

Drash on Parashat Vayelech

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Parashat Vayelech is found near the end of the fifth Book of the Torah, Devahreem (Deuteronomy in English). The Jewish name of the book means *The Words* and the English name of the book means *Repetition of The Law*. In many ways this Book summarizes the preceding four and is understood to contain speeches made by Moses near the end of his time leading Israel through the wilderness.

The name of this parashat is derived from the first Hebrew word which means *then he went out*. To provide the customary summation of the entire parashat, I, as usual, quote Wikipedia:

In the parashah, [Moses](#) told the [Israelites](#) to be strong and courageous, as [God](#) and [Joshua](#) would soon lead them into the [Promised Land](#). Moses commanded the Israelites to read the [law](#) to all the people every seven years. God told Moses that his death was approaching, that the people would break the [covenant](#), and that God would thus hide God's [face](#) from them, so Moses should therefore write a song to serve as a witness for God against them.

We are currently observing *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, the ten-day period beginning with Yom Teruah and ending with the Yom Kippur break fast. A rabbinic tradition holds this is the period during which The **LORD** decides who will live into the next *Yamim Noraim* and who will not.

Parashat Vayelech is the shortest parashat by verse count and second-shortest by word and letter count. *This year* is one of the few in which this portion is not combined with another parashat into a single weekly passage—this week we dwell on just 30 verses.

With all this in mind, I sought what I am to present in this drash. I was struck that about a third of the parashat foretells how unfaithful the Jewish people are going to be, setting the stage for *The Song of Moses* in next week's portion. We will begin to unpack this a bit with the Torah reading.

Yah-a-mod, Stephanie bat Ivan.

Stephanie will bless us with the English of Deuteronomy 31:26-29 (TLV):

²⁶ "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. ²⁷ For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!

²⁸ Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to testify against them. ²⁹ For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall on you because you will do evil in the sight of the **LORD** and arouse his anger by what your hands have made.”

As the summary mentioned, there is a fourth witness against Israel in this parashat beside the Torah, the Heavens, and the Earth—The **LORD** said in verse 21:

²¹ “[...]this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants.”

Have you ever sung, “And they sing The Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of The Lamb”? Yes, it has not been forgotten, but are we singing the actual Song of Moses? More on that next week, I expect.

Moses’ dressing down of Israel is a paraphrasing of what The **LORD** had just said to him and Joshua at the Tent of Meeting. I wonder how Joshua felt about being commissioned to lead a nation with such a dismal expectation of the outcome? Well, be strong and courageous, nonetheless, because God is with *you* at least.

So after Joshua went to be with his fathers, it came as no surprise that Israel as a nation brought calamity after calamity upon itself. The **LORD** raised up one unlikely leader after another to lead Israel out of the fine messes it kept getting itself into after returning to wicked ways. One of these leaders was a woman, Deborah, who was accepted by Israel both as its highest judge and even as a military leader (or at least as a military consultant), and she demonstrated perhaps the highest level of commitment to The **LORD** of all the judges excepting perhaps Samuel. The Scriptures do *not* state *inarguably* that it is, from The **LORD**’s point of view, a wrong thing for men to be led by a woman (there’s *much* argument about that). Certainly, however, the *men* in the Scriptures (and most women, too) have concluded such governance cannot ever be God’s best. Nonetheless, that generation of Israelites accepted Deborah’s leadership, and most had no quarrel with the outcome.

After the time of the judges, royalty took over, but the see-saw of national spiritual fealty continued just the same. By the time of Josiah, Israel’s devotion to The **LORD** had reached another low point.

Yah-a-mod, Elaine bat Benyameen Mosheh.

Josiah became king in Jerusalem when he was eight. Eight years later, now 16, he began to seek the God of his father David. Four years later, now 20, he began to purge his kingdom of idolatry. Six years later, now 26, he commissioned

refurbishing the dilapidated Temple. This Haftorah reading, II Chronicles 34:14-33, tells what came about.

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the silver that had been brought into the House of *ADONAI*, Hilkiyah the *kohen* found a *Torah* scroll of *ADONAI* given by Moses. ¹⁵ Hilkiyah responded by telling Shaphan the scribe, "I have found a scroll of the *Torah* in the House of *ADONAI*." Hilkiyah gave the scroll to Shaphan.

¹⁶ Then Shaphan brought the scroll to the king and moreover returned a report to the king, saying, "Your servants are doing everything that was committed to them. ¹⁷ They have melted down the silver that was found in the House of Adonai and handed it over to the overseers and into the hand of the workmen." ¹⁸ Shaphan the scribe also said to the king, "Hilkiyah the *kohen* has given me a scroll." Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

¹⁹ When the king heard the words of the *Torah*, he tore his clothes.

²⁰ The king commanded Hilkiyah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ²¹ "Go! Inquire of *ADONAI* for me and for the remnant in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of *ADONAI* that will be poured out upon us—because our fathers did not observe the word of *ADONAI* to do according to all that is written in this scroll."

²² So Hilkiyah, and those whom the king commanded, went to [Ch]uldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum son of Tokahath, son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe—now she was living in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter—and spoke to her about this.

²³ She said to them, "Thus says *ADONAI*, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, ²⁴ "Thus says *ADONAI*, 'Behold, I am bringing disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the curses that are written in the book that they have read before the king of Judah. ²⁵ For they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods in order to provoke Me with all the works of their hands. Therefore, My wrath will be poured out upon this place and it will not be quenched.'" ²⁶ But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of *ADONAI*, thus you will say to him, "Thus says *ADONAI* the God of Israel, 'Regarding the words which you have heard, ²⁷ because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against the inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes, and wept before Me, I have heard you,' says *ADONAI*.

²⁸ 'Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you will be buried in your grave in *shalom*. Your eyes will not see all the evil that I will bring upon this place and upon the inhabitants.'"

So they brought her word back to the king.

²⁹ Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ The king went up to the House of *ADONAI* with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the *kohanim*, the Levites, and all the people from the oldest to the youngest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the House of *ADONAI*.

³¹ Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before *ADONAI*—to follow *ADONAI* and to observe His *mitzvot*, His regulations and His decrees with all his heart and with all his soul and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book. ³² Moreover, he made all that were found in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand with him. The inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³ Josiah removed all the abominations from the whole territory of *Bnei-Yisrael* and made all who were found in Israel to worship *ADONAI* their God. All his days they did not turn away from following *ADONAI*, the God of their fathers.

By the way, Hilkiah is clearly identified as the *kohen gadol* (the high priest) earlier in the chapter. He and the other four men the king entrusted with obtaining The **LORD**'s opinion regarding the scroll were apparently directed by another man, likely a highly revered prophet, to a woman we know very little about. Chuldah is clearly extraordinary in her influence. Some scholars are even persuaded she, not the high priest or that unidentified man, provided authoritative assessment of the scroll's canonical status. It is certainly she who speaks the Word of The **LORD** into the situation, with no hint of indignation from the men involved, including the king himself, and all she foretold came to pass. There is no questioning her anointing in this matter and note there **is** a godly king on the scene calling the governmental shots, and respected male prophets are also at hand. Chew on this a while if any of this is new to you.

Perhaps you are thinking I must be ignorant of what Paul said regarding women teaching men in II Timothy 2:11-14 (TLV):

¹¹ Let a woman receive training in a quiet demeanor with complete respect for order. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to train or dictate to a man, but to be in a quiet demeanor. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ Also Adam was not deceived but the woman—being deceived, she fell into transgression.

I assure you I am not ignorant of what Paul said. This drash has now arrived at the crux of one of the great divisions within the Body—complementarianism versus egalitarianism—along with attendant concepts having some gender-based component, such as:

- managing versus consulting,
- the concept of overarching creation order, both before and after The Fall,
- conflating prophecy and teaching,
- prophesying versus judging prophecy,
- functional and behavioral differences; in the world versus in the Body, as well as in a marriage versus in a congregation versus in trans-local ministry versus in business versus in civil government or militia,

- assigning sub-authorities such as authority over budgeting or interior decorating based upon metrics like who has the greater experience or stronger artistic temperament,
- reassigning responsibilities and authorities after the onset of disabilities physical, mental, and/or spiritual,
- grounds for being unsubmitive to authority or even usurping authority,

and so on. Kindly note that, for the sake of simplicity and time limitations, contemporary gender confusion was completely ignored in those bullet points.

This drash cannot attempt to settle any of these differences, only acknowledge the complementarian/egalitarian viewpoints overshadow what the Scriptures explicitly tell us about Deborah and Chuldah, not to mention all the other prominent women in The Scriptures.

Here is what this drash intends you to grasp. Along with the Torah, the Heavens, the Earth, and the Song of Moses, these two women, Chuldah and Deborah, also stand as witnesses against most of the descendants of Avraham, Itzchak, and Yaakov. Using impeccable witnesses, of whom there are many more, including non-Jewish Enoch and Job, The **LORD** has built an air-tight case against those who should know better, the children of Israel.

They are not without an Advocate, hallelujah! But life-changing repentance demonstrated by actions conforming to the Torah remains the core of the only possible defense, alongside maintaining deep conviction that Yeshua is **LORD**—conviction sufficient to withstand any and all pressures to disavow that belief.

To you women whom The **LORD** has extraordinarily gifted and raised up into responsibilities usually associated with men, I say be strong and courageous, but also, be breath-takingly humble and submissive to those in authority over you. And you men with such responsibilities—you're exemplifying how we're to be humble and submissive to those in authority over us, right?

May all our names be inscribed in this year's Book of Life.

The next parashat is *Ha'azinu* which spans Deuteronomy chapter 32 in its entirety.