

Wikked Wyves

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Of latter date, of wyves hath he red,
That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed,
And lete hir lechour dighte hir al the night
Whyl that the corps lay in the floor up-right.
And somme han drive nayles in hir brayn
Whyl that they slepte, and thus they han hem slayn.

“The Wife of Bath's Prologue,” *The Canterbury Tales*

Tamar

Genesis 38:6-28

(6) Judah got a wife for Er his first-born; her name was Tamar. (7) But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD, and the LORD took his life. (8) Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother." (9) But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. (10) What he did was displeasing to the LORD, and He took his life also. (11) Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house. (12) A long time afterward the wife of Judah died. When his period of mourning was over, Judah went up to Timnah to visit his sheep shearers with his friend Hirah the Adullamite. (13) And Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheep shearing." (14) So she took off her widow's garb, covered her face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife. (15) When Judah saw her, he took her for a prostitute for she had covered her face. (16) So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you"—for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. "What," she

בראשית לח:ו-כח

(ו) וַיִּקַּח יְהוּדָה אִשָּׁה לְעֵר בְּכוֹרֹו וַשְׁמָה תָמָר: (ז) וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיִּמָּתֶהוּ יְהוָה: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְאוֹנָן בֶּן אֶלְיָאֶשֶׁת אָחִיו וַיְבִיחֶם אֲתָה וְהָקָם זָרַע לְאָחִיו: (ט) וַיֵּדַע אוֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזָּרַע וְהָיָה אִם־בָּא אֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ אָחִיו וַשְׁחַת אֶרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי נָתַן־זָרַע לְאָחִיו: (י) וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּמָּת גַּם־אֹתוֹ: (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְתָמָר פְּלֹתוֹ שְׁבִי אֶלְמִנָּה בֵּית־אָבִיךָ עַד־יִגְדֹּל שְׁלָה בְנִי כִי אָמַר פְּוִי־יָמוֹת גַּם־הוּא פֹאֲחִיו וַתִּלְךְ תָּמָר וַתֵּשֶׁב בֵּית אָבִיהָ: (יב) וַיִּרְבוּ הַיָּמִים וַתִּמָּת בֶּת־שׁוּעַ אִשְׁת־יְהוּדָה וַיִּגָּחַם יְהוּדָה וַיַּעַל עַל־גִּזְנוֹ צֹאנוֹ הוּא וְחִירָה רַעְהוּ הָעֶדְלָמִי תַמְנָתָה: (יג) וַיִּגַּד לְתָמָר לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה חָמִיךָ עָלָה תַמְנָתָה לְגַזּוֹ צֹאנוֹ: (יד) וַתִּסָּר בְּגָדֶיהָ אֶלְמִנּוּתָהּ מֵעַלֶיהָ וַתִּכְסּ בַּצִּעִירָהּ וַתַּחְעֲלֶף וַתֵּשֶׁב בַּפֶּתַח עֵינִים אִשָּׁר עַל־דְּרָךְ תַמְנָתָה כִּי רָאתָה כִּי־גָדֹל שְׁלָה וְהוּא לֹא־נָתַןָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: (טו) וַיִּרְאֶה יְהוּדָה וַיַּחְשַׁבֶּה לְזוֹנָה כִּי כִסְתָה פָנֶיהָ: (טז) וַיֵּט אֶלֶיהָ אֶל־הַדְּרָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲבֵה־נָא אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ כִּי לֹא יָדַע כִּי כִלְתּוֹ הוּא וַתֹּאמֶר מַה־תַּתּוֹנֵלִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֵלַי: (יז) וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח גְּדִי־עֲזִים מִן־הַצֹּאן וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־תָּתַן עֲרָבוֹן עַד שְׁלֹחֶךָ: (יח) וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הָעֲרָבוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתּוֹנֶךָ וַתֹּאמֶר חֲתָמֶךָ וּפְתִילֶךָ וּמַטְּךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדֶךָ וַיִּתְּנָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַתְּהַר לוֹ: (יט) וַתִּקַּם וַתִּלְךְ וַתִּסָּר צִעִיפָה מֵעַלֶיהָ וַתִּלְבַּשׁ בְּגָדֵיהָ אֶלְמִנּוּתָהּ: (כ) וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוּדָה אֶת־גְּדֵי הָעֲזִים כִּי־רָעוּ רַעְהוּ הָעֶדְלָמִי לְקַחַת הָעֲרָבוֹן מִיַּד הָאִשָּׁה וְלֹא מִצָּאָהּ: (כא) וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־אֲנָשֵׁי מְקוֹמָהּ לֵאמֹר אֵיךָ הִקְדַּשְׁתָּה הוּא בְּעֵינֵים עַל־הַדְּרָךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא־הִיתָה בָּנָה קְדֻשָּׁה: (כב) וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל־יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא מִצָּאָתִיךָ וְגַם אֲנָשֵׁי הַמְּקוֹם אָמְרוּ לֹא־הִיתָה בָּנָה קְדֻשָּׁה: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה תִּקַּח־לָּהּ חֵן וְהִיָּה לְרוֹז הַזֶּה וְשִׁלַּח־חֵל הַגְּדִי הַזֶּה וְאִסַּח

Talmud Bavli Makkot 23b

מכות כג:

Rabbi Elazar says: In three places the Divine Spirit appeared before all to affirm that the action taken was appropriate: In the court of Shem, in the court of Samuel the Ramathite, and in the court of Solomon. The Gemara elaborates: This occurred in the court of Shem, as it is written in the context of the episode of Judah and Tamar:

“And Judah acknowledged them and said: She is more righteous than I [*mimēni*]” (Genesis 38:26). How did Judah know that Tamar’s assertion that she was bearing his child was correct? Perhaps, just as he went to her and hired her as a prostitute, another person went to her and hired her as well. Rather, a Divine Voice emerged and said: It is from Me [*mimēni*] that these secrets emerged.

א"ר אלעזר בג' מקומות הופיע רוח הקודש בבית דינו של שם ובבית דינו של שמואל הרמתי ובבית דינו של שלמה בבית דינו של שם דכתיב (בראשית לח, כו) ויכר יהודה ויאמר צדקה ממני מנא ידע דלמא כי היכי דאזל איהו לגבה אזל נמי אינש אחרינא [לגבה] יצאת בת קול ואמרה ממני יצאו כבושים:

Yael**Judges 4:1-3**

שופטים ד:א-ג

The Israelites again did what was offensive to God... And God surrendered them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. His army commander was Sisera, whose base was Harosheth-goiim. The Israelites cried out to God; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he had oppressed Israel ruthlessly for twenty years.

ויספּוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַרַע בְּעֵינֵי יי
וְאֵהוּד מֵת: וַיִּמְכְּרֵם יי בְּיַד יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ-כְּנָעַן
אֲשֶׁר מֶלֶךְ בְּחָצוֹר וְשָׂר-צָבָאוֹ סִיסֵרָא וְהוּא
יּוֹשֵׁב בְּחַרְשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם: וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל-יי כִּי תִלְשַׁע מֵאֹת רַכְב־בַּרְזֶל לּוֹ וְהוּא
לָחַץ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחַזְקָה עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה:
(ס)

Judges 5:24-27

(24) Most blessed of women be Jael,
Wife of Heber the Kenite, Most blessed
of women in tents. (25) He asked for
water, she offered milk; In a princely
bowl she brought him curds. (26) Her
[left] hand reached for the tent pin, Her
right for the workmen's hammer. She
struck Sisera, crushed his head,
Smashed and pierced his temple. (27)
At her feet he sank, lay outstretched, At
her feet he sank, lay still; Where he
sank, there he lay—destroyed.

שופטים ה:כד-כז

(כד) תְּבָרַךְ מְנַשִּׁים יֵעָל אִשָּׁת חֶבֶר הַקֵּינִי
מְנַשִּׁים בְּאֵהָל תְּבָרַךְ: (כה) מֵיִם שָׁאֵל חֶלְבִּב
נִתְּנָה בְּסִפְלֵי אֲדִירִים הַקְּרִיבָה חֶמְאָה: (כו)
יָדָהּ לַיְתָד תִּשְׁלַחנָה וַיְמִינָה לְהִלְמוֹת עַמְלִים
וְהִלְמָה סִיסְרָא מִתְּקֵה רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּמְחָצֶה וַחֲלָפָה
רָקְתוֹ: (כז) בֵּין רַגְלֶיהָ פָּרַע נֶפֶל שָׁכַב בֵּין
רַגְלֶיהָ פָּרַע נֶפֶל בְּאִזְרֵי פָּרַע נָשָׁם נֶפֶל
שָׁדוּד:

Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, Pseudo-Philo

Now Yael took a stake in her left hand and approached him, saying, "If God will work this sign with me, I know that Sisera will fall into my hands. Behold I will throw him down on the ground from the bed on which he sleeps; and if he does not feel it, I know that he has been handed over." And Yael took Sisera and pushed him onto the ground from the bed. But he did not feel it, because he was very groggy.

And Yael said, "Strengthen in me today, Lord, my arm on account of you and your people and those who hope in you." And Jael took the stake and put it on his temple and struck it with a hammer. While he was dying, Sisera said to Yael, "Behold pain has taken hold of me, Yael, and I die like a woman." Yael replied, "Go, boast before your father in hell and tell him that you have fallen into the hands of a woman."

Talmud Bavli Horayot 10b

And Ulla says: Tamar engaged in licentiousness with Judah (Genesis, chapter 38), and Zimri engaged in licentiousness with Cozbi (Numbers 25:6–9). Tamar engaged in licentiousness, and kings and prophets emerged from her. Zimri engaged in licentiousness, and tens of thousands from the Jewish people fell. Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak says: A transgression performed for the sake of Heaven is greater than a mitzvah performed for personal gain, as it is stated: “Blessed above women shall be Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, above women in the tent shall she be blessed” (Judges 5:24). Who are these “women in the tent”? They are Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah.

Rahav**הוריות י:**

ואמר עולא תמר זנתה וזימרי זינה תמר זנתה יצאו ממנה מלכים ונביאים זימרי זינה נפלו כמה רבבות מישראל אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצוה שלא לשמה שנאמר (שופטים ה, כד) תבורך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקיני מנשים באהל תבורך מאן נינהו נשים באהל שרה רבקה רחל ולאה

Joshua 2:1-7

(2) The king of Jericho was told, “Some men have come here tonight, Israelites, to spy out the country.” (3) The king of Jericho thereupon sent orders to Rahab: “Produce the men who came to you and entered your house, for they have come to spy out the whole country.” (4) The woman, however, had taken the two men and hidden them. “It is true,” she said, “the men did come to me, but I didn’t know where they were from. (5) And at dark, when the gate was about to be closed, the men left; and I don’t know where the men went. Quick, go after them, for you can overtake them.”— (6) Now she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax which she had lying on the roof.— (7) So the men pursued them in the direction of the Jordan down to the fords; and no sooner had the pursuers gone out than the gate

Talmud Bavli Zevachim 116b

The Sages said with regard to Rahab: She was ten years old when the Jewish people left Egypt, and she engaged in prostitution all forty years that the Jewish people were in the wilderness. After that, when she was fifty years old, she converted when the two spies visited her. She said: May I be redeemed as a reward for having endangered myself with the rope, window, and flax, by means of which I saved Joshua’s two spies.

יהושע ב:א-ז

וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּנֵי נֹדִים מִן־הַשְּׂטִיִּים שְׁנַיִם־אֲנָשִׁים
 מִרְגְּלִים תְּרִישׁ לֵאמֹר לְכוּ רְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 וְאֶת־יְרִיחוֹ וְיָלְכוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בֵּית־אִשָּׁה זֹנֶה וּשְׂמָהּ
 רַחַב וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ־שָׁמָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר לְמֶלֶךְ יְרִיחוֹ לֵאמֹר
 הִנֵּה אֲנָשִׁים בָּאוּ הַנְּהַל הַלַּיְלָה מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחַפֵּר
 אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּשְׁלַח מֶלֶךְ יְרִיחוֹ אֶל־רַחַב לֵאמֹר
 הֲוָצִיאי הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבָּאִים אֵלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ לְבֵיתְךָ
 כִּי לְחַפֵּר אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ: וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה
 אֶת־שְׁנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וַתַּצְפְּנֵם וַתֹּאמֶר אֲנִי בָאוּ אֵלַי
 הָאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי מֵאִן הֵמָּה: וַיְהִי הַשָּׁעַר
 לְסֹגֹר בַּחֲשֹׁךְ וְהָאֲנָשִׁים יָצְאוּ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אָנָּה הֵלְכוּ
 הָאֲנָשִׁים רֹדְפוּ מֵהָר אַחֲרֵיהֶם כִּי תִשְׁיִגּוּם: וְהָיָה
 הַעֲלָתָם הַגָּגָה וַתִּטְמְנֵם בְּפִשְׁתֵּי הָעֵץ הָעֲרֻכּוֹת לָהּ
 עַל־הַגָּג: וְהָאֲנָשִׁים רֹדְפוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם דָּרָד הַיַּרְדֵּן עַל
 הַמַּעְבְּרוֹת וְהַשָּׁעַר סָגְרוּ אַחֲרָיָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ
 הַרְדָּפִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם:

זבחים קטז:

אמרו בת י' שנים היתה כשיצאו ישראל
 ממצרים וזנתה [כל] מ' שנה שהיו ישראל
 במדבר אחר נ' שנה נתגיירה אמרה יהא
 מחול לי בשכר חבל חלון ופשתים:

Pesikta Rabbati 40:3

And God will judge the world in righteousness, God will minister judgment to the peoples with uprightness" (Psalms 9:9). What is the meaning of uprightness? Rabbi Alexandri said: God judged the nations with the uprightness they possessed. [For example] Rahab, Jethro and Ruth. How will God speak to the nations of the world? [God will say]: "Why did you not bring yourself closer to me?" And they will say: "I was a utterly evil person and I was embarrassed." And God will say to them: "You were no more so than Rahab whose house was in the city wall and she received robbers and prostituted within. Nevertheless, she drew close to me and did I not welcome her and raise up prophets and righteous people from her?"

דבר אחר בחדש השביעי פתח והוא
ישפוט תבל בצדק ידין לאומים במישרים
(תהלים ט' ט') מהו במישרים אמר ר'
אלכסנדרי דן את האומות במישרים
שלהם ברחב ביתרו ברות כיצד אומר
לאומות העולם למה לא קרבת אצלי והוא
אומר שהייתי רשע מוחלט והייתי
מתבייש והוא אומר לו וכי יותר היית
מרחב שהיה ביתה בקיר החומה והייתה
מקבלת את הליסטים ומזנה מבפנים
וכשנתקרבה אצלי לא קיבלתיה והעמדתי
ממנה נביאים וצדיקים

Talmud Bavli Megillah 15a

The Sages taught: There were four women of extraordinary beauty in the world: Sarah, and Abigail, Rahab, and Esther.

מגילה טו.

תנו רבנן ארבע נשים יפיפיות היו בעולם
שרה (ואביגיל רחב) ואסתר

Talmud Bavli Megillah 14b

Eight prophets, who were also priests, descended from Rahab the prostitute, and they are: Neriah; his son Baruch; Seraiah; Mahseiah; Jeremiah; his father, Hilkiyah; Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel; and Hanamel's father, Shallum. Rabbi Yehuda said: So too, Huldah the prophetess was a descendant of Rahab the prostitute.

מגילה יד:

שמונה נביאים והם כהנים יצאו מרחב
הזונה ואלו הן נריה ברוך ושריה מחסיה
ירמיה חלקיה חנמאל ושלוש רבי יהודה
אומר אף חולדה הנביאה מבני בניה של
רחב הזונה