



## Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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Series III: The Temple Tifereth-Israel, 1946-1993, undated.

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Mothers in Israel, 1958.



**"MOTHERS IN ISRAEL"**

A new look at some beloved heroines

**THE TEMPLE**

May 11, 1958

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

Somewhat more than a century ago the noted British author and social critic, Thomas Carlyle, published a series of short essays entitled "On Heroes and Hero Worship". The purpose of these articles was a simple one. Carlyle proposed to underscore the unique importance to human civilization of the creative individual. He felt that history cannot be explained simply as a cantation of impersonal forces. We cannot understand the development of world thought without understanding the contribution of that unique genius Socrates. Mohammed unleashed a new world and a new world power in an area which had been supine and asleep. Shakespeare fashioned the English language into a tool of beauty and great classic form, but before his day it had been simply another of the popular folk-languages of our world. The scheme, the fabric of world history bears indelibly imprinted upon it the mark of men of genius, of these rare individuals who give to whatever discipline their mind is concerned with new dimension and new direction. I recommend the rereading of Carlyle's essays to you. You will find them crammed with information, you will find them a delight as far as its style is concerned. But more important I think that you will find them a healthy corrective to some of our modern philosophies of life. We live in an age which tends to discount the individual. It is the mass, not the man, that is supremely important. Various economic theories, not the least of them those of the communists, tell us that man is a prisoner of vast economic forces which he can neither mitigate nor control. Man they picture much like the protagonists of those ancient Greek dramas who, how much he might rail



against his fate, could neither change it nor prevent whatever the stars had in store for him. Many philosophies, especially the philosophies of history, those philosophies which originate with Hegel, tell us that man is a sport of the vast forces of life. He neither makes his future nor controls his destiny. Various historic lores of growth and decay, of challenge and response, much similar to those popularized recently by Mr. Arnold Toynbee, these are the forces which govern life and not the individual will and talents of the individual man. And the nascent science of sociology has made us all aware of the importance which the group plays in the development of civilization. All these things, then, have made us conscious of the group, of the class, of the nation, and not of the single lone man of spirit, man of creativity. I suppose that it is extremely understandable that we have cultivated in our day and age these philosophies of the mass. We live in an age which has seen an explosion of world population. We have been moved, each of us, further and further away from the centers of power and of decision. We live in an age of new science, new technology, and few of us have mastered the intricacies of this new age, of this new thought. Few of us feel wholly confident to make the necessary social and political and economic decisions and meet the future which now faces us. Life has become infinitely more complex. The decisions which we must make have become at the same time infinitely more crucial and final. If we make a mistake we may have no second chance. It is easy then to see why man has tried to rationalize his feelings of frustration and of insecurity. Certainly it is easier for the ego to feel that we in no way can change our future, for if we feel thus, we can accept whatever defeat and whatever frustration life holds in store.

There is only one trouble with all of these theories. They find absolutely no substantiation in life. Carlyle quotes for us chapter and verse of men of rare genius who changed the whole path of human history, the whole direction of the growth of human civilization. We cannot deny these facts, and we cannot deny the common sense that tells us that in our own life we are not marionettes,



puppets, dangling at the end of a string, our every action controlled and manipulated by some unseen hand. Now we know that we make our lives, we make our future. Whether we work or are indolent, whether we sacrifice or are selfish, whether we are indifferent to the decisions of politics which face our community or whether we concern ourselves and are educated about them - these decisions which each of us individually face, which no man or power makes for us - these decisions mold our future. They mold the future of our families, and to a very great sense our individual decisions taken in the large mold the future of mankind.

Carlyle, then, speaks a lesson spoken centuries before him, in our own Bible. In the Book of Deuteronomy you will find a challenge to man which needs no commentary, only commitment. "See, I have set before you", God says, "this day life and the good, death and the evil. Choose life, that ye may live." The power of life, hope, these are in the hands of man, in the hands of the individual man. Our Bible begins not with philosophy. Our Bible does not begin with theology or with law. It begins with history, it begins with biography, with the tales of Abraham and of the Patriarchs, of Moses, of Aaron, of Elijah, and of the Prophets, of that whole generation of men who forged Judaism and who gave life and flesh and a future to what might otherwise have been a pallid and insubstantial doctrine. These are the men whose stamp is imprinted in every act of worship which we sanctify, in every holiday which we celebrate, in every moral value which we gain from our tradition. They gave it to us. They founded it in the world, they spoke it to their age, they wrote of it in their holy books, and we are their heirs. Judaism, like Carlyle, insists on the importance of the creative personality. We differ from Carlyle, however, in this - Carlyle thought only of the men of reknown, of unique genius and unique ability. He spoke in the long line of tradition of men who have drunk deeply from the fountain of Greek philosophy and knowledge, of all those generations of thinkers who have insisted that there are some who must be ruled, and some who are fit to rule. He makes a separation in his own mind between the mass, the ordinary, the canaille, and the aristocrat, the noble, the man of unique powers and talents. Judaism is



quite other. Judaism is the history of a slave people, of a people from the most humble and ordinary of origins, slaves, serfs, desert nomads. It is the grand and magnificent tale of a people who despite their origins were able to find the spiritual grandeur which coursed about them in the world, and speak it that all men might hear. Judaism thinks of the greatness in the ordinary man. Carlyle thinks that the ordinary man cannot be great. Judaism speaks that every man having been created in the image of God, that each of us is in his own way potentially but little lower than the angels. Judaism gave the world the gospel of democracy, and Carlyle, despite his insistence upon the value of the individual, gave to fascism aid and support.

We differ from Carlyle also in this, and perhaps this point of view derives from what I have just said. Re-read the book of Carlyle, re-read his biographies. You will not find a single woman set down therein. In all the ages of world history, from all of the acts of greatness and of heroism which have been performed, Carlyle could not find a single woman worthy to be set down and inscribed on his pages. And the same is strangely true of the biographer of the Greek and Roman world, Plutarch. He gives us some seventy lives in his biography, the lives of seventy of the wisest and most renowned and the most heroic and noble of all of Rome and Greece, of all of the ancient world. Not a single woman is worthy to be inscribed on his pages. Open instead the frontispiece of your Bible. Look down its table of contents. You will see that twenty-two books bear the title of their principle protagonist. Two of these, the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther, bear the title of women, bear the title of their own heroine. Nor is this a bit of male gallantry, for certainly the beautiful Esther, who was willing to put her life, her security, her position in jeopardy for the sake of her people is worthy of being entitled; and surely the gentle and gracious Ruth, who personifies and epitomizes all that is loving and loyal and lovely in human character, surely this heroine too deserves the honor of her history being titled by the name. The Bible gives us a full portrait gallery of women of strength, of women of character, of heroic women. The



Bible did not set apart any class or any sex and say that these are ordinary people, common people, people in which you will not find nobility. They found nobility among the common man, they found nobility among the women of Israel. And as I re-read the stories of the noble women in our Bible I was struck by one fact. These are not women who live in a closed, separate world recipes and coiffures and dresses and the like. These are women of strength, women of action, women who live in a world not unlike our own in which they take their place when necessary in the political arena and in the market place and among all the affairs of mankind. These are women of strength.

The first story in our Bible is a fable, it is a myth. We know it well - the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. I ask you who is the stronger willed of the two. Is it not Eve, who bedevils her husband to accede to her wish and to sin against God? Is it not she who makes him accomplice to her acts? Turn a few pages more, to the story of the first mother in Israel, Sarah, wife of Abraham. Sarah was so strong willed that she was able to force her husband to drive away from his tent Hagar, his second wife, though our Bible tells us this matter was extremely grievous for him to do. Fortunately the strength of will exhibited by these mothers of Israel was often put to better use than bedevilling their husbands. Think of Miriam. Think of Miriam, sister of Moses. Think of her on the day when the Jews were about to leave Egypt. The host was assembled. Baggage was packed. The camels were ready to be led into the desert, and there was that awful moment of indecision which always comes before a people actually takes the first step into its future. And here our Bible portrays to us Miriam passing to and fro among the host of Israel, encouraging, giving spirit, giving hope, encouraging the people to march confidently with their God into the desert. And when the Jews have successfully crossed the Red Sea it is Miriam who is chosen to sing the great song of triumphant liberation to God. Think of Deborah, judge of Israel, a matriarch of the tribe of Ephraim. She lived some hundred years or so after the Jews had begun their invasion of Canaan. She lived at a time when the many cities of the Jews in Canaan were surrounded and



often attacked by enemy hosts. For twenty years now the Canaanite king Sisera had attacked first one city and then the next. All Israel was weak, all Israel was wounded, and there was none in Israel, no man in Israel who was willing to bear arms and dare in open combat the hosts of this bandit king Sisera. It required a woman - the spirit and the will of a woman - to force the Jews to be courageous, to force a certain Barach, General of the tribes of Israel, to summon his hosts. And only when she had promised Barach that she would go into battle with him, only then did the hosts of Israel march off and throw off in battle the yoke of twenty years of oppression and tyranny.

Israel owes much to women of strength, women of action. They owe much to a certain prophetess Hulda. She lived in the early part of the seventh century before the common era. She was undoubtedly one of the major forces behind what we know as the Deuteronomic Revolution, or Reformation. It was a reformation of Judaism which drove out from our midst many of the pagan practices which over the ages had seeped in. A woman, Athalia, albeit not a good woman, was for a time queen of all Israel. Israel's women were neither giddy nor flighty nor shy. They were willing in the home, in their communities, to march alongside of their husbands. But fortunately - fortunately the women of Israel never forgot that they were - whatever their opportunities in the larger life - they were essentially women, wives, and mothers. When Lemuel in the last chapter of the Book of Proverbs paints that glorious picture of the Jewish woman which you heard sung this morning it is not as prophetess and not as judge and not as warrior that he commends her, but he commends the woman who "looks well to the ways of her household". He commends the woman whose "children raise up and call her blessed". He commends the mother. He commends the wife. And it is as mothers of Israel, both literally and symbolically, that Sarah and Rachel and Rebecca are known and beloved to us. And it is as a surrogate mother that really Miriam gains her fame as she watches over the canoe cradle of the little boy Moses tossing in the Nile and as she nurses the growing lad Moses in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh. And perhaps the woman Hannah, mother of the great judge



Samuel, stands and typifies all that is great in these mothers of Israel in her acts of self-denial and of renunciation for her God and for her son. It is as a mother the woman of Israel reaches her finest hour. And strangely it is as a mother that the women of Israel most control and affect the destiny of our people. For it is a mother who makes, in a very real sense, the visions which are her sons' or her daughters', the character which is her sons' or her daughters', the set of values and of standards which are theirs. She it is in the cradle, in the crib, in the early formative stages which Freud has so underscored in importance to us - it is she who makes the molders of the future what they will be, in a very real sense makes them strong or weak, gives them the visions or the selfishness to make tomorrow a thing of glory or an hour of frustrated despair.

And so if we were to write postscript this day to the essays of Mr. Carlyle, we would agree with him that each of us in a very real sense, within the limits of our common mortality, controls our destiny and molds our future. And we would pray that those women who are blessed with motherhood find in their hearts courage, dedication, understanding and vision sufficient for their offspring to mold that future of which now we only dream and pray.

Amen.



Some of more than a century ago the illustrious English author, Thomas Thorne Thorne published a series of books entitled On the  
History of the English Language. His purpose was essentially a simple one. To understand the importance of the creative individual in history. This is not only a record of the man but of man - origin - creative - interpretation of individual. Language of modern language under some of our history. Studies have found an English language of unprecedented depth & breadth. Societies have brought new order & system to the world of language. "History" brought something unique and fresh into the world. If we would understand the individual of civilization we must understand not only the basic life force of the man but the creative role of man of culture & genius.

[illegible]



One might find many apprehensions for the future with regard to  
unlimited human power. Anticipated difficulties due to friction. The world's  
population has grown so rapidly. Our land has become unhealthily  
concentrated. Our stock has multiplied and no more standard  
have been set. As we struggle to adjust to all these new  
find our head aches with confusion. The only solution is to  
tension to not come a long. As it seems we are  
nationalistic feelings. To be in that we are personally  
to free us of responsibilities for each other.

[illegible]

The English on Babel insist that men in an efficient age -  
 wisdom is denied of in material men except his fortune. The Bible  
 begins with history and biography not Babel and Babel. - It is only  
 the education of men - education - power - custom - religion - custom  
 The material and concrete created Judas in regard to life. He is it and been  
 for some Judas in regard to men, humanism - history - it is not  
 have received a pale due to the material change in fortune.

Where Coughman's Ball differs is that Coughman only the  
tense of an accidental rule is Ball as represented to  
in the ordering pattern. Coughman <sup>Plurals</sup> as <sup>order</sup> as well as of Plurals  
and of each whole tending of would be a good rule as a whole







The Bible delights to portray women. When like Sarah they are of exceptional beauty, it dwells on the charm. But in 2 verses & those brief 2 can furnish by one feat of almost every female biography. These are women of strength who play a full and active part in the affairs of their world. The Bible is aware we are introduced in a woman's world of recipes and dinner. ~~They~~ <sup>They</sup> ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> neither flighty nor giddy - if I had to describe them by one single term - I would choose strength - strength of will and strength of character.

The Garden of Eden episode may be fiction - but much you will - It is Eve not Adam who makes the decision to break God's law. It is Eve who persuades her husband to become accomplice in her sin. Though this fall was written by men - strength rests here with the "woman self".

Move on to Sarah. The story is a bit complicated but her character is one worth knowing. Sarah was Abraham's first wife. Their union a love match - a ~~very~~ <sup>union</sup> most unusual in that day. But Sarah even barren through long years she could produce for her husband neither son nor heir. Despite a cultural climate which permitted polygamy, Abraham remained faithful <sup>to her</sup> and had no other wife. Finally, in middle age Sarah became resigned to her fate. Yet she could not accept the fact that Abraham would die without issue. Taking the initiative Sarah insisted that Abraham take to wife one of her maids - a certain Hagar. Perhaps in this way a child might be born. Indeed, Hagar did give birth to a son - Ishmael and Abraham ~~was~~ <sup>gave</sup> ~~her~~ <sup>not</sup> a son but to enjoy the company of his lady. Thirteen years later a miracle occurred. Sarah's womb was opened & God gave her a child. Now that she had produced also a son - Sarah insisted that Hagar & Ishmael be sent away - & the Bible records "and though the request was grievous in the eyes of Abraham he acquiesced".

Sarah's women were not unskilled. Fortunately their character was often put to better use than ordering about their husbands. When the slave bonds were abolished for the Exodus from Egypt - many trembled at the irrevocable decision. Fear moved to open in the camp. Then Miriam, Moses' sister, pointed about among the people exhorting



then - and even so then - buying the best of evidence of the day.  
Muir gave the people the word to move and it was the word  
voice the revolution under the God's had been accomplished.

A century or two later another woman Deborah gave Israel  
the courage to survive. The conquest of Palestine was not yet complete.  
Scattered people scattered all over the land but they were always subject  
to the rule of neighboring tribes - whose bonds. There were no peace.  
For twenty years now the armies of the Canaanite King Achish had  
terrorized the countryside. Israeli men learned to meet him in  
open combat. Slender, - pale, - and young men his. Men joined to  
defend the women - But not Deborah - one of the revered  
mothers of the tribe of Ephraim. It was she who summoned  
Deborah's husband for war. It was she who called Israeli soldiers  
warrior Barak to head the army. The men came but failed to  
do battle. <sup>Only if Deborah</sup> ~~Barak~~ marched with her would they  
advance against him - So Deborah led the men into battle on  
a chosen day for Deborah a great victory & deliverance.

Deborah's women were women of courage & action. ~~What is the~~  
~~woman and her story - not the story of a woman but the story of a~~ In Bible  
Day a woman, Deborah was for a time queen and supreme ruler of  
all Israel. A woman leader - a prophetess was undoubtedly one of the  
principal agents of the important Deuteronomistic Reform which ended in  
the 7th century BCE the Jewish religion of <sup>pagan</sup> ~~polytheism~~ <sup>monism</sup>  
that could be forgotten. A life that never ends that you might  
recognize that the Biblical woman would not feel out of place in  
the modern world. She would ~~find~~ have found a place in  
modern area of life her talent & opportunities anticipated.

The Biblical woman is a person of - trust & devotion - but  
she is also - and primarily - a mother. When Deborah wants to say the  
praises of Deborah's women - it is as wife and mother - to provide and  
handover, but to provide her "the women who lead well to the ways  
of her household" "on whom longer than is the law of kindness"  
and are the mothers "whose children rise up & still can be named"



The Bible's women do not live in a narrow woman's world - but  
that is not to say that she does not function most & best as wife & mother.  
When Samuel is the last of the Book of Judges praise David's women  
it is not as prophetess, heroine, or friend but as wife & mother "who  
look well to the way of her household" "on whom longed for as the  
Queen of Kindness" and who is successful in her task "for her children  
were up & well her released - her husband also - he praised her"

Samuel, Rebecca, Rachel are not remembered for their activities but  
as the mothers of Israel - the women whose love & tenderness & church  
~~and deeply spiritual~~ nurtured out of this our lost & suffering the  
whole Jewish people. We seldom remember the women I mentioned  
buried, undiscovered among the tumbled & losty bones to us, but none  
of us forget the Miriam - the woman who makes - who carefully  
guards the cradle of the baby Moses as it floats on the Nile & who  
acts as nurse to the young lad even in the Pharaoh's palace.

~~On the Book of Proverbs we read a list of all the women who  
found a good wife & mother has found a good thing. The good wife  
is a gift & a blessing.~~

We have been speaking of making history. Could a page of the Hebrew  
of our future ~~be changed to a celebration of~~. The Bible  
speaks of the history making capacity of a wife of us. ~~in the past~~  
~~submit of a wife & mother~~



2 Michael's life a woman's empire takes on the greatest opportunity. It is the more than any other force which molds the character of the child. Her power and wisdom become almost daily contact with her - as indeed do her lessons & exercises. With her children a mother shapes the future - for it will be of their creation.

Belle showed great wisdom in naming women among the members of  
 tomorrow - ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> future not with you - I'm sure it will give one  
 of courage, dedication, & understanding at your disposal.

# Kaddish

Friday MAY 9

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## Sunday

11

### Those who passed away this week

JOSEPH HARRIS  
LENA DEVAY

# Vahrzeits

ERNST ALTSCHUL  
PEPI NEWMAN WIESENBERGER  
RICKIE L. HABER  
CHARLES R. FINN  
LOUIS HORKHEIMER  
ISIDOR R. COPPERMAN  
EDWARD A. WEISKOPF  
ANNETTE SILVERMAN  
MORT A. UNGER  
MIRIAM BLUM RICHMAN  
RACHEL S. GROSS  
ABRAHAM KROHN  
LUCY JOSEPH BING