

4:17-22 The downfall of Sisera

1. Book of Judith, Chapter 13, Revised Standard Version

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew. Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence. They went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted so long. But Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was dead drunk.

2. Malbim to 4:17

היו בית חבר מבני ישראל, ואיך לא יריבו ריב עמם ואלקיהם:

The family of Chever were Jews; how could they not battle for their nation and their Gd?

3. Malbim to 4:17

השלום שבין יבין ובית חבר היה שלום כולל עם בני קיני השוכנים במדבר יהודה, שעז"א ובין בית חבר הקיני, ועתה שנפרד חבר מאת אחיו ונטה אהלו בין ב", אין עליו חיוב הברית של בני קיני...

The peace between Yavin and Chever's house included all of the Keini of the Judean Desert, as it said, "Between the house of Chever haKeini." Now Chever left his brothers and pitched his tent among the Jews, and he was not beholden to the covenant of the Keini.

4. Abarbanel to 4:18

...שנתחברו שתי הסבות לשמצאה יעל מקום לעשות זה הפעל. הראשונה היא כי בעניני המלכים אין הדבר אסור או מותר, נאה או מגונה, כי אם ע"פ הדברים אשר ישימו ויקימו ביניהם, וכאשר חבר הקיני עשה שלומו התחכם מאד ואמר כי שלום בין יבין מלך חצור ובין בית חבר הקיני, הנה לא אמר "בין בית יבין" ... והסבה השנית כי סיסרא לא הלך לאהל חבר הקיני כי אם לאהל אשתו... וידוע מנימוסי המלכים שאין האשה מחוייבת לדברים שיעשה הבעל...

Two reasons combined to enable Yael to do this. First: In royal affairs, acts are prohibited or permitted, attractive or disgraceful, exclusively based on the arrangements they make. When Chever haKeini made peace he was very clever, saying the peace would be between King Yavin of Chatzor and the house of Chever haKeini, and not "between the house of Yavin"... And the second reason was that Sisera did not go to the tent of Chever haKeini, but to his wife's tent... And it is known in royal rules that women are not obligated by their husbands' deeds....

5. Book of Judith, Chapter 13, Revised Standard Version

Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag. Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to do for prayer.... From a distance Judith called out to the sentries at the gates, "Open, open the gate! Gd, our Gd, is with us, still showing His power in Israel and his strength against our enemies, as He has done today!"... Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise Gd, O praise Him! Praise Gd, who has not withdrawn His mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!" Then she pulled the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me."

Women and War

6. Mishnah Sotah 8:7

במלחמת מצוה הכל יוצאין אפילו (יואל ב') חתן מחדרו וכלה מחופתה

In mitzvah wars everyone goes, even the groom from his room and the bride from her chuppah.

7. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra to Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:4

וי"ל דה"ק כיון דחתן יוצא מחדרו כלה יוצאה מחופתה שאינה נוהגת ימי חופה ואפשר דבמלחמת מצוה הנשים היו מספקות מים ומזון לבעליהן וכן המנהג היום בערביות

One could suggest that he was saying that a groom leaves his chamber and a bride leaves her chuppah, since they won't observe the days of the chuppah. Or, perhaps, in a mitzvah war the women provide water and food for their husbands, as is the custom today in Arab lands.

8. Rashi to Talmud, Ketuvot 51b

והא קא משלחן להו גירי - כשנלחמין מזמנות ומושיטות להם היצים לירות.

"But don't they give the thieves arrows" – When they fight, the women prepare and provide arrows for them to fire.

9. Rambam, Sefer haMitzvot, Introduction to the count of mitzvot

וידוע שאין הנשים... ולא נלחמות במלחמת רשות.

It is known that women do not... fight in optional wars.

10. Talmud, Nazir 59a, with Rashi

רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר מנין שלא תצא אשה בכלי זיין למלחמה ת"ל לא יהיה כלי גבר על אשה ולא ילבש גבר שמלת אשה.

רש"י: וזה שמצינו ביעל אשת חבר הקיני שלא הרגתו לסיסרא בכלי זיין אלא כמו שנאמר ידה ליתד תשלחנה.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: How do we know that a woman may not go out to war with weapons? It is written, 'The implements of a man shall not be upon a woman.'

Rashi: As far as Yael, wife of Chever haKeini, she did not kill Sisera with a weapon; rather, as it is said, "She sent her hand to the peg."