

The Seven Jewish Prophetesses

Jenna Andelman

Shavuot 2024

Megillah 14a:4

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied on behalf of the Jewish people, and they neither subtracted from nor added onto what is written in the Torah, introducing no changes or additions to the mitzvot except for the reading of the Megilla, which they added as an obligation for all future generations.

Megillah 14a:13

The Gemara asks with regard to the prophetesses recorded in the *baraita*: **Who were the seven prophetesses?** The Gemara answers: **Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.**

SARAH

Megillah 14a:13

Sarah, as it is written: “Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah” (Genesis 11:29). And Rabbi Yitzhak said: Iscah is in fact Sarah. And why was she called Iscah? For she saw [*sakhta*] by means of divine inspiration, as it is stated: “In all that Sarah has said to you, hearken to her voice” (Genesis 21:12).

Genesis 21:12

But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you.

MIRIAM

Megillah 14a:14

Miriam was a prophetess, as it is written explicitly: “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand” (Exodus 15:20). The Gemara asks: Was she the sister only of Aaron, and not the sister of Moses? Why does the verse mention only one of her brothers? Rav Nahman said that Rav said: For she prophesied when she was the sister of Aaron, i.e., she prophesied since her youth, even before Moses was born, and she would say: My mother is destined to bear a son who will deliver the Jewish people to salvation. And at the time when Moses was born the entire house was filled with light, and her father stood and kissed her on the head, and said to her: My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled.

Sotah 12a:10-12

A Sage teaches: **Amram**, the father of Moses, **was the great man of his generation. Once he saw that the wicked Pharaoh said: “Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive” (Exodus 1:22), he said: We are laboring for nothing** by bringing children into the world to be killed. Therefore, **he arose and divorced his wife. All** others who saw this followed his example and **arose and divorced their wives. His daughter, Miriam, said to him: Father, your decree is more harsh** for the Jewish people **than that of Pharaoh, as Pharaoh decreed only with regard to the males, but you decreed both on the males and on the females.** And now no children will be born. Additionally, **Pharaoh decreed to kill them only in this world, but you decreed in this world and in the World-to-Come**, as those not born will not enter the World-to-Come. Miriam continued: Additionally, concerning **Pharaoh the wicked**, it is **uncertain** whether **his decree will be fulfilled**, and it is **uncertain** if his decree will **not be fulfilled. You are a righteous person**, and as such, **your decrees will certainly be fulfilled, as it is stated** with regard to the righteous: **“You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto you” (Job 22:28).** Amram accepted his daughter’s words and **arose and brought back**, i.e., remarried, **his wife**, and **all** others who saw this followed his example and **arose and brought back their wives.**

Megillah 14a:15

But once Moses was cast into the river, her father arose and rapped her on the head, saying to her: My daughter, where is your prophecy now, as it looked as though the young Moses would soon meet his end. **This is** the meaning of **that which is written** with regard to Miriam’s watching Moses in the river: **“And his sister stood at a distance to know** what would be done to him” (Exodus 2:4), i.e., **to know what would be with the end of her prophecy**, as she had prophesied that her brother was destined to be the savior of the Jewish people.

DEVORA

Megillah 14a:16

Deborah was a prophetess, **as it is written** explicitly: **“And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth” (Judges 4:4).** The Gemara asks: **What is** the meaning of **“the wife of Lappidoth”?** The Gemara answers: **For she used to make wicks for the Sanctuary**, and due to the flames [*lappidot*] on these wicks she was called the wife of Lappidoth, literally, a woman of flames.

Judges 4:9

She said, "I will certainly accompany you. However, you will not be glorified by the course you follow, because it is into a woman's hand that Adonoy will deliver Sisera." Devorah rose and accompanied Barak to Kedesh.

CHANA

Megillah 14a:18

Hannah was a prophetess, as it is written: “And Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoices in the Lord, my horn is exalted in the Lord” (I Samuel 2:1), and her words were prophecy, in that she said: “My horn is exalted,” and not: My pitcher is exalted. As, with regard to David and Solomon, who were anointed with oil from a horn, their kingship continued, whereas with regard to Saul and Jehu, who were anointed with oil from a pitcher, their kingship did not continue. This demonstrates that Hannah was a prophetess, as she prophesied that only those anointed with oil from a horn will merit that their kingships continue.

I Samuel 2:1-2

And Hannah prayed: My heart exults in the LORD; *I have triumphed* through the LORD. I gloat over my enemies; I rejoice in Your deliverance.

שמואל א ב' א'-ב'

וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר עֲלֵךְ לִבִּי בַיהוָה רָמָה קִרְנֵי
בַיהוָה רָחַב פִּי עַל-אֹיְבֵי כִי שָׂמַחְתִּי בִישׁוּעָתֶךָ:

AVIGAIL

Megillah 14a:21

Abigail was a prophetess, as it is written: “And it was so, as she rode on the donkey, and came down by the covert of the mountain” (I Samuel 25:20). The Gemara asks: Why does it say: “By the covert [*beseter*] of the mountain”? It should have said: From the mountain.

I Samuel 25:20

(20) She was riding on the ass and going down *a trail* on the hill, when David and his men appeared, coming down toward her; and she met them.—

שמואל א כ"ה כ'

(כ) וְהִיא הָיָא | רִכְבַּת עָלֶיהָ חֲמֹזֵר וַיֵּרְדוּת בְּסִתְרָה
הַהָר וְהִנֵּה דָוִד וְאֲנָשָׁיו יֹרְדִים לְקִרְאָתָהּ וַתִּפְגַּשׁ
אֹתָם:

Megillah 14a:22

The Gemara answers that in fact this must be understood as an allusion to something else. **Rabba bar Shmuel said: Abigail**, in her attempt to prevent David from killing her husband Nabal, came to David and questioned him **on account of menstrual blood that comes from the hidden parts [setarim]** of a body. How so? **She took** a blood-stained cloth **and showed it to him**, asking him to rule on her status, whether or not she was ritually impure as a menstruating woman. **He said to her: Is blood shown at night?** One does not examine blood-stained cloths at night, as it is difficult to distinguish between the different shades by candlelight. **She said to him:** If so, you should also remember another *halakha*: **Are cases of capital law tried at night?** Since one does not try capital cases at night, you cannot condemn Nabal to death at night. (*This is followed by more back and forth until David concedes that killing Nabal is not justified and would be a sin.*)

I Samuel 25:31-33

(31) do not let **this** be a cause of stumbling and of faltering courage to my lord that you have shed blood needlessly and that my lord sought redress with his own hands....” (32) David said to Abigail, “Praised be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! (33) And blessed be your prudence, and blessed be you yourself for restraining me from seeking redress in **blood** by my own hands.

שמואל א כ"ה:ל"א-ל"ג

(לא) וְלֹא תִהְיֶה זָמָת | לְךָ לְפִיּוּקָהּ וּלְמַכְשׁוֹל לֵב
 לְאֲדֹנָי וּלְשִׁפְדֵי-יָדַם חַנּוּם וּלְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֲדֹנָי לִי.....: {ס}
 (לב) וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לְאַבְיגַיִל בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְקִרְאָתִי: (לג) וּבְרוּךְ
 טַעֲמֶיךָ וּבְרוּכָה אַתְּ אֲשֶׁר כָּלַתְנִי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מִבְּוֹא
 בְּדָמַיִם וְהִשַׁע יָדַי לִי:

Megillah 14b:2

The Gemara asks: The plural term **damim**, literally, bloods, **indicates two**. Why did David not use the singular term **dam**? **Rather, this teaches that Abigail revealed her thigh**, and he lusted after her, **and he went three parasangs by the fire** of his desire for her, and **said to her: Listen to me**, i.e., listen to me and allow me to be intimate with you. Abigail then **said to him: “Let this not be a stumbling block for you”** (I Samuel 25:31). **By inference**, from the word **“this,”** it can be understood that **there is someone else** who will in fact be a stumbling block for him, **and what is this referring to? The incident involving Bathsheba. And in the end this is what was**, as indeed he stumbled with Bathsheba. This demonstrates that Abigail was a prophetess, as she knew that this would occur. This also explains why David blessed Abigail for keeping him from being responsible for two incidents involving blood that day: Abigail’s menstrual blood and the shedding of Nabal’s blood.

HULDAH

Megillah 14b:5

Huldah was a prophetess, **as it is written: “So Hilkiah the priest and Ahikam and Achbor and Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess”** (II Kings 22:14) as emissaries of King Josiah. The Gemara asks: **But if Jeremiah was found there, how could she prophesy?** Out of respect for Jeremiah, who was her superior, it would have been fitting that she not prophesy in his presence. The Sages of **the school of Rav say in the name of Rav: Huldah was a close relative of Jeremiah, and he did not object to her prophesying** in his presence.

Megillah 14b:6

The Gemara asks: **But how could Josiah himself ignore Jeremiah and send emissaries to Huldah?** The Sages of **the school of Rabbi Sheila say: Because women are more compassionate**, and he hoped that what she would tell them would not be overly harsh.

II Kings 22:10-20

(10) The scribe Shaphan also told the king, “The high priest Hilkiah has given me a scroll”; and Shaphan read it to the king. (11) When the king heard the words of the scroll of the Teaching, he rent his clothes. (12) And the king gave orders to the priest Hilkiah, and to Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Michaiah, the scribe Shaphan, and Asaiah the king’s minister: (13) “Go, inquire of GOD on my behalf, and on behalf of the people, and on behalf of all Judah, concerning the words of this scroll that has been found. For great indeed must be GOD’s wrath that has been kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this scroll to do all that has been prescribed for us.” (14) So the priest Hilkiah, and Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah—the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah son of Harhas, the keeper of the wardrobe—who was living in Jerusalem in the Mishneh, and they spoke to her. (15) She responded: “Thus said the ETERNAL, the God of Israel: Say to the one who sent you to me: (16) Thus said GOD: I am going to bring disaster upon this place and its inhabitants, in accordance with all the words of the scroll that the king of Judah has read. (17) Because they have forsaken Me and have made offerings to other gods and provoked My anger with all their deeds, My wrath is kindled against this place and it shall not be quenched. (18) But say this to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of GOD: Thus said the ETERNAL, the God of Israel: As for the words that you have heard— (19) because your heart was softened and you humbled yourself before GOD when you heard what I decreed against this place and its inhabitants—that it will become a desolation and a curse—and because you rent your clothes and wept before Me, I for My part have listened—declares GOD. (20) Assuredly, I will gather you to your ancestors and you will be laid in your tomb in peace. Your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.” So they brought back the reply to the king.

ESTHER

Megillah 14b:9

Esther was also a prophetess, **as it is written: “And it came to pass on the third day that Esther clothed herself in royalty”** (Esther 5:1). **It should have said:** Esther clothed herself in **royal garments. Rather,** this alludes to the fact **that she clothed herself with a divine spirit of inspiration. It is written here: “And she clothed herself,” and it is written elsewhere: “And the spirit clothed Amasai”** (I Chronicles 12:19). Just as there the reference is to being enclothed by a spirit, so too Esther was enclothed by a spirit of divine inspiration.

Esther 5:1

(1) On the third day, Esther put on **royal apparel** and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, facing the king’s palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace.

אסתר ה'א'

(א) וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מְלָכוֹת
וַתַּעֲמֵד בַּחֲצַר בַּיִת־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית נֹכַח בַּיִת
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא מְלָכוֹתוֹ בְּבַיִת
הַמְּלָכוֹת נֹכַח פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת:

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Jenna Andelman