

Did the Spirit of Yahweh Empower a Woman to Lead?

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Introduction

The book of Judges remains prominent in Old Testament leadership studies because of its narratological presentation of Yahweh's leaders during pre-monarchic Israel. Although polar discussions exist about the book's collective purpose, the need for ideological leadership continues as one of the accepted threads that cohere individual narratives into a unified literature.¹ Yahweh was Israel's sovereign Lord (Judg 8:23), judges were his chosen leaders (Judg 3:9-11, 15-30; 4:4; 6:14), and covenantal faithfulness (or lack thereof) determined the peace of the land (Judg 2:1-5); cf., Deut 28, Josh 23). Lee Roy Martin writes,

The book begins with the question of leadership, ends with the question of leadership, and concerns itself with the stories of fourteen leaders. God chooses leaders; Gideon refuses monarchic leadership; Abimelech claims leadership, and lack of decisive leadership seems to cause anarchy (Judges 21:25).²

Hence, this book undeniably offers a glimpse into Yahweh's stance on choosing and empowering leaders. The world of the judges may not be exactly like today, but for contemporary Christians (spiritual Israelites), the need for ideological leaders endures. Yahweh is still our sovereign Lord. He remains the final arbiter of ideological leadership.

The enduring purposes of the book of Judges come into play most significantly in the ongoing debate about women in Christian leadership. Many still assume that Christian leadership belongs to the sphere of men. In fact, at first glance, the book of Judges may be mistaken as

¹Trent C. Butler, "Judges," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, 8, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), lxiii; Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, Bible and Literature Series, 14 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 18.

²Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology. Supplement Series 32 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 92.

promoting androcentric leadership. Most judges were men; the era itself is presumed patriarchal. Yet, in the litany of pre-monarchic judges, a woman named Deborah was identified as a major judge with better accolades than the other judges. She was a prophetess, a wife, and a major judge of Israel (Judg 4:4-5).³

So, this study asks, did the Spirit of Yahweh empower a woman to lead? What is the significance of Deborah's story for the leadership crisis in the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) of Israel? Is her story significant for women in Christian leadership today? To answer these questions, the study presents a narrative-theological analysis of Deborah's story in Judges 4, proceeding from deductive plot analysis to theological synthesis.

In the interim, this study proposes that the Spirit of Yahweh empowered Deborah as a leader, enabling her to be both prophet and judge, for the deliverance of Israel. Her inclusion in the book of Judges highlights Yahweh's sovereignty in choosing his agents and his inclusion of women in leadership.

Prologue

Purpose of the Book of Judges

Famed for its seemingly disjointed and 'ironic' stories,⁴ Judges offers a window into pre-monarchic Israel, a period beginning after Joshua's era (Judg 1:1). Martin Noth proposed an Israelite amphictyony during this period, that is, a confederation of twelve tribes, converging around a central 'cult' sanctuary established by Joshua at Shechem (Josh 24).⁵ Contra Noth's theory, Yairah Amit argues that the themes of 'cult centralization' and the forming of 'twelve tribes' were still foreign to those in the era of Judges.⁶ Instead, she proposes that the book was written based on "pre-existing literature of northern heroes" by Judahite

³Butler, *Judges*, 90-91. Butler comments that in Judg 4:4 the author uses the terms woman, prophetess, and wife to emphasize that this judge is a female, not a male.

⁴For a discussion on irony as the book's main literary device see Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 11-21.

⁵Martin Noth, *History of Israel*, trans. Stanley Godman, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 53ff, 68ff; A. D. H. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges*, vol. 29, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 2nd (Naperville, IL: A.R. Allenson, 1974), 7-14.

⁶Yairah Amit, "The Book of Judges: Fruit of 100 Years of Creativity," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, in *Conversation with Thomas Römer: The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction*, ed. Raymond F. Person Jr, (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 9 (2009): 32-33, <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2009.v9.a17>.

tribes trying to understand Yahweh's actions in their history.⁷ She posits that Judges is a "Judahite indictment against the northern kingdom. . . . It suggests by the use of cyclicity that the northern society was a serial sinner."⁸ J. P. U. Lilley, however, advocates that the stories in Judges don't just depict a cyclicity but also a downward progression.⁹ The pastiche of narratives concludes with Israel's moral disintegration (Judg 17:6; 21:25), rhetorically advocating for ideological leadership and devotion to Yahweh.

Butler affirms this advocacy of ideological leadership (monarchical, in his theory) as one of the purposes of the book since he posits that Judges presents a historical reversal of all that Joshua established.¹⁰ Ultimately, the book's original recipients are inundated with the irony of "who is king when all is right in my eyes? (17:1-21:25)."¹¹ Although complex issues in the book linger as subjects of discourse, the need for an ideological leader—one who serves in covenant faithfulness to Yahweh, remains front and center.

The Spirit in the Book of Judges

Directly related to the questions of this paper is a sub-theme in the book of Judges—the Spirit's empowerment. In the book of Judges, one can read the Spirit of Yahweh empowering a person for a special task: for example, to be a judge or prophet. The people of Israel saw the Spirit as the presence and power of Yahweh. Michael L. Brown explained how the biblical authors progressively saw the Spirit from one who was present (even superintending) in creation to the one divinely enabling persons for special tasks.¹² In later Jewish writings, the Spirit is identified as the "spirit of prophecy."¹³ For the Jews, the one who speaks divine revelation or inspiration is empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh.

⁷Ibid., 31.

⁸Ibid., 34.

⁹J. P. U. Lilley, "A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges," *TynBul* 18 (1967): 98-99.

¹⁰Butler, *Judges*, lvii.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Michael L. Brown, "The Spirit in the Pentateuch: From Creation to Supernatural Empowerment," in *The Spirit throughout the Canon: Pentecostal Pneumatology*, ed. Craig S. Keener and L. William Jr. Oliverio, vol. 48, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2022), 6-10.

¹³Ibid., 10; c.f. D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 200; Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 112.

The book of Judges, however, does not have a formulaic way of describing the empowerment of the Spirit. Since the period of Judges was within what modern scholars called the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) of Israel,¹⁴ the way the Spirit empowered people depended on the situation.¹⁵ Sometimes the Spirit explicitly empowers, as in the case of Gideon being “clothed” with the Spirit (Judg 6:34), or implicitly like Deborah, whose prophecies were fulfilled (Judg 4:9; 4:14-23).¹⁶ The prophecy-fulfillment motif, as in Deborah’s case, can be observed in the entire DtrH, indicating the acceptance of prophecy as evidence of the Spirit’s empowerment.¹⁷

Interestingly, Brian Neil Peterson states that “none of the specific prophets noted in the DtrH are explicitly said to have had the Spirit enter into them in the way the Spirit enters, for example Ezekiel (Ezek 2:2; 3:24). Instead, it is assumed in the DtrH that the prophets have the Spirit working within them when they speak the words of God (cf. Deut 18:18).”¹⁸ Hence, in books within DtrH, the Spirit’s empowerment may be both explicitly and implicitly described, and the prophecy-fulfillment motif is used as evidence of divine endowment. This important aspect of DtrH pneumatology must be taken into consideration in the analysis of Deborah’s story.

Plot Analysis of Judges 4

Deborah’s epic comes into play from the backdrop of Israel’s pre-monarchic history. The plot of the narrative can be traced in Judges 4,¹⁹

¹⁴The Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) mentioned here refers to the period between Israel’s settlement in the land to the destruction and exile of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. It spans roughly 820 years. Brian Neil Peterson, “The Spirit in the DtrH/Former Prophets: ‘And the Spirit Came Upon Him,’” in *The Spirit throughout the Canon: Pentecostal Pneumatology*, ed. Craig S. Keener and L. William Oliverio, Jr., vol. 48, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 16; c. f. Amit, “The Book of Judges,” 2009, 32-33.

¹⁵Peterson, “The Spirit in the DtrH/Former Prophets,” 16-17.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 18, 21.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹Judges 4 and 5 are, respectively, a prose and a poetic version of the same story within pre-monarchic Israel’s history. Since the current study is narrative-theological, the paper will limit its analysis on Judges 4 (the prose version). Although, the study will also refer to Judges 5 for theological analysis. See Butler, *Judges*, 82.

the prose portion of the pericope.²⁰ The story communicates a “change”²¹ that depicts repercussions not just for the isolated epic but also for the metanarrative of the book of Judges. Klein proposes that the protagonist in the book of Judges is the people of Israel, and each judge represents the potential nation.²² In line with her position, this study posits that Deborah and Barak are the protagonists in Judges 4; both were judges, albeit with different functions.²³

Deborah is directly described as a prophet and a judge in Judges 4:4-5. Jewish tradition described her as a teacher of the Torah, and one of the seven prophetesses of Israel (*BT Megillah* 14a).²⁴ Moreover, the Hebrew term *hi' shophtah* used to describe Deborah as judging Israel (v. 4) “broadly denotes governing and can refer to administration of kings, judges, and chiefs.”²⁵ Hence, most Jewish tradition recognized her as an extraordinary leader of the community at that time.²⁶

Barak, on the other hand, was supposed to be a leader like Joshua, a military deliverer. This contention is supported by Susan Ackerman, who notes that in Judges 5 Deborah is depicted as the military commander while Barak appears as her second-in-command.²⁷ However, The Jewish Midrash notes that Barak was initially the chief character but he assigned himself a secondary role due to lack of faith.²⁸ In representing the people of Israel, Deborah and Barak represent two kinds of people in a covenant

²⁰A full discussion on biblical narratives' plot and pediment structure can be read in Amit's book. Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticisms and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 46–48.

²¹A “change” in the story indicates something significant has happened. Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 46.

²²Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 17.

²³Deborah was identified as a prophet-judge in Judg 4. Barak, on the other hand, was mentioned in 1 Sam 12:11 and Heb 11:32 as a judge (military deliverer) like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. See Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen : Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, 1st ed., Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 30.

²⁴Tamar Kadari, “Deborah 2: Midrash and Aggadah,” in *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women* (March 20, 2009), Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/deborah-2-midrash-and-aggadah>.

²⁵Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 89; c.f. Nili Sacher Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 164.

²⁶There is a midrashim tradition criticizing Deborah and Huldah's haughtiness, but these accounts are attributed to some rabbinic traditions' criticism against women transgressing gender norms. Most rabbinic traditions still laud Deborah as one of the extremely righteous and praiseworthy women in the Bible. See Kadari, “Deborah 2: Midrash and Aggadah.”

²⁷Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 31.

²⁸Kadari, “Deborah 2: Midrash and Aggadah.”

relationship with Yahweh, one with complete obedience and the other with conditional obedience.

An analysis of the plot structure may further elucidate these characterizations. Butler proposes a division of Judges 4 using Amit's categories in the following manner:

Table 1. Trent Butler's Plot Tracing of Judges 4

<i>Narrative Element</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Passage</i>	<i>Signal of Change</i>
Exposition	Introducing the main characters	vv. 1-5	Disjunctive sentence opening
Complication	Conditional acceptance of the call to arms	vv. 6-8	Change of characters
Change	Search for a woman's glory	vv. 9-11	Conditional sentence
Unraveling	Man's victory without glory	vv. 12-15	Change of place
Climax	Woman gaining glory in unmanning generals	vv. 16-21	Two disjunctive sentences
Ending or denouement	Glory revealed	v. 22	"just then"

Source: Trent C. Butler, "Judges," in *Word Biblical Commentary* 8, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 83-84.

Butler adds verses 23-24 in his proffered outline as editorial interpretations of the entire prose narrative.²⁹ Most scholars further comment that Judges 4 and 5 are the same story in different genres (prose and poetry).³⁰

Although Butler's proposition is well-thought-out, there is notable androcentrism in his interpretation. For instance, he identifies the story's climax as a woman gaining glory in unmanning generals. Hidden in this categorization is the assumption that a woman's glory affects the

²⁹Butler, *Judges*, lxxxv.

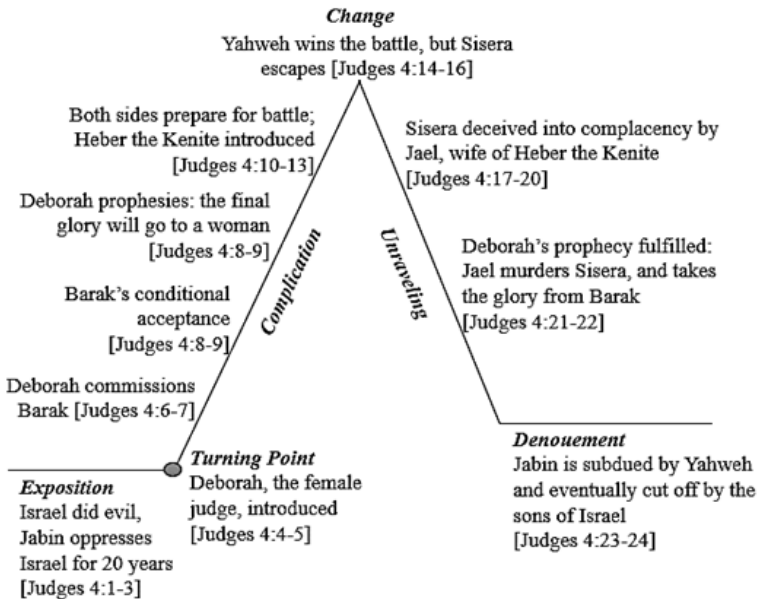
³⁰Ibid., 82; Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 30; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 138-39.

ontology of manhood. The idea that being defeated by a woman makes one less of a man seems like a gender-sensitive interpretation of a historical narrative. Perhaps the story has a deeper meaning than just which gender claimed glory.

With this skepticism in mind, the current study proposes an alternative interpretation of the story using another form of narrative criticism—a deductive plot analysis.³¹ Applying Amit’s concept of a pediment structure,³² the current study proposes that the battle narrative reaches its climax and demonstrates a ‘change’ in the atypical battle victory between Israel’s army and Jabin’s army, as foretold by Deborah. Unlike the previous judge narrative, where Yahweh’s victory was straightforward and complete, the victory in this narrative is incomplete and offers an ironic twist.

An alternative plot tracing of Judges 4 can be as follows:

Figure 1. Proposed Pediment Plot Structure of Judges 4



³¹Since Judges 4 is a battle narrative, analyzing its content and literary presentation may help unfold the story’s meaning. Lilley, “A Literary Appreciation of the Book of Judges,” 99.

³²Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 47.

With the plot traced above, one can see that the “change” reflects an incomplete win for the people of Israel due to Barak, a protagonist’s self-determination. Instead of complete obedience and faith in Yahweh’s directive, his conditional acceptance of Yahweh’s command led to Israel’s incomplete (and ironic) victory.

This deviation in pattern from previous major judge narratives is significant because it implies a possible divergence in Israel’s covenantal relation with Yahweh. The narrative of Deborah and Barak represents a growing tension that may have presaged a future degeneration or breakage of their covenant relationship. Klein explains that in Israel’s eagerness to win the battle and claim the land, they were willing to compromise the ethics of their covenant.³³

Plot Explained

Exposition

The narrative starts with a two-unit exposition: first, a description of Israel’s negative situation, that is, foreign oppression due to divine punishment (Judg 4:1-3). Second is a description of Yahweh’s elected judge (Judg 4:4-5), identified by the narrator as Israel’s leader-deliverer. Both units reflect two levels of perception—the human perception of their situation (dire) and Yahweh’s perception of their situation (redemptive).

In unit one, the situation is dire. A foreign oppressor, Jabin, the king of Canaan, torments the sons of Israel. This oppression came about because of Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness. Their acts of unfaithfulness are narrated as “again they did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” (4:1a). As a repercussion, Yahweh sold them into enemy hands. Ehud, the previous judge, was already gone. So, Israel was left leaderless under the oppression of a nation with more advanced wartime equipment (Judg 4:3).

Though the situation seemed hopeless in human eyes, Yahweh did not leave them without recourse. A positive turning point is presented: Yahweh prepares an empowered leader, a judge, for their time. She is introduced as Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth (Judg 4:4a). Though the narrator does not inform us when she started judging,

³³Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 47.

her status as the appointed judge is hard to rebut.³⁴ As verse 4b succinctly informs, “She [Deborah] judged Israel at that time.” By clearly identifying her as a judge, the narrator includes Deborah in the list of deliverers that Yahweh would raise for Israel (see Judg 2:16; 4:4-5).

The emphasis on her womanhood (woman, prophetess, and wife) includes her in the list of unlikely individuals chosen by Yahweh to deliver his people. The assumption that Deborah was an atypical choice stems from the gender norms of the time.³⁵ During the era of pre-monarchic Israel, female leaders were rare.³⁶ Although prophetesses existed, a woman functioning as both prophet and judge was considered extraordinary.

Complication

The people of Israel asked for deliverance from foreign oppression, and Yahweh assigned Deborah, a prophet-judge, to lead his people toward this deliverance. In a committal formula, Deborah commissioned Barak, Yahweh’s chosen military deliverer, to lead Israel’s army in the fight against the army led by Sisera, Jabin’s viceroy.³⁷ A complication, however, arises as Barak, amid assurance of Yahweh’s victory, refuses to go to battle without Deborah’s presence. Osborne argues that Barak’s response was neither reluctant nor humble; instead, it was “self-serving and searching for honor (תראפת).”³⁸ Deborah’s response indicates that she recognized Barak’s request for what it was: Barak’s desire for glory and failure to trust Yahweh’s assurance of victory. A crucial event followed: as punishment for Barak’s failure to fully obey, Deborah prophesies that Yahweh will sell Sisera into a woman’s hand (Judg 4:9b).

³⁴Although a few modern scholars propose that Deborah’s judging or leading was the work of a late redactor, the majority of Old Testament scholars still uphold Deborah as one of the major judges in pre-monarchic Israel. For the dispute on Deborah’s function as a judge, see B. Lindars, “A Commentary on the Greek Judges?” in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem 1986*, ed. C. E. Cox, SCS 23 (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1987), 182.

³⁵Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 37, 41.

³⁶William R. Osborne, “A Biblical Reconstruction of the Prophetess Deborah in Judges 4,” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 2, no. 2 (2013): 203–6, 213.

³⁷Butler, *Judges*, 86.

³⁸Osborne, “A Biblical Reconstruction,” 211.

Change

The complication reaches a climax, wherein a significant change occurs in the narrative. Amit calls this “change” the heart of the story.³⁹ In Judges 4, this change occurs during battle, when after Deborah’s prophetic command (Judg 4:14), Barak and Israel’s army fight Sisera and his army. The former overpowers the latter by Yahweh’s orchestration (Judg 4:15), but Sisera, the enemy’s captain, escapes on foot. Yahweh is the battle’s winner; however, he allows for a remnant enemy to escape and be vanquished not by an Israelite judge but by an unexpected hero.⁴⁰

The current study proposes this as the pinnacle of Deborah’s narrative because it potentially demonstrates a double-layered significance. At the micronarrative level, Yahweh wins the battle but allows Sisera to escape the grasp of Barak, his chosen military deliverer. This change signifies that Barak was not given complete victory as punishment for his conditional obedience. In a sense, Barak fails to “personally” complete his mission. The story’s denouement cannot occur until Sisera is defeated.

At the metanarrative level, although Yahweh wins the war, he allows an enemy to escape. This signals a deviation from previous judges’ battle outcomes and possibly foreshadows more deviations from battle outcomes between Israel and foreign enemies. The people of Israel (as represented by Barak) may consider this event a foretaste of future ironical wins. The people of Israel are deprived of completely vanquishing their enemy (and thus gaining long-term peace), as their disobedience and fledgling allegiance results in Yahweh’s displeasure.

The double-layered significance of the climax indicates that beyond the usual androcentric interpretation lies a more profound significance to the battle result. The irony of winning a battle but not being completely free from an enemy’s oppression may foreshadow a future that the people of Israel can expect because of their failure to remain completely faithful to Yahweh.

Unraveling

Amit explains that the unraveling is where “the consequences of the change are revealed.”⁴¹ The change is revealed when Yahweh wins the

³⁹Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 47.

⁴⁰Butler, *Judges*, 57. Although this study does not agree with Butler’s assumption that Barak was unmanned by Jael, the current author agrees with his premise that the story demonstrates how Yahweh’s glory departs from the expected judge and falls onto an unlikely hero.

⁴¹Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 47.

battle but allows Sisera to escape the hands of Barak. The consequences of this change include the following:

1. Sisera escapes into the tent of Heber the Kenite, and meets Jael, Heber's wife.
2. Jael, the woman prophesied by Deborah in Judg 4:9, lures Sisera into complacency and then later kills him with a tent peg.
3. The ironic juxtaposition of Jael being the victor over Sisera being the vanquished and Barak's incomplete victory informs readers that Yahweh can choose whomever he wills to deliver his people, especially in the face of faltering obedience.

Sisera's death in the hands of a woman with undisclosed ancestry signified that Barak (and the people of Israel) had fallen short of the expectations of Yahweh and, thereby, was denied the glory of victory. Barak remained the military leader of Israel's army, but Jael was deemed "most blessed among women" (Judg 5:24) because she became the agent to complete Yahweh's deliverance.

Denouement

The narrative ends with describing how Israel cleaned up Jabin's army and destroyed his oppressive rule. The song of Deborah and Barak in Chapter Five recounts the story in lyrical poetry and ends with the statement: "and the land had rest for forty years" (Judg 5:31). The song highlights Yahweh as the ultimate deliverer who deserves all the praise.⁴² It also mentions Deborah as the mother of Israel, Barak as the judge alongside her, Jael as the blessed woman who defeated Sisera, and Sisera's mother who waits in vain for his son. In the end, through the agency of his chosen instruments, Yahweh enforced his will, the people of Israel were delivered, and the land had peace for forty years.

Theological Synthesis

With the plot analysis completed, the study now deduces three theological themes from the story. First is the theme of Yahweh's deliverance vis-à-vis Israel's faltering obedience. Second is the

⁴²Amit rightly concludes that in the book of Judges, Yahweh is the main hero. Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, First English Language Edition, vol. 38, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 214–18.

theme of women's roles in Yahweh's deliverance history. Third is the Spirit's empowerment of leaders. Though these three themes do not comprehensively explain all that the narrative implies, they answer the questions of the current study.

First, the narrative of Deborah records the deliverance of Yahweh during her time as judge. The narrative is replete with ironic juxtapositions due to a chosen person's faltering obedience. The story could have been straightforward: Israel cries out for deliverance from oppression (oppression brought about by their evil acts), and a positive turning point occurs with the introduction of Deborah and the subsequent commissioning of Barak. However, a 'plot twist' surprises its audience: amid prophetic assurance, Barak refuses to go to battle without Deborah. This refusal indicates a lack of faith, conditional obedience, and, most importantly, self-determination over Yahweh's way of deliverance. With this twist, Yahweh provides an alternate way of achieving his deliverance—the glory of victory falls not on Barak but on a woman.

Yahweh's indictment of Barak is implied by the consequence of his conditional obedience. In the final analysis, Yahweh is highlighted as the ultimate deliverer of the people. Yahweh's spiritual authority behind the prophet-judge Deborah, his divine orchestration of military victory, and Sisera's demise at Jael's hands (as foretold), were the ultimate reasons for the deliverance of Israel.

Secondly, the battle narrative reveals that Yahweh included women in his deliverance history. Although Deborah is the only female judge in the book, the emphasis on her gender, her numerous accolades, and the highlight of women in the story imply Yahweh's willingness to elevate women's status. Deborah was lauded as the mother of Israel. She was a leader fully obedient to Yahweh. Jael, on the other hand, though with undisclosed ancestry, was faithful to Yahweh. Her cunning and bravery vanquished an enemy, humbling Barak and effecting the glory of Yahweh's victory. Together, these two women represent heroic women in Israel's history.

Hence, it is Yahweh's providential design, not gender, that qualifies leaders. As David Firth states, "the starting point for any valid expression of leadership is, therefore, that the leader's authority must derive in some way from Yahweh."⁴³ It is Yahweh's authority that qualifies a person. Deborah was empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh to be a prophet and judge, while Jael was declared (by divine prophecy) as the one

⁴³David G. Firth, "The Spirit and Leadership: Testimony, Empowerment and Purpose," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 260.

who would claim the glory of victory. One can deduce that Yahweh's providential design can overturn human expectations.

Thirdly, the Spirit empowers leaders, though not in a proverbial manner. The Spirit's empowerment of Deborah was not as explicit as his empowerment of other major judges like Othniel. Deborah was a recognized leader before and even during the battle. She was already judging (case-hearing, governing) and was identified as a prophetess (one with the Spirit of prophecy). She functioned as a divine emissary, ably appointing a military commander (Judg 4:6-7) and representing Yahweh's presence in the battle (Judg 4:8).⁴⁴ Although her victory song in Judges 5 reminds us of the prophetess Miriam,⁴⁵ the entirety of her accolades makes her more comparable to Moses.

Bruce Herzberg affirms the under-appreciated similarities between Deborah and Moses, noting that these two leaders share the most extensive matchups in the Old Testament.⁴⁶ For instance, both were prophets and judges offering decisions for those who came to them in their regular place of judging; for example, Moses in his tent, Deborah in the Palm of Deborah (Judg 4:5).⁴⁷ Both also did not fight in battle; instead, they appointed commanders, inspired the troops and acted as Yahweh's emissaries (Exod 17; Judg 4). Both also sang post-battle songs of victory (Exod 15 and Judg 5). Wilda Gafney, agreeing with Irmtraud Fischer, notes that Deborah "represents a unification of the Mosaic prophetic tradition that was divided between Miriam and Moses, and by some reckoning also Aaron."⁴⁸ One can surmise that Deborah's leadership was distinctive in the book of Judges, not just for her gender representation but also for her characterization as a leader like Moses.⁴⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers the following answers to the previously asked questions. First, Yahweh did empower a woman to

⁴⁴Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 48; Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 14.

⁴⁵Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 15.

⁴⁶Bruce Herzberg, "Deborah and Moses," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38, no. 1 (2013): 16.

⁴⁷See also *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 15; c. f. Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen: Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung der Prophetie in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 122.

⁴⁹Gafney also notes that there were only three judges who were also identified as prophets in the Old Testament: Moses, Deborah and Samuel. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam*, 33.

lead. Her name was recorded in the annals of Israel's pre-monarchic history as Deborah, wife of Lappidoth. As a prophetess and judge, the narrative describes her as having Yahweh's Spirit. Although there is no direct statement of the Spirit coming upon her, the prophecy-fulfillment motif in her story provides implicit evidence of her Spirit empowerment. Her role as Israel's judge served the deliverance purposes of Yahweh, indicating that Yahweh's providential design determines leadership authority.

Second, Deborah's leadership signified not only the role women played in DtrH but the irony in Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh. The entire story seems like a satire on Israel's faltering faithfulness. Deborah was an Israelite committed to Yahweh's directive, while Barak was an Israelite with faltering obedience. Both leaders represented the people of Israel; both also demonstrated the existing tensions among the people. Women who were socially deemed unsuited to leadership emerged as the faithful ones, while men who were expected to lead did not get the glory of victory. This ironic juxtaposition serves Yahweh's purpose of reminding Israel to forgo socio-religious nuances and focus on what is essential: covenant faithfulness.

Finally, Deborah's story implies Yahweh's inclusion of women in leadership. In this narrative, one sees the sovereignty of Yahweh in choosing his leaders and the empowerment of the Spirit in enabling those leaders. Yahweh himself chose Deborah. There is no denying that "Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging⁵⁰ Israel at that time" (Judg 4:4). A woman was declared as the leader of Israel at that time, and Yahweh's Spirit enabled her to fulfill a prophetic role as well. There was both appointment and enabling, revealing that Yahweh does not exclude women in leadership. He appoints and empowers those whom he calls regardless of their being male or female.

Concerning the contemporary issue of women in leadership, one cannot deny that the choosing of leaders depends on Yahweh's providential design and the affirmation of the Spirit's empowerment. One can use Deborah's story as a point of reference in recognizing women leaders. What qualifies a leader is not being male or female, but the providential design of Yahweh and the evidence of the Spirit's enabling.

Further Implications

The need for biblical scholarship on women's empowered leadership is necessary. The view that God cannot empower women to lead still

⁵⁰The New International Version of Judg 4:4 directly translates judging as *leading*.

dominates some sectors of the Christian community. For instance, in the Philippines, the author's home country, the gender parity index is at 79.1 percent.⁵¹ This index has landed the Philippines a top rank in terms of gender equality; in fact, the country is considered today as the most gender-equal nation in Asia.⁵² However, this level of equality remains low in the country's religious sectors.

Androcentrism still prevails among Christian churches in the Philippines. The Roman Catholic church, which makes up around 80 percent of the country's religious population, only ordains male clergy, followed by the majority of Protestant denominations that refuse to recognize or appoint female leaders. The idea that the Apostle Paul prohibited women to lead (1 Tim 2) remains prevalent even in a gender-equal nation like the Philippines. However, one must note that Paul's occasional teaching is not equivalent to Yahweh's providence.⁵³

As noted in the above analysis, Deborah is a prime example of a woman empowered for leadership. The authoritative source of her leadership was Yahweh himself, whose Scripture recognized her as a judge, while evidence of her anointing was encapsulated in a prophetic-fulfilment motif. It was in the providence of Yahweh to assign a woman to lead at that time. This implies that Yahweh does not universally prohibit women from leadership. Instead, he assigns and empowers people, like Deborah, according to his purposes.

Once again, the Christian church in the Philippines (and other nations) is reminded that ideological leadership finds its source and authority in Yahweh. The choosing of Christian ministry leaders ought to be according to divine providence and anointing, for Yahweh empowers whom he wills for his purposes (1 Cor 12:11). If the Philippines (or other nations) has already accepted the capacity of women to lead, the religious sector can also follow suit by allowing called and empowered women to lead and minister in the Christian church. Both the proven capacity of

⁵¹Michelle Abad, "Philippines Improves in 2023 World Gender Equality Ranking," *Rappler*, June 24, 2023, <https://www.pids.gov.ph/details/news/in-the-news/philippines-improves-in-2023-world-gender-equality-ranking>.

⁵²Johnny Wood, "Asia's 10 Most Gender Equal Countries," *World Economic Forum*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/asia-gender-equal-countries/>.

⁵³See discourses contra Pauline prohibition against women in ministry: Janelle L. Harrison, "Female Roles in Leadership and the Ideological Texture of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15," *Inner Resources for Leaders* 3, no. 1 (2011), <https://www.regent.edu/journal/inner-resources-for-leaders/female-leadership-1-timothy-2/>; Waldemar Kowalski, "The Role of Women in Ministry: Is There a Disconnect between Pauline Practice and Pauline Instruction?," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 20, no. 2 (2017): 147-70; Waldemar Kowalski, "Does Paul Really Want All Women to Be Silent? 1 Corinthians 14:34-35," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 20, no. 2 (2017): 171-81.

women in society and the biblical record of Yahweh empowering women to lead support such a claim.

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