

Having Men for Dinner: Biblical Women's Deadly Banquets

Session Two: Jael & Women of the Bible

Opening Reflection: What do we think of today as a woman's role? A man's role? Do you think we all agree on these role definitions?

Notes for Discussion Video

Pattern of Biblical Women Murderers (Duran)

- A) a powerful foreign male enemy
- B) a particular situation with the husband
- C) some sort of sexual tension
- D) food or drink as hospitality is involved
- E) a cold-blooded murder by a woman

Judges Cycle (See Reading 4 for the scriptural explanation of this cycle.)

- 1) The people sin against God.
- 2) An enemy comes to punish them
- 3) The people repent and turn to God
- 4) God raises up a judge to help
- 5) Peace
- 6) The judge dies

Other patterns discussed:

- 1) Poetic parallelism
- 2) Chiastic structure



Jael buys a tent stake.

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Big Things

- The Judges cycle
- The Hebrew Scriptures are full of patterns we can learn to recognize
 - Poetic Parallelism
 - Chiastic Structure
- Women are sometimes assumed to be sexual aggressors in the Bible
- It's important to read Bible stories in context
- It's important to know who is writing/publishing the books we use to interpret the Bible
- We have to be careful with our own cultural standards and expectations when we read the Hebrew Scripture. Good books can help us understand what the Word might have meant to its earliest readers.

Reading 1: Judges 4:18-24

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

“I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

“Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”

But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.

On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

Reading 2: Judges 5:25-30

“Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.
He asked for water, and she gave him milk;
in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.
Her hand reached for the tent peg,
her right hand for the workman’s hammer.
She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
At her feet he sank,
he fell; there he lay.
At her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.
“Through the window peered Sisera’s mother;
behind the lattice she cried out,
‘Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?’
The wisest of her ladies answer her;
indeed, she keeps saying to herself,
‘Are they not finding and dividing the spoils:
a woman or two for each man,
colorful garments as plunder for Sisera,
colorful garments embroidered,
highly embroidered garments for my neck—
all this as plunder?’

Italicized lines here are examples of poetic parallelism found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. It is quite common in Hebrew poetry to reiterate the point in the following line.

Reading 3: Judges 3:20-25

Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king rose from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, “He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the palace.” They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead.

Reading 4: Judges 2:16-19

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord’s commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.