Whatever the ultimate cause of the incident is, Miriam and Aaron are disgusted with Moses. In their disgust they attack Moses' office as God's prophet, seeking to put themselves on the same level as him. Thereby they were attempting to claim an authority and position that they had not been given by God.

We read that "Miriam spoke (וַתִּדְבֹר) and Aaron against Moses." Here Miriam's name and her speaking is listed first, likely because she is leading the way in this sin, and Aaron is going along with her. This is not the first time that Aaron allowed others to lead him astray. When Moses had earlier gone up on Mount Sinai to receive God's revelation, because Moses was taking a long time, the people grew impatient, thought that Moses would not return, and wanted to worship other gods. The people thus led Aaron to form the golden calf which they worshipped (Exod 32). So here again, in Numbers chapter 12, Aaron shows his sinful weakness by allowing, this time, his sister to lead him to sin.

When Miriam and Aaron say, "Has Yahweh indeed only spoken by Moses (בְּמוֹשֶׁה)? Has not also He spoken by us (בְּנוֹ)?", we learn that God hears them. We then read that "Yahweh said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, 'Come out (צֵאוּ), the three of you, to the tent of meeting.'" We are not told how God speaks to the three, although it is perhaps suggested that

they are together at the time. It is also possible that God speaks His request to Moses who then relays it to Aaron and Miriam. Either way, the three go out to the tent of meeting. Yahweh then comes down in a pillar of cloud, stands at the entrance of the tent, and calls for Aaron and Miriam to come forth. To these two, God says,

“Hear now My words: If your prophet (נְבִיאִי) will be of Yahweh, I will make Myself known to him (אֵלַי) by a vision; I will speak in him (בּוֹ) by a dream. Not so with My servant Moses. Faithful is he in/with all my house. Mouth to mouth I speak with regard to him in plain sight and not by riddles. And he looks upon the form of Yahweh. Why were you not afraid to speak against my servant — against Moses?”

Now when God is saying these words, he is not suggesting to Miriam and Aaron that they are prophets and Moses is one step higher. Rather, His words take Miriam and Aaron down even further, because they are not really prophets. Aaron’s main purpose was to be the spokesman for Moses. His main task was to deliver, not words that he received from God in a vision or dream, but the words that God delivered to Aaron through Moses. While God did speak to Aaron a few times apart from Moses’ presence or mediation (e.g., Exod 4:27; Lev 10:8; possibly in Num 12:4; later in Num 18:1, 8, 20), Aaron’s main task was not that of prophet but of priest who relayed the Word of God by Moses to the people (Exod 4:10–16; 7:1–2; Lev 10:11). With Miriam, there is no case of God speaking to her in a dream or vision. Even in the Numbers 12 account we are considering, God does not speak to Miriam apart from the presence of Moses or Aaron. This suggests that Miriam is referred to as a prophetess because, after the Israelites came through the Red Sea, she leads the women in singing a portion of the song that God had already revealed to his prophet Moses. This is the only instance that we have of God speaking by Miriam, and this in an indirect way, where Miriam speaks to the women the words that God gave through Moses.

We can see that Miriam’s move at confronting Moses is an attempt to put herself not only on the level of Moses, but even on the level of Aaron. However, while Miriam may have led the women in song, using the word of Moses, she was on the same level neither of Moses nor of Aaron, who had the office of teaching the word of Moses to the entire congregation of Israel, consisting of men and women. The hierarchy of authority as assigned by God is seen when He calls the three siblings together. He addresses Moses first, then Aaron, then Miriam (Num 12:4). While Miriam leads Aaron in confronting Moses, when God addresses Miriam and Aaron, it is Aaron first, then Miriam (12:5). The level of authority is also revealed by who is punished, namely Miriam. The hierarchy is seen again when, after Miriam becomes leprous, it is Aaron who intercedes on behalf of Miriam to Moses, and then Moses who intercedes on behalf of Aaron to God (12:11–13).

We see that Miriam, who may have been offended at the dark color of the skin of her sister-in-law, is punished by being plagued with the leprosy that made her undesirably white as snow. As far as Aaron is concerned, his punishment is that he must see his sister suffer. We could say the same is true today for ministers of the Word who make concessions to feminist

pressures contrary to the Word of God and His will for the roles of men and women. The suffering they bring is not necessarily their own, but that of their sisters, who rather than proceeding forward with God's people in the health of God's blessings, live lives where those blessings are half eaten and that isolate them from what God intends for them.

Reference to Miriam's rebellion and leprosy is made later in Deuteronomy, where Moses says,

Watch yourself in regard to the plague of leprosy to be exceedingly watchful and to do all that the priests, the Levites, will direct/teach you. Just as I commanded them, you will be watchful to do. Remember what Yahweh, your God, did to Miriam on the way when you came out from Egypt. (Deut 24:8-9)

Here Moses reminds the people of the account where God struck Miriam with leprosy because she did not want to listen to Moses and recognize the role God had given him. As we saw, in a more subtle sense, Miriam was also challenging the role of Aaron. This reminder of Miriam would have served as a strong warning against the Israelites following in her footsteps and not listening to the priests that God had appointed for their specific work of directing the people. As failure to recognize the role of Moses and even Aaron brought leprosy upon Miriam, so failure to recognize the role of the priests would bring leprosy upon the people as it spread. Today we could say that the warning of Moses continues, where failure to recognize the role of pastors leads to the spread of sin in congregations to their own detriment.

The last mention of Miriam that is relevant to our discussion comes in the 6th chapter of Micah.² In speaking of His gracious acts, God says,

For I have caused you to go up from the land of Egypt and from the house of slaves. And I ransomed you. And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. (Mic 6:4)

This passage reminds the Israelites of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. God recalls how Moses, Aaron, and Miriam went before the Israelites when they came out of the land of their slavery. Once again, we notice the order of hierarchy in the listing of the names. While Moses and Aaron were the main agents of God in leading Israel out of Egypt, we know that Miriam was involved in leading the women, particularly in leading them in song after they crossed the Red Sea. CTCR 1985's statement that in this passage Miriam "is referred to as a leader on par with Moses and Aaron" is misleading, failing to recognize the word ordering in this passage, disregarding the context of Numbers 12 which should inform an understanding of this passage and shows that Miriam was not on par with either Moses or Aaron, and being open to the interpretation that Miriam was a leader of men, rather than of women and children.

² The other passages where Miriam is mentioned are Numbers 20:1, 26:59, and 1 Chronicles 6:3 (5:29 in Hebrew). The former refers to the place of Miriam's death and burial. The latter two merely list Aaron, Moses, and Miriam as the children of Amram. Aaron is probably listed before Moses in these verses because he was older than Moses.

Judging from what the Scriptures say about Miriam, we have no indication that she was the equivalent of a male prophet. Nowhere do we have any instances where God speaks to her in dreams or visions. The one occasion where God speaks “mouth to mouth” with her in Numbers 12 leaves her never wanting to experience that again and being satisfied to hear God’s word through Moses. This is similar to when God speaks directly to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. After they hear His voice, they are happy to have Moses be the one who relays the words of God to them (Exod 20:1, 19; Deut 5:4, 22–27).

Miriam’s role as prophetess is revealed only on one occasion, where she leads the women in song after the Israelites cross the Red Sea. In this instance, Miriam speaks the words that God had already given to Moses. In this regard Miriam is like Aaron in that she speaks the words of Moses, the prophet. She is different from Aaron in that she speaks these words not to the men and women of the congregation, but only to the women and, perhaps, to the children accompanying them. Whether or not Miriam acted in this capacity at other times is not certain. Her statement with Aaron of “Has not also [God] spoken by us” refers to the past and may or may not include repeated activity. Therefore, the statement of CTCR 1985, “That she was one through whom God spoke is also clearly implied in Num. 12:1-2” (p. 5), must be tempered by these facts.

Deborah

In the second chapter of Judges, we are given a summary of events in the book. After Joshua and his generation died, the Israelites forsook the Lord and turned to worshipping other gods. The Lord then handed them over to those who would plunder them and oppress them. When the people cried out to the Lord in their distress, He would raise up a judge who saved them from those who plundered them. After the judge died the people fell away again and the cycle continued (Judg 2:10–23).

The first two judges in the book of Judges are Othniel and Ehud (3:7–30). After the account of Ehud, we read,

After [Ehud] was Shamgar, the son of Anath. And he killed Philistines, six hundred men, with an oxgoad, and he also delivered Israel. And again the children of Israel did the evil thing in the eyes of Yahweh and Ehud died/was dead. And Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Caanan who reigned in Hazor. And the commander of his army was Sisera and he was dwelling in Harosheth of the nations/gentiles. And the children of Israel cried out to Yahweh because to him were nine hundred chariots of iron and he oppressed the children of Israel with strength/force for twenty years. And Deborah, a woman (אִשָּׁה), a prophetess (נְבִיאָה), the wife of Lapidoth (אִשְׁתּוֹ לַפִּירוֹת) — she (הִיא) was judging (שֹׁפֵטָה) Israel at that time (בְּעֵת הַהִיא). And she was sitting under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. And the children of Israel went up to her for judgment. And she sent and called to Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh of Naphtali. And she said to him, “Has not Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded, ‘Go and draw [an army] on

Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw to you Sisera, the commander of the army of Jabin, and his chariots and his multitude/army at the wady of Kishon. And I will give him into your hand.’?” And Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.”³ And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory because of the way which you are going about this,⁴ for into the hand of a woman Yahweh will sell Sisera.” And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And ten thousand men went up at his heels and Deborah went up with him. And Heber the Kenite was being separated from the Kenites, from the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses. And he pitched his tent as far as the terebinth tree in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh. And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. And Sisera called all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the nations/gentiles to the wady of Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, “Arise, for this is the day in which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand. Has not Yahweh gone out before you?” And Barak went down from Mount Tabor and ten thousand men behind him. And Yahweh confused Sisera and all the chariots and all the army [as they found themselves] before Barak at the end of the sword. And Sisera went down from his chariot and he fled by his feet. And Barak pursued after the chariots and after the army to Harosheth of the nations/gentiles. And all of the army of Sisera fell at the edge of the sword; not even one man was left. And Sisera fled by his feet to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera. And she said to him, “Indeed turn aside, my lord. Indeed turn aside to me. Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent. And she covered him with a rug. And he said to her, “Give me now a little water to drink, for I have been thirsty.” And she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. And he said to her, “Stand (עמד) at the entrance of the tent and let it be that if a man comes and asks you and says, ‘Is a man here,’ then you will say, ‘there is not.’” And Jael, the wife of Heber, took a peg of the tent and placed a hammer in her hand. And she went to him secretly and drove the peg into his temple and it went down into the ground. And he was being in heavy sleep and he was weary and he died.⁵ And behold Barak was pursuing Sisera and Jael went out to meet him. And she said to him, “Come and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” And he went in to her and behold Sisera was lying, being dead, and the peg was in his temple. And God humbled Jabin king of Canaan on that day before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel continually went against and was hard/severe upon Jabin king of Canaan until they cut off Jabin king of Canaan. (Judg 3:31–4:24)

Several things need to be pointed out with this account. First, we are told that when the Israelites “did the evil thing in the eyes of Yahweh,” then He “sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan.” After suffering under the oppression of Jabin for twenty years, the Israelites cry out to

³ The Septuagint adds at this point: “because I do not know the day in which the Lord prosperously sends the angel with me.” Such an addition makes Barak look better but doesn’t line up with the shaming sense that Deborah points to.

⁴ Or “Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory upon the way which you are going.” With either translation, it is clear that Barak will not have glory because of his demand for Deborah to come with him.

⁵ In the Septuagint, Codex Alexandrinus has “And he struggled/convulsed between her knees and lost his strength and died,” while Codex Vaticanus has “And losing consciousness he became dizzy and died.”

God. We then learn that “at that time” Deborah was judging Israel. In other words, Deborah is already judging the Israelites when they cry out to God. The implication is that even before they cry out to God, during the time of Israel’s unfaithfulness, Deborah is judging. Therefore, Deborah, in her role of settling disputes, is not God’s answer to the cry of the Israelites. Furthermore, Deborah is judging at a time when Israel is being unfaithful to God. We are not told who set her up as this type of judge. It seems likely that while Jabin was oppressing the Israelites, many men may have been or were sought after to become slaves to him. Such a situation probably caused the men who should have been judges to fear for themselves and abandon any role that may have been perceived as a threat to Jabin. It is in such an environment that we learn that Deborah is settling disputes, likely because the men were not filling their roles.

That judging was the sphere of men is seen from Exodus 18:13–26 and Deuteronomy 1:9–18, 16:18–20, and 17:8–13, where masculine forms are used for the ones judging, for example, אֲנָשֵׁי־חַיִל “men of ability” (Exod 18:21; LXX: ἄνδρας δυνατούς), אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת “men of faithfulness” (Exod 18:21; LXX: ἄνδρας δικαίους), שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים etc. “rulers of thousands” (Exod 18:21; LXX: χιλιάρχους), אֲנָשִׁים “men” (Deut 1:13, 15; LXX: ἄνδρας), שֹׁפְטִים “ones judging” (Deut 16:18; LXX: κριτὰς), שֹׁפְטֵי “officials” (Deut 16:18; LXX: γραμματοεισαγωγεῖς), and הַשֹּׁפֵט “the one judging” (Deut 17:9, 12; LXX: τὸν κριτήν, τοῦ κριτοῦ). This fact is supported by the way that Deborah is introduced. She is not introduced in this way: “Deborah, a prophetess . . . was judging Israel at that time.” Rather she is introduced thus: “Deborah, a woman, a prophetess . . . was judging Israel at that time.” The first word after her name is the word that is being emphasized. Since the fact that Deborah is a prophetess already shows that she is female, to say that she was a woman is not necessary for establishing her gender. Also, the feminine form for “prophetess” (נְבִיאָה) was already familiar from the account of Miriam in Exodus 15, where the word “woman” does not follow Miriam’s name. Rather, Miriam is introduced as “Miriam, the prophetess (הַנְּבִיאָה), the sister of Aaron” (Exod 15:20). Therefore, with the use of his wording and word order, we can see that the author of Judges is putting the focus on Deborah’s gender by using an otherwise redundant description of her being a woman. It must be noted that while the Hebrew and Septuagint both include the word “woman” after the word “Deborah,” few of the modern translations of the Bible do the same.⁶

⁶ Translations that do not include the word are KJV, RSV (1946/1971), NIV (1984), ESV (2001), and NASB (1977). William F. Beck, *The Holy Bible: An American Translation* (New Haven, Missouri: Leader Publishing, 1976), at least may acknowledge the presence of the word, translating the verse as “Now Deborah, a woman prophet, Lappidoth’s wife, was the judge in Israel at that time.” Such a translation falls short of the Hebrew original, however, which has the word “woman” (אִשָּׁה) followed by the feminine word “prophetess” (נְבִיאָה), not by the masculine word “prophet” (נְבִיא). As was mentioned, this feminine form “prophetess” was already familiar from the account of Miriam in Exodus 15, where the word “woman” does not follow Miriam’s name. Instead, Miriam is introduced as “Miriam, the prophetess (הַנְּבִיאָה), the sister of Aaron” (Exod 15:20). The only modern translation of Judges that I have come across that is close to the Hebrew original is *Τὰ Ἱερὰ Γράμματα: Μεταφρασθέντα ἐκ τῶν Θείων Ἀρχετύπων ὑπο τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Νεοφύτου Βάμβρα* (1851; repr., Αθήνα [Athens]: Ἑλληνικὴ Βιβλικὴ Ἐταιρεία), which has “Καὶ ἡ Δεβόρρα, γυνὴ προφήτις, γυνὴ τοῦ Λαφιδῶθ, αὕτη ἔκρινε τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐκέλευον.” While this version has the right words, it still is lacking in that there should be a comma between γυνὴ and προφήτις to bring out the emphasis of the author of Judges — an emphasis which is also supported by the rest of the

The presence of the word “woman” right after the word “Deborah” also argues against certain interpretations that view the word “Lapidoth” as signifying something other than the husband of Deborah. If “Lapidoth” were to be taken as a town or as meaning “torches,” suggesting that Deborah was a “woman of the town of Lapidoth” or a “woman of torches” (i.e., that she was a fiery woman, that she made wicks for the candles that were used in the tabernacle, or some other such interpretation), it is unlikely that the word “woman” would occur twice in the sentence introducing Deborah. Otherwise we would have: “And Deborah, a woman (אִשָּׁה), a prophetess (נְבִיאָה), a woman of Lapidoth (אִשָּׁת לַפִּירוֹת) — she (הִיא) was judging (שֹׁפֵטָה) Israel at that time (בְּעֵת הַהִיא)” or “And Deborah, a woman (אִשָּׁה), a prophetess (נְבִיאָה), a woman of torches (אִשָּׁת לַפִּירוֹת) — she (הִיא) was judging (שֹׁפֵטָה) Israel at that time (בְּעֵת הַהִיא).” Also arguing against such interpretations is the fact that in the Old Testament, the standard introductory formula for a prophetess is to give the name, followed by the fact that she is a prophetess, followed by her relation to a man. Thus we have “Miriam, the prophetess (הַנְּבִיאָה), the sister of Aaron (אָחֻיֶּהוּן)” in Exodus 15:20 and “Huldah, the prophetess (הַנְּבִיאָה), the wife of Shallum (אִשָּׁת שָׁלֹּם)” in 1 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22. Furthermore, this introductory formula not only suggests that Lapidoth is Deborah’s husband, it also shows that the insertion of the word “woman” after Deborah’s name is a departure from this formula for the sake of emphasis, drawing the attention of the hearer/reader to the word.

The author of Judges emphasizes that a woman is judging Israel in order to shame the men and point to their unfaithfulness. This theme of shame is seen elsewhere as well. When Deborah tells Barak that God has given Sisera into his hands, Barak responds by saying that he will only go and fight if Deborah accompanies him. Deborah then replies by saying, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory because of the way which you are

context of the account of Deborah, as will be seen. Other places where the Hebrew word for “woman” (אִשָּׁה) is followed by a feminine noun are Judges 19:1, 27; 2 Samuel 14:5; 15:16; 20:3; and 1 Kings 11:26; 17:9, 10. In Judges 19:1 and 27, the noun that follows in the singular, while feminine in gender, is not obviously masculine in form (פִּילְגֶשֶׁת and פִּילְגֶשֶׁת). However, in the former occurrence it can be seen as indicating what kind of wife the man had taken to himself. In the latter occurrence, the phrase “the woman” (הָאִשָּׁה) precedes the word and is used for emphasis. In 2 Samuel 15:16 and 20:3, this same noun follows in the plural, and while feminine in gender, is masculine in form (פִּלְגֶשֶׁתִּים). In both of these instances, the noun is descriptive as to who the women were that David left to care for the house. Also, the word for “women” (נָשִׁים) can be seen in both of these passages as being emphatic, namely, emphasizing that David only left women, and no men, in the house. In 2 Samuel 14:5 and 1 Kings 11:26; 17:9, 10, the word for “woman” (אִשָּׁה) precedes the word for “widow” (אַלְמָנָה) and can be seen as having an emphatic sense. In the first passage, a woman pleading before the king points to her vulnerable position in being both a woman and a widow. The second passage is similar, in that Zeruah, after we are told that she is the mother of Jeroboam, is referred to as both a woman and a widow. This points to her vulnerability. The author of 1 Kings may bring this point out to indicate that her vulnerable situation was one factor which moved Solomon to show compassion in employing Jeroboam as his servant, a fact that would help explain all the more Solomon’s desire to kill him (11:40) when Jeroboam “lifted up his hand against the king.” Another possibility is that the author of 1 Kings, in showing the vulnerability of this woman, gives some insight regarding why the young man Jeroboam was so ambitious (11:28). In 1 Kings 17:9, the emphasis is first on the fact that Elijah is to stay with a woman and then on the fact that she is a widow. In the following verse, the emphasis is on the fact that, when Elijah arrives at the gate of the city, there he first sees a woman, who he discovers is also a widow.

going about this,⁷ for into the hand of a woman Yahweh will sell Sisera.” With her words Deborah recognizes several shameful things. First, Barak exhibits shameful behavior for a man in not agreeing to fight unless Deborah, a woman, accompanies him. He also shows that he is wary of taking the leadership role by himself, something that as a man he should have done. In addition, he exhibits shameful behavior in revealing a weak faith, believing that God would only be with him if Deborah was with him. Furthermore, because Barak acts shamefully, Deborah indicates that God would shame him in giving Sisera into the hand of a woman instead of into his hand, the hand of a man. Now if Deborah was aware that Barak’s request exhibited shameful behavior for a man in that he only agreed to fight if she accompanied him, and if she was aware that God giving Sisera into the hand of a woman instead of into Barak’s hand was a shameful thing, then surely she was aware that the fact that she was settling disputes, doing a man’s job, also acted to shame men.

Another portion of the passage that we are looking at could have contributed to the sense of shame of the Israelites. We hear the mention of “Heber the Kenite” and “Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite.” Also, we are told that the Kenites are “from the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses.” While here Hobab is called the father-in-law of Moses, in Numbers 10:29 it seems that he is referred to as the brother-in-law of Moses. Perhaps Hobab is called the father-in-law of Moses because, after Moses’ father-in-law Jethro left the people of Israel (Exod 18:27), Hobab filled the role of the head of his family among the Israelites (see Num 10:29–33). At any rate, the mention of an in-law of Moses brings to mind Moses’ wife Zipporah, in that Hobab is her father figure or brother. As was mentioned, Zipporah may have been the Cushite wife that Miriam and Aaron had a problem with. If not, then it seems that when Zipporah died, Moses married another woman who was called a Cushite. Either way, the author of Judges, in drawing attention to Zipporah in mentioning Hobab, may be indirectly pulling up before his hearers/readers the account of Miriam and Aaron challenging Moses position in Numbers 12. If it was a shame for Miriam to seek to take over the position of a man, how shameful must it have been to find Deborah and Jael taking over the role of a man. While Miriam acted in defiance of men, it seems that Deborah and Jael act in the absence of men. Again, knowing that it was not God’s will for women to take over men’s roles, the whole account of Deborah and Jael, coupled with a possible allusion to Miriam’s rebellion, would work to shame men.

The passage we are considering begins with “After [Ehud] was Shamgar, the son of Anath.” Elsewhere in the book of Judges, this formula is used to show who a given judge’s successor was (see 10:1, 3; 12:8, 11, 13). One wonders why Shamgar, who was a contemporary of Deborah (see 5:6), was not acting as Israel’s judge. Perhaps in a time of weak faith, the people feared him. Perhaps he himself feared assuming the role of deciding disputes.

As was mentioned, Deborah is introduced as “Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth.” This introduction, as was also stated, is similar to Miriam’s, who is introduced as “Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron.” As Miriam did not receive direct revelation from

⁷ Or “Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory upon the way which you are going.” With either translation, it is clear that Barak will not have glory because of his demand for Deborah to come with him.

God, but relayed the revelation of God given to her by the prophet Moses, so it may be that Deborah is called prophetess, not because she receives direct revelation from God, but because she relays the revelation given to her by a prophet. In line with this thought are the words of Deborah to Barak, when she says, “Has not Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded, . . . ?” Here Deborah appears to be relaying a message from God that had already been spoken and was known. It follows that if Deborah received a message that was already spoken by a prophet, it may also have been revealed to her by a prophet that, if Barak insisted that she come with him, Sisera would be given into the hand of a woman.

Also, when Barak is assembled with his army and Sisera comes to the wady of Kishon, we hear that Deborah says to Barak, “Arise, for this is the day in which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand. Has not Yahweh gone out before you?” In this case, again, Deborah appears to be stating something that is already known. It may simply be that Barak is failing to recognize the obvious and needs Deborah to light the fire under him to get him going. For God already had told Barak, “Go and draw [an army] on Mount Tabor and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw to you Sisera, the commander of the army of Jabin, and his chariots and his multitude/army at the wady of Kishon. And I will give him into your hand.” The sense of the Hebrew here suggests that once Barak assembles his army on Mount Tabor, and when God draws Sisera and his chariots and army to the wady of Kishon, that then God will give Sisera into Barak’s hand.

While it is possible that Deborah received direct revelation from God, the words of Judges 4 do not say this. Neither do they indicate that Deborah received revelation from God via a dream or vision. We saw that Miriam is introduced as the sister of Aaron. We also know that she was the sister of Moses the prophet. As we will see, Huldah is the wife of a priest and likely had connections with prophets. We know that Isaiah’s wife was married to a prophet. Given that these other Old Testament prophetesses had connections with a prophet, it may be quite likely that Lapidoth is a priest who either has associations with prophets or is himself a prophet. That Deborah judges suggests that she has a knowledge of the Law and we know that there was a close connection between the priests and judges (see Deut 17:8–13). If Deborah’s husband was a priest, she would likely have a good acquaintance with the Law. If her husband was a priest, where was he and why wasn’t he judging instead of his wife? Could he be dead? Could he have been captured by Sisera? Was he in hiding? Did he experience a period of unfaithfulness? Of course we are given no specific answers as to just who and where Lapidoth was, although the connections of the other prophetesses with priests and prophets is suggestive.

Another thing that we notice about Deborah is that she does not go out to the people proclaiming God’s word as a prophet would. Also, she calls Barak to herself and in a sense takes him aside.

Following the account of Judges chapter 4, we learn that Deborah and Barak sing a song:

And Deborah sang (שָׁרָה) and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, “Because leaders acted as leaders in Israel, because people volunteered, bless Yahweh. Hear, O Kings. Give ear, O rulers. I to Yahweh, I, I will sing. I will make melody to Yahweh, the God of Israel. Yahweh, when you went

forth from Seir, when you marched from the territory of Edom, the earth shook, also the heavens dropped, even dark clouds dropped water. Mountains shook before the presence of Yahweh, this Sinai before the presence of Yahweh, the God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, caravans/highways ceased, and the ones going on paths went on twisting paths. {Those dwelling in small villages/rural areas —|or|— leaders}⁸ ceased in Israel; they ceased until I, Deborah, arose, I, a mother, arose among Israel.⁹ He [i.e., Israel] was choosing new gods; at that time there was war in/at the gates.¹⁰ Was shield to be seen or spear among forty thousand in Israel? My heart is with the ones who are commanding Israel, the ones who are volunteering among the people. Bless Yahweh. The ones who are riding tawny donkeys, the ones who are sitting upon cloth garments, the ones who are going upon the way, speak. From the sound of the ones who are dividing up [the spoils] among the places where water is drawn, there they recount the righteous acts of Yahweh, the righteous acts of {those dwelling in small villages/rural areas —|or|— leaders}¹¹ in Israel. At that time the people of Yahweh went down to the gates. Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, Deborah; rouse yourself, rouse yourself; utter a song. Arise, Barak, and take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam. At that time the survivor/remnant went down to noble ones; the people of Yahweh went down for me against the mighty ones. From Ephraim, their root in Amalek; behind you Benjamin with your people; from Machir went down the ones who were commanding and from Zebulun the ones drawing [the army] with a staff of an officer/scribe. And the commanders in Issachar were with Deborah, and Issachar thus was with Barak. He [i.e., Issachar] was sent into the valley at his [i.e., Barak's] heels. Among the clans of Reuben were great searchings of heart. Why did you stay among the campfires/sheepfolds to hear the whistlings for the flocks? With regard to the clans of Reuben were great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed in the region beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why was he abiding with ships? Asher remained at the coast of seas and by his landing places he was staying. Zebulun as a people gave no regard for his life, [being ready] to die, and also Naphtali upon the heights of the field. Kings came; they engaged themselves in battle; at that time the kings of Canaan engaged themselves in battle at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; a plunder of silver they did not take. From the heavens the stars engaged themselves in battle; from their courses they engaged themselves in battle against Sisera. The wady of Kishon swept them away, the wady of former times, the wady Kishon; O my soul, you were marching forth with strength. At that time horse hoofs beat [upon the ground] due to rushing, the rushing of his mighty ones. Curse Meroz, said the angel of the

⁸ The meaning of the Hebrew word here (פְּרָזִים) is uncertain. It could be related to the Hebrew word that means “open area” or “small village” (פְּרָזָה). A second possibility is that it comes from the plural of another Hebrew word (פְּרָזִים or פְּרָזָה), which in the Septuagint is translated as *δυναστών* in Habakkuk 3:14 (for פְּרָזִים) and as *δυνατοὶ* in our Judges passage in Codex Vaticanus (where Codex Alexandrinus simply gives the transliterated word of *φραζων*). These Greek translations suggest that the Hebrew word in plural could mean “leaders” or “rulers.”

⁹ In the Septuagint, Codex Vaticanus has “until she, Deborah, arose, until she, a mother, arose among Israel”: *ἕως οὗ ἀναστῆ Δεββωρα, ἕως οὗ ἀναστῆ μήτηρ ἐν Ἰσραηλ*. Codex Alexandrinus gives the sense of “until Deborah arose, because a mother arose among Israel” or “until Deborah arose, because she arose as a mother among Israel” or “until Deborah arose, because she, a mother, arose among Israel”: *ἕως οὗ ἐξανέστη Δεββωρα, ὅτι ἀνέστη μήτηρ ἐν τῷ Ἰσραηλ*.

¹⁰ Codex Alexandrinus of the Septuagint translates this as “They chose new gods like barley bread”: *ἠρέτισαν θεοὺς καινοὺς ὡς ἄρτον κρίθινον*; translating *לָחַם* as *לָחֶם* and *שַׁעֲרֵי* as *שַׁעֲרֵי*. Codex Vaticanus translates this as “They chose new gods; then they [i.e., the enemies of Israel (implied)] made war upon cities of rulers”: *ἐξελέξαντο θεοὺς καινοὺς· τότε ἐπολέμησαν πόλεις ἀρχόντων*; translating *רָיִים* as “cities,” which, by implication, would have their own rulers.

¹¹ See footnote 8.

Yahweh, curse intensely the ones dwelling in it, because they did not come to the assistance of Yahweh, to the assistance of Yahweh against the mighty ones. Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, is being blessed in relation to women; in relation to the women in the tents she is being blessed. Water he asked for, milk she gave [him]; in a bowl of majestic ones she brought [him] curds. She stretched out her hand to the peg and her right hand to the hammer of the laborers (עַמְלִיִּים); and she was striking Sisera, she destroyed his head; and she was shattering and she was piercing his temple. At her feet he bowed down/sank, he fell, he lay; at her feet he bowed down/sank, he fell; in the place in which he bowed down/sank, there he fell, being violently destroyed. Out through the window she looked and the mother of Sisera cried out shrilly through the lattice, ‘Why has his chariot delayed in coming? Why have the hoofbeats of his chariots tarried?’ The wise ones of her noble ladies were responding, (— nevertheless she, she was repeating her words to herself —), ‘Are they not finding [and] distributing spoil? — a womb, two wombs for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials of an embroidered thing; dyed material of two embroidered things for necks carrying spoil?’ So will perish all of your enemies, O Yahweh, and the ones who are loving Him [will be] as the going forth of the sun in its strength.” And the land had rest for forty years. (Judg 5:1–31)

We recall that when Barak insisted that Deborah go along with him, she stated, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory because of the way which you are going about this,¹² for into the hand of a woman Yahweh will sell Sisera.” We have seen that Deborah’s words are fulfilled in that the glory or credit for killing Sisera was taken away from Barak and given to Jael, who drove the tent peg into Sisera’s temple. This turn of events came about to bring shame upon Barak. The shaming of Barak, however, does not end there. It continues in some sense in the song before us, where the glory is not really Barak’s.

The author of Judges says, “And Deborah sang (וַתִּשֶׁר) and Barak.” Here Deborah’s name is listed before Barak, where the emphasis seems to be on Deborah as the one leading the song. This comes through as well in all the first person references of the song, which refer to Deborah. Also, in each of the other two places where Barak’s name is mentioned in the song, Deborah’s name comes first, then Barak’s: “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, Deborah; rouse yourself, rouse yourself; utter a song. Arise, Barak, and take captive your captives” and “And the commanders in Issachar were with Deborah, and Issachar thus was with Barak.” Thus it is seen that because of his behavior in not taking the leadership role upon himself and without Deborah’s accompaniment, Deborah gets more glory than Barak. Nowhere in the song is this more evident than in the one place where Deborah’s name appears and is not followed by Barak’s: “{Those dwelling in small villages/rural areas —or— leaders} ceased in Israel; they ceased until I, Deborah, arose, I, a mother, arose among Israel.” In this verse of the song, Deborah essentially gets the credit for the defeat of Sisera and the restoration of peace in Israel. Here in this verse, Barak’s name would have replaced Deborah’s, even as Deborah’s name would have been absent from, rather than preceding his name in, the other portions of the song, if Barak had assumed his leadership role as God intended. The shaming of Barak continues in the concluding portion of

¹² Or “Nevertheless, it will not be to your glory upon the way which you are going.” With either translation, it is clear that Barak will not have glory because of his demand for Deborah to come with him.

the song, where the focus is on Jael, rather than Barak, as the one getting the credit for violently destroying Sisera, the enemy of Israel.

Other aspects of the song stand out in emphasizing Barak's shame. We are told that Israel remained oppressed until Deborah, "a mother," rose up. While the introduction of "Deborah, a woman, . . . was judging" in chapter 4 was used to emphasize the fact that a woman was doing a man's job in judging, here the statement of "Deborah, . . . a mother, arose" can be seen as emphasizing that a woman was doing a man's job in going with the army. Again, this would show how out of place things were, where a woman whose sphere of influence was the home, had to do what the men would not. Also, the song makes a point of mentioning the fact that Jael killed Sisera with "the hammer of the laborers (עַמְלִים)." Here the hammer is described as that which is used by male laborers — laborers being masculine in form. So we see that Jael is also portrayed as doing a man's job, not only in killing Sisera, but in the instrument that she uses to do it. The fact that Jael is fulfilling a man's role may also be seen in the previous chapter, where Sisera says to her, "Stand (עֲמֹד) at the entrance of the tent" (4:20). The imperative that Sisera directs to Jael here is masculine, rather than feminine in form.

At the end of the song, the shaming of Barak, and the rest of the Israelite men for that matter, is once more brought out to the hearers of the song. For we learn of a situation that had been going on in Israel for twenty years, when Sisera's mother and her noble ladies describe the custom of their army, saying, "Are they not finding [and] distributing spoil? — a womb, two wombs for every man." Here the rape and exploitation of conquered women by Sisera and his army is spoken of as common practice. Through their unfaithfulness to God and their hesitancy to take action, Barak and the other men had failed live up to their roles of protecting and defending their woman.

Some points that were previously made find further support in the song under consideration. We are told that instead of there being caravans or highways in the days of Israel's unfaithfulness, travelers, apparently in small numbers, went on winding and out of the way paths, most likely to stay out of sight and remain safe from attacks by Sisera and his army. Also, we learn that "those dwelling in small villages/rural areas —|or|— leaders" ceased in those days. Either way the translation is taken here, the idea that people were in hiding and were laying low is clear. We also know that because Israel chose "new gods," "there was war in/at the gates," again verifying the threat of Sisera killing and/or capturing men, providing incentive for men to stay out of leadership roles that could be perceived as a threat to Jabin king of Caanan.

One verse of the song says, "Curse (אָרוּר) Meroz, said the angel of the Yahweh, curse (אָרוּר) intensely the ones dwelling in it, because they did not come to the assistance of Yahweh, to the assistance of Yahweh against the mighty ones" (5:23). This verse suggests that either Deborah or Barak or perhaps both have encountered and heard the angel of the Yahweh speak. The use of the masculine plural imperatives for the verb translated as "curse" may indicate that the angel is speaking to Barak and Deborah, telling them to include the curse against Meroz in the song. In the second chapter of Judges, the angel of Yahweh speaks to all the children of Israel (2:1–4). In the six chapter of Judges, he speaks to Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson

(6:11–22; 13:2–24).¹³ Receiving a message from the angel of the Lord did not mean that the children of Israel or the parents of Samson were placed into the office of prophets. Neither did receiving a message from the angel of the Lord place Hagar, the mother of Ishmael by Abraham, into the office of a prophet (Gen 21:17-18). In the same way, on the day of Christ’s resurrection, the receiving of a message to speak to others from an angel of the Lord, and even from Jesus Himself, did not place Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Matt 28:5-10; Mark 16:6-7; John 20:17) into the office of a prophet. The same can be said of Deborah, if, in fact, she received a message from the angel of the Lord regarding the cursing of Meroz.

As we have seen in the case of Jael, she is doing a man’s job in killing Sisera, a job that would have belonged to Barak if he had not acted as he did. One thing we notice about this is that in order for Jael to do a man’s job, she has to sin in deceiving Sisera, promising him safety while intending him harm, i.e., she lied (cp. Prov 12:22). Her nature was not capable of otherwise killing this fierce leader of Jabin’s army. Jael is “being blessed in relation to women; in relation to the women in the tents” because she bears the honor of killing the ruthless enemy of Israel, not because she acted deceitfully. Here it seems there is a lesson to be learned from this narrative. When men sin by not fulfilling their role, they become the cause, to some degree, of women sinning by taking over a man’s role.

This brings us to the consideration of Deborah in her role of judging disputes for the people of Israel. Did she sin by taking this role? It is possible that God did not tell her to take this role, but that due to the lack of male leadership she felt compelled to help her people, or her people compelled her to act in this regard. Faced with the sin of fulfilling the man’s role or seeing her people suffer, she may have chosen the latter. The fact that the first words of the song Deborah sings say, “Because leaders acted as leaders in Israel, because people volunteered, bless Yahweh” seems to suggest that she is relieved to see the men finally step up to the plate. In this case, that God used Deborah to relay His message to Barak would not be an approval of her act of judging, anymore than God allowing Jael to kill Sisera was an approval of her act of lying. In the book of Judges, one theme is clear, namely, God works through sinners to accomplish His purposes. Gideon is given to idolatry (8:22–28). Jephthah appears to have sacrificed his only daughter as a burnt offering (11:29–40). Samson is a moral mess, marrying a foreign woman, abandoning her, then trying to reclaim her after she remarries (14:1–15:6); violating the ceremonial law in eating something that touched a dead thing (14:8–9); joining himself to a prostitute (16:1); and loving the Philistine Delilah more than God (16:4–21). Given the track record of these other judges, there is no compelling reason to assume that Deborah is without fault in all that she does. The statement of CTCR 1985 that “the example of Deborah shows a woman raised up by God to govern and to deliver His people” (p. 6) assumes a lot. It is not at all clear that God raised up Deborah to govern His people. It is not at all clear that God raised up Deborah to deliver His people, although in the end He did use her to play a role in that. In the

¹³ In the book of Judges, the angel of Yahweh also speaks to Gideon (Judg 6:11-22). However, after the angel vanishes from Gideon’s sight (6:21), we see that God still speaks to Gideon two more times (6:22-26), the latter of which occurs at night and is likely in a dream (6:25-26).

song Deborah speaks of rising up (5:7), but here an active verb form is used, not a passive form with God as the subject.

If, however, for some reason God told Deborah to act in a man's role by judging disputes, this would not constitute an endorsement of women ruling over men. Rather, it would be one instance of God acting apart from what He has established in order to teach a lesson and shame men. If God wanted women to rule over men, then we should expect that especially in a theocracy that He has established, He would give more than one case where this is so. Being countercultural is not something that God is afraid of, and if He really approved of a woman being in a ruling role, we should expect to see not only more examples, but even a specific decree in the Law endorsing such a thing. However Deborah is the only case of an Israelite woman ruling over a man in the Old Testament (not including the illegitimate reign of Athaliah in 1 Kgs 11 and 2 Chr 22:10–23:21). Because God once allowed a donkey to speak to Balaam to show him his sin and restrain his madness (Num 22:22–35; 2 Pet 2:15–16), does that mean that we should now rely on our pets to speak to us and keep us on the right path? Because God once may have had Samuel, after he died, appear to a woman who consulted the dead (1 Sam 28:3–25), does that mean that Christians should consult the dead expecting to receive messages from God? In the same way, if, that is if, God once allowed a woman to judge men to make a point about the low state of the faithfulness of men, neither should we assume that this is an act to be repeated. In this case, the statement of CTCR 1985 that “the example of Deborah shows a woman raised up by God to govern . . . His people” (p. 6) needs much further qualification in order to avoid being misleading.

Further support that a woman judging was not God's ultimate will is evidenced elsewhere. In Deuteronomy 16:18, God commands the Israelites to appoint judges in all of their towns. As was noted previously, the Hebrew word for “judges” here is a masculine plural participle (שֹׁפְטִים). Also, the judges were to be appointed in every town, suggesting that they were to carry out their judgment in each town in which they were appointed. With Deborah, however, we know that she was not judging in a town. Rather, she settled disputes “under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim” (Judg 4:5). Another thing we see in this passage from Deuteronomy is that it was not God Himself, but the Israelites, who were responsible for appointing judges in the individual towns. If Deborah was a local judge as described here, then it was the people who appointed her. Given the fact that Deborah was already judging at the time when Israel was being unfaithful to God, it would not be surprising if they did not follow God's will in the appointment of a judge, choosing, for whatever reason, a woman instead of a man.

In Deuteronomy 17:9–12 another type of judge is spoken of. When a case was too difficult to decide by a local judge, the matter was to be brought to the place that God would choose for the tabernacle to be. There at the tabernacle, the Levitical priest and “the one who is judging (הַשֹּׁפֵט) in those days” were to decide the matter. Again, as previously mentioned, the Hebrew word for “the one who is judging” is a masculine singular participle. In addition, we see that this head judge was to be carrying out his act of judging at the tabernacle and with a priest.

In the case of Deborah, however, there is no mention that a priest is present with her as she settles disputes, although it is possible that she had some connection with a priest, as noted previously. Be that as it may, she is not carrying out her judgment at the tabernacle, which, from the time of Joshua to Samuel, was located some 10 miles north of Bethel at Shiloh (Josh 18:1; 1 Sam 1:3). From the description that “the children of Israel went up to her for judgment” (Judg 4:5), it seems that Deborah was fulfilling the role of a head judge of some sort, apparently in the absence of any local judges in towns or of a head judge at the sanctuary.

The situation availing at the time of Deborah is similar to what we find in the third chapter of Isaiah. There we learn that in a time of unfaithfulness, God was going to take away all kinds of support from Jerusalem and Judah, including judges (Isa 3:1–3). Here again, the Hebrew word for “judge” is a masculine singular participle (טַפְּשִׁים; LXX: δικαστήν), apparently being used in a collective sense (3:2). We are also told that God was going to “set youths as their officials and caprice will rule over them” (3:4). During this time the people will be desperate for a ruler to solve the nation’s ills, yet none will be found (3:6–7). Then God says, “With respect to my people, the ones oppressing them are acting as children;¹⁴ and women¹⁵ rule over them. Oh, my people, the ones who are leading you (מְאַשְׁרִיךְ) are causing you to err and are swallowing up the way of your paths [which you should follow]” (3:12). Here we see that it is not a good thing for youths (3:4) or those who act as children to rule over God’s people, where the focus is on the lack of experience or maturity (see the example of 1 Kgs 12:1–24). We also see that it is not a good thing for women to rule over the people. Such rule could refer to the direct rule of women over men, such as in the case of Deborah or Athaliah, or to women who rule through men by the power of influence or persuasion, such as in the case of Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:1–16). Since at the time of Isaiah there is no Biblical example of a woman acting in the former capacity, the latter situation may be what is being addressed. Either way, however, the focus would be on the improper role of the woman in moving into the man’s sphere of ruling. While the statement of “the ones who are leading you are causing you to err and are swallowing up the way of your paths [which you should follow]” could refer back to the first part of the verse, namely, to the oppressors who are acting as children and the women who are ruling, it may refer to the men (מְאַשְׁרִיךְ is a masculine participle) who are actually in the leadership roles and who are fostering the situation of following childish ways or advice and following the lead of women. Another thing we see is that in a time of unfaithfulness, God removes the judges from the land. This lends credence to the fact that Deborah, who is judging at a time of unfaithfulness, may very well not have been appointed by God in this capacity.

¹⁴ The Septuagint has “are gleaning (καλαμῶνται)” for “are acting as children.” Both are possible meanings for the underlying Hebrew word (לָקְטוּ).

¹⁵ The Septuagint has “the ones demanding (payment) (ἀπαιτοῦντες)” for “women.” The Hebrew of the Masoretic Text is מְאַשְׁרִיךְ, meaning “women.” The Septuagint appears to be reading the Hebrew as מְאַשְׁרִיךְ, namely, as a participle of the verb אָשַׁר, meaning “ones who are lending on interest.” However, the proper form of the participle for this verb would be מְאַשְׁרִיךְ, not מְאַשְׁרִיךְ (cp. Neh 5:7).

One final comment regarding the account of Deborah and Barak should be made. In Hebrews chapter 11, when people from the book of Judges are remembered for their faith, Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are the only ones who are mentioned (Heb 11:32–34). It is surprising, given the fact that Judges chapters 4 and 5 give Deborah the pride of place when compared to Barak, that Deborah is not mentioned rather than Barak, or at least with him. While the fact that Barak is a sinner is clear from the account in Judges, that Deborah is also a sinner is not made explicit. Perhaps the absence of Deborah’s name in Hebrews is meant to lead the hearer/reader to draw such a conclusion. At any rate, the book of Hebrews, in not mentioning her name, gives no stamp of approval to Deborah’s act of judging.

Huldah

The account of Huldah is found in 2 Kings 22:14–20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22–28. The setting is the reign of Josiah the king of Judah. Now Josiah was preceded by Manasseh, his grandfather, who reigned in Judah for 55 years and by Amon, his father, who reigned for 2 years. 2 Kings indicates that both Manasseh and Amon did evil in the eyes of the LORD, being given to idolatry, following the detestable practices of the nations who lived in the land before the Israelites, and leading the people of Judah to do the same (2 Kgs 22:2–17; 22:20–22). 2 Chronicles concurs with this account but gives the added information that after a time, Manasseh, perhaps toward the end of his reign, humbled himself and repented of his sins (2 Chr 33:2–19, 22–23). Yet even with Manasseh’s attempt to reform himself and Judah, we learn that the people, contrary to God’s will, still offered sacrifices to Him at the high places. Moreover, because of the wicked things that Manasseh did and led the people of Judah to do, God announced that Judah and its inhabitants would be wiped out and the remnant taken from the land (2 Kgs 21:9–16).

After the unsuccessful attempt of Manasseh to get the people to follow the Lord, and after two years of Amon leading himself and the people in again following after the ways of idolatry and unfaithfulness to the Lord, the reign of Josiah begins. Josiah became king when he was eight years old (2 Kgs 22:1; 2 Chr 34:1). In the eighth year of his reign as king, “he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Chr 34:3). In the twelfth year of his reign, he began to carry out reforms throughout the land of Judah and Israel, getting rid of idolatrous practices and the high places (2 Chr 34:4–7).

During the reign of Josiah, the prophet Zephaniah calls the people of Judah to repentance and pronounces judgment and wrath upon those who are idolaters (Zeph 1:1, 4–18; 2:1–3; 3:1–8). He says regarding Jerusalem, “Her prophets are being reckless, men of treachery; her priests have profaned that which is sacred, they have treated the law violently” (3:4; cp. Jer 14:14; 23:25–34; Mic 2:11; 3:5). The prophet Jeremiah, who begins his prophetic ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (Jer 1:2), also calls out against the unfaithfulness of the people of Judah (2:1–2, 26–28; 3:6–11). He says, “For as the number of your cities are [the number of]

your gods, O Judah” (2:28). Jeremiah was appointed by God to stand “against all the land — against the kings of Judah, against its officials, against its priests, and against the people of the land” (1:18). Relaying the message of God, he says regarding the religious leaders, “The priests have not said, ‘Where is Yahweh?’ and those who are handling the law have not known me. And the ones who are shepherding have transgressed against me and the prophets have prophesied by Baal and have gone after unprofitable things” (2:8). Similarly he says, “From the prophet to the priest, everyone is practicing falsehood” (6:13; see also 8:10). Other prophets who may have been around at the time Josiah reigned are Nahum and Habakkuk.

We reach the account of Huldah in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign. During this time, Josiah has his focus on the repairing of the temple (2 Kgs 22:3–7; 2 Chr 34:8–13). He sends Shaphan his secretary to Hilkiyah the high priest at the temple in order to make sure that the money brought into the temple is used for its repairs. At this time Hilkiyah informs Shaphan that he has found “the book of the Law of Yahweh [given] by the hand of Moses.” Hilkiyah then gives this book to Shaphan, who reads it himself and then takes it to the king and reads it before him. When the king hears the words of the book he tears his clothes. (2 Kgs 22:8–11; 2 Chr 34:14–19. Next we hear:

And the king ordered Hilkiyah the priest and Ahikam the son of Shaphan and Achbor the son of Micaiah and Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the servant of the king, saying, “Go, inquire of Yahweh on behalf of me and on behalf of the people and on behalf of all of Judah concerning the words of this book which was found, for great is the wrath of Yahweh which has been burning against us because our fathers have not given heed in connection with the words of this book to do according to all that is being written concerning us. (2 Kgs 22:12–13)

The account then continues as follows in 2 Kings:

And Hilkiyah the priest went (וַיֵּלֶךְ) and Ahikam and Achbor and Shaphan and Asaiah to Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, one who was keeping the wardrobe [lit. ‘the clothes’]. And she was dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second District. And they spoke to her. (2 Kgs 22:14)

This same account as given in 2 Chronicles is:

And Hilkiyah the priest went (וַיֵּלֶךְ), and those to whom the king [spoke], to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, one who was keeping the wardrobe [lit. ‘the clothes’]. And she was dwelling in Jerusalem in the Second District. And they spoke to her according to this [matter]. (2 Chr 34:22)

Apart from the fact that the descendants of Shallum have names that can be spelled in more than one way, a few points are worth noting from the above passages. First, when the king orders the men to go and inquire of the Lord, we are told that he speaks first to Hilkiyah. That Hilkiyah is the

leader of this inquiring party is then shown by the words “And Hilkiyah the priest went (וַיֵּלֶךְ) and” Now as a priest, we know that Hilkiyah may very well have been among those who Jeremiah and Zephaniah spoke against for being unfaithful. This is supported by the fact that when Hilkiyah finds the book of the law, we are told that he passes it off to the king. Whether Hilkiyah and the other priests at that time had another copy of the law that they let fall into disuse, or whether they were without any written copy of the law until they found the book in the temple, is not told to us. Either way, as the high priest, Hilkiyah, and not the king, would have borne the primary responsibility of teaching the law to the people, a thing that he and the other priests were guilty of not doing (see Lev 10:8–11 regarding the role of priests and Deut 17:14–20 regarding the role of the king). Hilkiyah’s leadership role in the things pertaining to God is, as was noted, also evidenced in the fact that he is the one who leads the group to go inquire of the Lord. Furthermore, we see that the king does not tell this group to go to Huldah. Rather, he says, “Go, inquire of Yahweh.” Therefore, all indications point to the idea that when the king tells the group of men to inquire of Yahweh, it is Hilkiyah who ultimately decides to carry out this command by going to Huldah rather than by going to Jeremiah or Zephaniah or another male prophet.

We are told that Huldah is the wife of Shallum, who is a keeper of the wardrobe. The wardrobe referred to here could either refer to the royal wardrobe of the king or to the wardrobe of the priests. Given the fact that the king would probably have spoken to Shallum himself if Shallum was the keeper of his wardrobe and Huldah his wife, it is more likely that Shallum was a priest and a keeper of the wardrobe of the priests. Other than his role, exactly who Shallum is remains unspecified in this account. Is he the Shallum who is the uncle of Jeremiah (see Jer 32:7–8)? Is he the Shallum who is the father of Hilkiyah (1 Chr 6:12–13 [Heb: 5:38–39]), making Huldah the mother or step-mother of Hilkiyah. Is Hilkiyah a priest of Anathoth and the father of Jeremiah (Jer 1:1), yet one who supported the men of Anathoth in seeking to kill Jeremiah if he continued to prophesy in the name of the Lord (Jer 11:21)? Does the king send so many witnesses with Hilkiyah because he does not trust him? Whatever the answer is to these questions, the fact is that Hilkiyah, a priest who was likely unfaithful to God in the past and who has become aware of God’s wrath against such unfaithfulness, decides to go to Huldah to inquire of the Lord. It may be that he thought he would receive a more sympathetic hearing with a woman — a woman who was connected with priests and perhaps even related to him in some way.

After Hilkiyah and his entourage come to Huldah, the account continues as follows:

And she said to them,

“Thus has said Yahweh, the God of Israel,

‘Say to the man who sent you (אִתְּכֶם) to me,

“Thus has said Yahweh,

‘Behold I will be bringing misery to this place and upon the ones inhabiting it, all the words of the book which the king of Judah read. In return for [the fact] that they forsook me and sent up the smoke of sacrifices to other gods in order to provoke me to anger with all

the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be burning against this place and will not be quenched.”

And to the king of Judah, the one who was sending you (אֲחִיקָם) to inquire of Yahweh, thus you will say to him,

“Thus has said Yahweh, the God of Israel,

‘With respect to the words which you heard, because your heart was tender and you were humbled before Yahweh when you heard that which I spoke against this place and against the ones inhabiting it, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and [because] you tore your clothes and wept before me, therefore also I have heard you,’

an utterance of Yahweh,

‘therefore behold I will be gathering you together with your fathers and you will be gathered to your grave in peace and your eyes will not look upon all the misery which I will be bringing upon this place.’”

And they brought back word to the king. (2 Kgs 22:15–20)¹⁶

Here we see that Huldah begins by saying, “Thus has said Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Say to the man who sent you to me, “Thus has said Yahweh,”” The “man who sent you to me” may refer to the king and “me” may refer to God. However, it may be that the “man who sent you to me” is Hilkiah, who directed the delegation to Huldah, and “me” may refer to Huldah. This is supported by the fact that when the king is referred to we hear, “And to the king of Judah, the one who was sending you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you will say to him, “Thus has said Yahweh, the God of Israel,”” With this understanding, the destruction that is going to come upon Jerusalem is directed to Hilkiah as the one who, as high priest, bears responsibility for the unfaithfulness of Judah, in that he and his predecessors failed to teach and carry out the law in accordance with their vocations. Then, the second part of the message is directed to the king of Judah as one who has repented and sought to follow God’s law in accordance with his vocation. Also, with this interpretation, we can see Hilkiah as being rebuked for bringing the delegation to Huldah rather than to one of the male prophets, a further sign that he is guilty of being unfaithful to God.

Putting aside the reasons that Hilkiah seeks out Huldah, the fact that he goes to Huldah expecting to receive a word from the Lord suggests that Huldah apparently had a reputation as a prophetess already. However, the statement of CTCR 1985 that “Huldah . . . was well-known . . . for her ability to speak for God. She told Josiah very clearly and specifically God’s message” (p. 6) is too facile. As was the case with Miriam and Deborah, there is no indication that God spoke to Huldah in a dream or vision as he would with a prophet. Also, we see that like Deborah, Huldah does not go out to men, but they come to her. In addition, as was the case with Miriam and likely also Deborah, Huldah has an association with priests and probably also with prophets.

¹⁶ For our purposes, the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 34:23–28 is essentially the same.

While it is possible that God gave direct revelation to Huldah, it is just as likely that Huldah received the words of the Lord from a prophet and then relayed those words. We have such an example earlier in 2 Kings, where Elisha gives directions to one of the “sons of the prophets” (i.e., a disciple of the prophets) to relay the word of the Lord (given to Elisha) to Jehu, the future king of Israel (2 Kgs 9:1–12). In 1 Kings we also have an example of God being aware of someone coming to inquire of the Lord, regarding which He gives information before the visit as to how the visit will go and what word of the Lord is to be relayed (1 Kgs 14:1–18). If Huldah was one who relayed messages from a prophet of the Lord, the question would be why such a method would be used. We saw that in the case of Miriam, she spoke to women the word of the Lord given to Moses when the women were segregated from the men, probably for safety reasons in being keep distant from the Egyptian forces. In the case of Deborah, she speaks a word that was apparently already known, but due to the unfaithfulness of men, was not being heeded. It may be that Huldah relays the words of a prophet because during the recent times of unfaithfulness, the male prophets were despised and persecuted by the people. Such a situation, like the case of Deborah, would work to shame the men.

Philip’s Daughters

In the second chapter of Acts, after the tongues of fire come upon the apostles and they speak in other languages about the magnificent things of God, Peter indicates that this incident is in accordance with what is spoken by the prophet Joel. Quoting the prophet, he says,

“And it will be in the last days,” says God, “I will pour out from My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy (προφητεύσουσιν), and your young men will see visions (ὄρασεις) and your old men will dream (ἐνυπνιασθήσονται) with dreams (ἐνυπνίοις). And indeed upon my male slaves and upon my female slaves in those days I will pour out from My Spirit and they will prophesy (προφητεύσουσιν).” (Acts 2:17–18)

While in the book of Acts we have instances of the apostles and other men prophesying (e.g., 2:4; 19:6; 11:27–28; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10) and we have instances of the apostles and other men seeing visions (9:10, 12; 10:1–7; 10–19; 30–32; 11:5; 22:17) and likely dreams (16:9–10; 18:9; maybe also 23:11 and 27:23–24),¹⁷ there is only one reference to women engaged in the activities that pertain to the prophecy of Joel. The account with this reference is as follows:

¹⁷ All of these visions or dreams are described as a “vision” (ὄραμα) or “trance” (ἔκστασις). The Greek word used for “vision” (ὄρασις) in Acts 2:17 only occurs in this sense elsewhere in the New Testament in Revelation 9:17, where it refers to the vision John is seeing. The Greek noun used for “dream” (ἐνύπνιον) only occurs in Acts 2:17 in the New Testament. The verb used for “dream” (ἐνυπνιάζομαι) only occurs elsewhere in the New Testament in Jude 8, with a somewhat different sense. Visions that occurred in the night are likely visions that were seen while sleeping, i.e., in dreams. Another Greek word for “dream” (ὄναρ) is used by Matthew for the dreams where the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph (Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19, likely also 22), where the Magi are warned not to return to Herod, and where Pilate’s wife suffers many things according to a dream on account of Jesus (27:19).

On the next day, after departing [from Ptolemais], we came to Caesarea. And after entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was being one of the seven, we stayed with him. And to this man (τούτῳ) were (ἦσαν) four virgin daughters who were given to prophesying (προφητεύουσαι). And while we were staying for more days, a certain prophet from Judea, Agabus by name, came down. And after coming to us and taking up/removing the belt of Paul, [and] after binding the feet and the hands of himself, he said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind **the man to whom this belt belongs** and will give [him] over into the hands of the Gentiles.’” And when we heard these things, we began urging, both we and the ones in that place, that he not go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “What are you doing by crying and breaking my heart? For I, I am being ready not only to be bound but (ἀλλὰ) also to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus.” And because he was not being persuaded, we became silent after saying, “Let the Lord’s will be done.” And after these days, after making preparations, we began to go up to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:8–15)

In this passage we hear about the four virgin daughters of Philip “who were given to prophesying.” What this prophesying consisted of is not specifically detailed. We do know that rather than using these daughters to prophesy of the future binding and handing over of Paul in Jerusalem, God instead sends the prophet Agabus from Judea to do this. This may suggest one of two things. First, given that the setting appears to be in a house and apart from an assembly, this situation may indicate that it is not proper for women to be carrying out this kind of prophesying to men, not only in an assembly, but also at other times. Such an understanding would be in line with the idea that Huldah rebuked Hilkiah for coming to her. The other possibility is that the prophesying of Philip’s daughters did not consist of revelations of future events, but rather consisted of speaking the Word of God that they heard from or were taught by their father.

This second possibility is supported by an alternate translation of 21:9 above. After indicating that Paul and his companions stayed at the house of Philip, the above translation renders the Greek as “And to this man (τούτῳ) were (ἦσαν) four virgin daughters who were given to prophesying (προφητεύουσαι).”¹⁸ However, this verse could be translated as “And **for/by this man** (τούτῳ) his four virgin daughters were (ἦσαν) given to prophesying (προφητεύουσαι).”¹⁹ This rendering, where “**for/by this man** (τούτῳ)” would then be seen as being placed at the beginning of the clause for emphasis, would indicate that Philip’s daughters prophesied by means of Philip, that is, by means of the words spoken by Philip, or that they prophesied for Philip. Given that Philip’s daughters were women, they most likely had access to places where Philip as a man could not be present, such as the women’s quarters in large households. It may be that Philip sent his daughters into such settings as an extension of his evangelistic work, since

¹⁸ This rendering finds support from passages with similar constructions, where a dative is used in conveying a relation of one person to another, e.g., Luke 1:5; 8:2; 10:39; Acts 7:21.

¹⁹ For some examples of the use of the dative for advantage/disadvantage or for means, see Luke 7:38; 11:30; 21:23; Acts 12:2, 6; 24:10; 26:18 (also 1 Cor 4:4; 6:13; 11:29; 2 Cor 1:11; 5:13; Gal 2:8). For the use of extended sandwiched periphrastic constructions, see Luke 2:33; 8:32; 18:34; 21:37; 23:53; Acts 3:10; 9:9; 11:5; 16:12. For other cases of τούτῳ being fronted to the beginning of the clause, see Acts 10:43; 15:15.

he couldn't reach these places. The fact that we are informed that his daughters were virgins tells us that they were not married. While such activity was carried out by them while unmarried, if or once married, their proper and God-pleasing role would have been in bearing and raising their children and keeping their house.

The account of the daughters of Philip gives no indication that they received revelations from God in dreams or visions as a prophet would. Nor do we have any indication that their prophesying was directed toward men.

The Women at Corinth

In 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul says, “And every woman who is praying or prophesying (προφητεύουσα) with her head uncovered is dishonoring her head.” Here Paul's words suggest that women do prophesy. However, in the 14th chapter of the same epistle, he makes it clear that women are not to prophesy in the assembly of Christians, where such prophesying includes speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, revelations from God, speaking a psalm [i.e., the written Word of God], and speaking or teaching correctly about God (14:1–6, 26–38). While Paul thus elaborates on how women are not to prophesy, he does not, in this passage or epistle, address specifically how they can or should properly engage in this activity, unless 14:15 is taken as a reference to corporate singing, which would then fit the category of prophesying as being correct speaking (albeit corporately) about God and something the women would have engaged in with the rest of the assembly.

As with the account of the daughters of Philip, so with the women at Corinth, no indication is given that these women received revelations from God in dreams or visions as a prophet would. Therefore, the statement of CTCR 1985 that “Acts 21:9 and 1 Cor. 11:5 specifically indicate that women functioned as prophets in the early church” (p. 10) is unsubstantiated. In support of this statement CTCR 1985 adds, “Prophesying is distinguished from preaching in Eph. 4:11. Preaching is a form of teaching, but the distinctive characteristic of prophecy is that it results from God having put His very words into the mouth of the one speaking (2 Pet. 1:21-22)” (p. 10). The interpretation of Ephesians 4:12 here is problematic. The passage does not speak of prophesying or preaching. Rather it states, “And He himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers,” that is, it doesn't discuss actions but the titles of men given as gifts to the church. Also, the passage from 2 Peter does not refer to “prophesying” but to a “prophecy of Scripture (προφητεία γραφῆς)” which “men spoke from God by being carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Prophesying, however, can be broader than this, referring also not just to receiving “a prophecy of Scripture,” but to correctly speaking about the truths contained in “a prophecy of Scripture” (1 Cor 14:3-6, 26-27, 29-32).

Part V – Concluding Thoughts

The preceding sections of this and the previous two essays have taken issue with various aspects of the approach and conclusions of the CTCR. A few more comments will be now be made. First, a few things need to be said regarding some general statements that we find in CTCR 1985 that have not yet been addressed.

CTCR 1985 states, “[Women] were also expected to take an independent part in bringing sacrifices and gifts before God. (Lev. 12:6; 15:29) (p. 6).” These passages from Leviticus point to sacrifices that pertained to issues specific to women. However, to say that they were to take an independent part in bringing these sacrifices before God is not true. The examples we have from the Scriptures show the husbands accompanying and being involved with their wives in these matters (Luke 2:22-24; 1 Sam 1:21-28).

According to CTCR 1985:

Women ministered at the door to the tent of meeting (Ex. 38:8), and while it is not clear what form this service took, it did play some part in the worship. Women also participated in the great choirs and processions of the temple (Ps. 68:25; 1 Chron. 25:5-7; Neh. 7:67). Although they were not permitted to serve as priests, this is never interpreted to mean that they were less than full members of the worshipping community. (p. 6)

Exodus 38:8 states, “And he [i.e., Bezalel] made the basin of bronze and its base of bronze with the mirrors of the women serving, who served at the door of the tent of meeting.” The verb for “serving” in this passage is *סָבַר*, which can mean “serve” or “wage war.”²⁰ The noun form of the verb, also *סָבַר*, can have the sense of “hard service.”²¹ The Septuagint translates this verse as, “This one [i.e., Bezalel] made the bronze basin and its bronze base from the mirrors of the women fasting, who fasted beside the doors of the tent of testimony” (LXX 38:26). Here the verb *סָבַר* is translated with *νηστεύω*, which means “to fast.” From this passage we can see that it is certainly not clear what form this service took and it is also certainly **not** clear that “it played some part in the worship.” Psalm 68:25 pertains to virgins playing tambourines in a processional that occurs outside of the temple and not as part of the temple worship. 1 Chronicles 25:5-7 merely states that Heman, whose fourteen sons played music under his direction in the temple, also had three daughters, further proof that God had exalted him. Nehemiah 7:67 finds its parallel in Ezra 2:65, which mentions men and women singers. According to Andrew Steinmann:

The . . . singers listed in Ezra 2:65 with the property are associated with the slaves (Ezra 2:64), and so they are distinct from the temple singers listed in Ezra 2:41. These other singers, who included women, must have provided entertainment for the wealthy. Apparently there were no women among

²⁰ BDB, 838, s.v. *סָבַר*.

²¹ BDB, 839, s.v. *סָבַר*, 3b. The use of the noun form in this sense is found in Job 7:1; 14:14; Isa 40:2; Dan 10:1.

the temple singers since the participle describing them in Ezra 2:41 is masculine and the temple singers appointed by David were men (e.g., 1 Chr 9:33; 15:16-19, 27).²²

These women singers mentioned in Nehemiah 7:67 and Ezra 2:65 did not participate in temple choirs.²³

CTCR 1985 states, “Significantly, Jesus does not say anything about women having a specific role in life. He issues no commands that apply to women only” (p. 9). This statement is essentially an argument from silence. The apparent silence of Jesus should be interpreted to mean rather that he accepts the then current patriarchal nature of things and the common roles of men and women at his time. I say apparent silence of Jesus because Jesus certainly speaks through the apostle Paul. And through the apostle Paul Jesus says that woman “will be saved through childbearing” (1 Tim 2:11-15). Through the apostle Paul Jesus commands younger widows to “keep bearing children, keep managing the home” (1 Tim 5:14). Jesus, through His Word spoken through His apostle, continues to depict the home as the main sphere of influence for the woman. To say that women didn’t have the opportunities then that they have now would not change this at all. Again, Jesus’ silence relative to the then current roles of women shows his approval of these roles. He wasn’t timid in speaking against the errors of his day. His lack of critique on the then current roles of men and women is, therefore, significant.

As we heard, CTCR 1985 states:

Priscilla is a woman who receives particular mention. . . . In Acts she is engaged with her husband, Aquila, in teaching the great orator Apollos. Priscilla must have been, therefore, well-educated in the teachings of the Christian faith and a most capable instructor. (p. 11-12)

The context of this passage from Acts reveals that Apollos “was speaking (ἐλάλει)” and “teaching (ἐδίδασκεν)” the things concerning Jesus “accurately (ἀκριβῶς),” although he was knowing only the baptism of John. Upon hearing him speaking boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside to themselves (προσελάβοντο)” and “laid out (ἐξέθεοντο)” to him the way of God “more accurately (ἀκριβέστερον)” (Acts 18:24-26). We can see from this passage that Apollos was a little off on a few things and Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and gave him more accurate information. We are not told who does most of the talking in this setting, Priscilla or Aquila. The teaching that Apollos was doing was public and repetitive. The correcting of Apollos by Priscilla and Aquila was a private, one time event. To say that Priscilla, or even Aquila for that matter, was “a most capable instructor” is obviously pushing an agenda. I know a layperson who one time heard his pastor say that only mankind was created from the ground. The layperson took the pastor aside and showed him in Genesis that land animals and birds were also created from the ground. Did this mean the layperson was “a most capable instructor?” No. To show a fellow Christian his error is not to assume the “position” of an “instructor.” It may

²² Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 176.

²³ For other examples of women singers who sang outside of the worship setting, see 2 Chr 35:25; 1 Sam 18:6-7.

also be the case that with Apollos, Priscilla joined her husband Aquila in order to fulfill the requirement that every matter be confirmed by two or three witnesses (John 8:17; 1 Tim 5:19).²⁴

Again, as we heard, CTCR 1985 states:

After Priscilla and Aquila, Paul greets still other women: Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, all of whom “worked hard” in the Lord ([Rom. 16:]12). Here Paul uses a term that commonly refers to the toil of proclaiming the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:26; Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:10). In Rom. 16:13, 15 he greets the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus. In Phil. 4:2-3 he mentions two other women—Euodia and Syntyche—who have labored beside him in the gospel. Although it is impossible to determine from Paul’s words what specific missionary tasks these women assumed, there is no doubt but that he often benefited from the cooperation of women in his apostolic labors and that women were no less fervent than men in spreading the gospel message. (p. 12)

None of the passages cited here indicate that the toil of the women involved proclaiming the Gospel. The term that Paul uses for “working hard” (κοπιᾶω) is also used in situations that do not pertain to proclaiming the Gospel (e.g., Luke 5:5; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor 4:12; Eph 4:28; 2 Tim 2:6). There is no reason to suppose that these women labored for the Gospel in any way that was different from the women who followed Jesus during His ministry and served Him and provided for His needs and those of the Twelve (Mark 15:41; Luke 8:3).

CTCR 1985 states, “[Women] . . . played a significant role in the life of the community, teaching men and women and caring for those in need (p. 12).” While it is true that women played a significant role in the life of the community, caring for those in need, the proof is lacking to show that the role of women in the life of the community involved teaching men in any official capacity.

In discussing the service of women in the early church, CTCR 1985 states,

Yet, within the church’s own communal life the general prohibition of Tertullian seems to have been commonplace: “It is not permitted to a woman to speak in Church. Neither may she teach, baptize, offer, nor claim for herself any function proper to a man, least of all the sacerdotal office” (De virg. vel. 9.1) (p. 16)

²⁴ The names of Aquila and Priscilla occur together 6 times in the New Testament. In these occurrences, Aquila is listed first in Acts 18:2 and 1 Cor 16:19 and Priscilla is listed first in Acts 18:18, 26, Rom 16:3, and 2 Tim 4:19. Priscilla may be listed first in Acts 18:18 due to grammatical reasons, namely, to keep Aquila’s name closest to the masculine participle κειράμενος in order to show that it is Aquila and not Paul who has his head shaved. In Acts 18:26 the Majority text has Aquila listed first, not Priscilla. Various theories have been proposed to account for the placement of Priscilla’s name first, such as Priscilla being more active or having a higher social standing or Paul extending Christian courtesy. If Priscilla joined Aquila in order to meet the requirement that every matter be confirmed by two or three witnesses, then the placement of her name first in this passage could be to show that a woman could serve as a witness in such a situation. However, in light of the fact that in this and the other passages we lack details which would inform the situations, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the ordering. Regarding some of the theories on the ordering, see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1992), 475.

The context of this passage of Tertullian is his discussion of the conduct of women in the church. The CTCR cites Tertullian here as if he supports the idea that the only thing forbidden to a woman is holding the “sacerdotal office” (p. 17). However, the truth is that Tertullian’s statement does not support this at all. Tertullian states that a woman cannot “claim for herself any function **proper to a man**, *least of all* the sacerdotal office.” Here we can see that Tertullian views the sacerdotal office as a subset of what is proper to man. His words, which ring of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, indicate that he views Paul’s words as forbidding to a woman what is proper to a man. What is proper to a man is a category that is broader than the sacerdotal office. In other words, Tertullian sees the words of Paul as pointing to a general principle of male-female relationships, a principle that also has specific application to the sacerdotal office. Such a position supports the findings of this essay which reveal that Paul’s directives for a woman not to speak in an assembly and for a woman not to teach or have authority over a man are general principles based on the order of Creation, applicable to male and female relationships in general, and pertaining to the pastoral office as a specific application of this general principle.

The CTCR’s limiting of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 to the pastoral office results in the applications that it makes relative to women reading the Scriptures in the worship service, as well as to the applications it makes relative to woman suffrage, women holding office in the congregation, women serving as acolytes or ushers, etc. These essays have shown that the CTCR is in error in its limiting of Paul’s words in these passages to the pastoral office. The result is that the applications that it makes based on this approach are subject to error as well. We have seen that this is so in the case of women reading Scripture in the worship service. The same can be said regarding woman suffrage.

There are several scenarios where it is clear that a woman voting would exercise authority over a man, despite all the verbiage that voting is a service not an act of authority. For instance, when 3 men vote one way, 3 men vote another way, and 1 woman votes and tips the scales. Or when 5 women vote one way and 2 men vote the other way. Yet take a situation where a man and woman vote the same way. In such a case the woman doesn’t exercise authority over the man. But here’s the problem: the man doesn’t exercise authority over the woman. And furthermore, the woman does not submit to the man. So even when a man and a woman vote the same way, the man is prevented from exercising authority over the woman and the woman is prevented from being submissive. When Paul says that a woman should not exercise authority over a man, the implication is that a man is to exercise authority over a woman. Where women are given equality of voting with men, the words of the apostle are thrown aside, no matter what voting scenario one envisions in the church. Of course for the CTCR, this is not a problem because it interprets Paul’s words regarding authority as only preventing a woman from holding the pastoral office. Again, here is where the CTCR is in error.

In 1968 the CTCR published “Woman Suffrage in the Church” (CTCR 1968). It provides two quotes of Dr. C. F. W. Walther relating to woman suffrage. The first is:

All the adult male members of the congregation are entitled to active participation in the transactions of such meetings by way of speaking, deliberating, voting, and resolving. But women and the young are excluded from such participation.

The CTCR notes that “Dr. Walther quotes 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as his authority for this observation.” The second quote from Walther that it provides is as follows:

All adult male members (that is, those who can vote in civic matters) ought to have the right to take active part in speaking, deliberating, voting, and passing of resolutions as these occur in the meetings of the congregation, since this right appertains to the whole congregation. Compare Matt. 18:17-18; Acts 1:15, 23-26; 15:5, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Cor. 5:2; 6:2; 10:15; 12:7; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; 2 Thess. 3:15. Excluded from the exercise of this right are young people (1 Peter 5:5) and female members of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

After providing these two quotes, CTCR 1968 states, “It should be noted that Dr. Walther simply appeals to 1 Cor. 14:34-35 for his position on the right of women to vote. He does not stop to show how this passage proves his point.” While the CTCR suggests this is some kind of flaw of Walther, Bohlman provides a different perspective on Walther’s approach. Regarding the method of citing Scripture in the Lutheran Confessions, he says,

Perhaps the most obvious and compelling confessional evidence for the fundamental clarity of Scripture is the manner in which Scripture is cited as the basis of confessional doctrine. Again and again passages are simply quoted without any explanation. Of the copious Biblical citations in the confessions, the majority are simply direct quotations of the sacred text without interpretation or extended commentary. The inference is that these statements of Scripture are so clear that anyone who can read them can understand what they say. . . . The use of Scripture in this unadorned way in documents that at least in part were intended for a nonclerical audience argues strongly for the confessional belief in the fundamental clarity and general understandability of the text of Scripture.²⁵

Walther “does not stop to show how this passage proves his point” because the passage from 1 Corinthians 14 is clear enough.

CTCR 1968 goes on to recognize that John H. C. Fritz holds the same position as Walther in his *Pastoral Theology* published in 1932. The following quote from Fritz is provided:

Since Scripture itself excludes children, 1 Peter 5:5, and women, 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12, from speaking and voting in congregational meetings, only the men of the congregation have the right to take part in the public discussions and the right of suffrage. – The reason given in Scripture why women are not permitted to speak in the church and to take an active part in the government of the church is that they “are commanded to be under obedience” and “not usurp authority over the man.”

²⁵ Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*, 56-57.

After noting that Dr. Georg Stoeckhardt holds to the identical position, CTCR 1968 states, “All of the statements quoted appear to have assumed that the passages quoted could be applied directly to the issue of woman suffrage in the church” (p. 3-4). Here the CTCR seems to be using the idea of direct application in the sense of explicit statements regarding voting. This is the critical shift that occurs. The CTCR will argue that voting is not addressed explicitly or expressly in these passages, that the passages refer only to a worship service, that voting is not an act of “domination,” and so therefore the passages do not have application to the issue (p. 7-11). Walther and Fritz see a principle in these passages that has clear application to woman suffrage and that pertains not just to a worship setting but includes other forms of congregational assembling. The essays presented for this conference demonstrate that the position of Walther and Fritz is the more Biblical position. The activities that were carried out at the assembly of the church in Corinth included more elements than those that occur in the “worship” setting in the LCMS today, for instance, asking questions publicly, Bible study style teaching with discussion, judging disputes between fellow Christians, and decisions related to excommunication. The prohibiting of a woman to speak authoritatively applied to all of these elements at the church in Corinth. Also, the prohibiting of a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man in 1 Timothy 2 pertains to how a Christian is to conduct himself in the household of God (1 Tim 3:15), that it is, how a Christian is to conduct himself as a member of the household of God among gathered Christians and how a Christian is to conduct himself as a member of the household of God outside of the gathering of Christians. It is a general principle that has application beyond just the pastoral office, although it applies to that as well. The position of CTCR 1968 and the general subsequent endorsement of this position by the CTCR to date, while culturally convenient then and largely culturally convenient now, is doing the Church no favors.

The gender confusion today is hardly accidental and its source is not a mystery. It is the result of the confusion and mixing of the roles of men and women that has increasingly progressed over the last 150 or so years. The question is, will we recognize that the current position of the LCMS on the roles of men and women is contributing to this confusion, or will we bury our heads in the sand of the “infallible” CTCR? Jesus tells us that there is joy in heaven where there is repentance (Luke 15:7, 10). We can be confident that this is true.

Some may conclude that the theology of the Scriptures, as articulated in these essays, is demeaning to women. I disagree. What is demeaning to women is to hide the truth from them. What is demeaning to women is to allow them to continue to think that they need to be like men in order to be valued and fulfilled in life. What is demeaning to women is for men to fail to live up to their roles of leadership in seeking to emulate Christ in His role as man who rules His bride the Church in love and in His role as man who rules over creation in love. This ruling of man is ultimately a service that is carried out in love for women and in love for God who created women and entrusted them to the care of men. There is nothing demeaning about being loved. There is nothing demeaning about being cared for. Let the world interpret this ruling of men as it will. But let the Scripture interpret this ruling of men as it is, a self-sacrificial service for the good of others modeled after the One who with self-sacrifice gave Himself for the world and for

His bride. I am not demeaned when Christ rules me in creation for my good. I am not demeaned when Christ rules me in the Church for my good. In fact, I would feel demeaned if He did not rule me in this way, for it would exhibit a lack of love toward me. May God, through His Word and Spirit, grant that our thinking would be reoriented away from worldly thoughts of ruling and being ruled to true Biblical theology and Biblical models, for “godliness is profitable for all things, having a promise for the life which now is and for that which is coming” (1 Tim 4:8).