

## ***Wise Women Leading the Way: Sheerah's Story - 1 Chronicles 7:20-24***

Norwalk Christian Church, February 9, 2020, Epiphany 5, Year A, (Non-Lectionary Series)

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Until we started the sermon series I was under the impression that Sheerah was an 80s cartoon, the princess of power and strongest woman in the universe. I did not know that Sheerah was one of the mothers of our faith.

This sermon series has taken us to strange places in the dusty old pages of our old Old Testaments, places we are not used to traveling too. We have uncovered stories, many uncomfortable to tell, many forgotten or overlooked.

Sheerah story would be completely unknown, were it not for this one verse, thrown in the midst of all these names. I had heard of Sheerah's family, her grandfather ... great grandfather, the text is a little unclear on how many generations, but she was a granddaughter of Joseph. Joseph, whom the ending of Genesis is devoted to; Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, grandson of Abraham; Joseph, who saved his family and all of Egypt from Famine.

Joseph was given a home and prominence in Egypt. He married an Egyptian, an African woman. Together they had two sons Ephraim and Mannaseh. Ephraim had sons. But these sons caused him much pain. Not only did they die, but they died committing a crime. Instead of building wealth, they tried to steal it and a great price was paid. They were murdered for their thieving, with perhaps even others killed in the process.

Ephraim mourns their death, and after a long time of mourning, decided to go on with life, best he could. He and his wife had another child, Beriah, which literally means *weeping*. And then we are told that child either had a daughter or Ephraim also had a daughter, the text is ambiguous.

But on this, the text is very clear: that daughter-descendent of Joseph and Ephraim was named Sheera and she was a builder. She built not one, not two, but three cities! An amazing feat for anyone, but especially an ancient woman.

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It's remarkable that her name is even mentioned. The book of Chronicles begins with exactly what the name suggests, a chronicle, a listing of peoples names, generations of Israelites. The first word in Chronicles is Adam and it goes on from there, all the way to the family of King Saul, the 1st king of Israel. That list includes hundreds of names of men, but only 57 women, most of them only mentioned by name.

Every so often, the author of this book, in attempting to Chronicle the history of Israel, she--and the Chronicler could've certainly have been a she--she throws in a little story about a woman, a woman who, were it not for the Chronicler's inclusion, we would know nothing about.

Yet, even though the stories are there, we still know nothing about them! We often skip over genealogies, the hard to pronounce names after names, so and so begat so-and-so who begat so in so...it's so very boring. But in skipping over their stories, we forget the contributions of these women.

But Sheerah's story, brief as it is, is included, and now her story has been told again, to us. Today, we speak again of the legacy of this ancient, almost forgotten woman, a mother of our faith, Sheerah, who did what no other woman in all of Scripture is ever credited for doing. Sheerah, who not only was a builder, but she built cities. Sheerah, forgotten no more.

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Well, in more recent news, tonight is the Oscars! I could talk about the contributions of women being overlooked in the Oscars, with so little women nominated for awards, but you've heard the stories. A few years ago, one of the Oscar Best Picture nominations was *Hidden Figures*, a movie based on a book of the same name, which tells the story of three black mathematicians, Katherine Goble, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughn, who work behind the scenes making the Apollo space missions possible.

Prior to this book and movie, we all knew the names of John Glenn and Neil Armstrong. But we did not know Katherine, Mary, or Dorothy, their contributions diminished and forgotten. No Apollo mission, no moon landing, would've been possible without Katherine, Mary, or Dorothy.

How many hidden figures are in our stories? How many hidden figures in the story of this church? How many hidden figures in the story of our city? How many hidden figures in the story of our country, of the history of humanity? Let everywhere we look, their legacy is all around us.

Right now you can go to Israel and you can see Sheerah's story hidden in plain sight. The remnants of these towns she built so very very long ago still remain, their foundations now permanent parts of the Israeli landscape, artifacts to her great power and accomplishment. Her legacy lives on.

Her name is never mentioned again in scripture, but the names of her cities are mentioned again. In the valley between Upper and Lower Beth-horon, we are told in the book of Joshua that one of the greatest battles of Israelite history was fought, the battle between the Israelites in the Amorites led by Joshua (who, by the way, was a descendent of Sheerah). During this battle, scripture says that the Lord made the sun stand still.

And then, in the moment when the armies pass through that rocky valley, between Upper and Lower Beth-horon, Sheerah's cities, God rained down rocks from heaven, hail that pelted the enemy army. And the Israelites were victorious.

Sheerah's legacy lived on.

Her third city is not mentioned again, but did you catch its name. Uzen-sheerah. She named it after herself, and it literally means, “listen to Sheerah.” Some have suggested that even God listened to Sheerah, and at the moment her descendant Joshua led the Israelites armies between the cities she built, God listened, God remembered, and God acted to save Sheerah’s people.

Listen to Sheerah.

Here’s the deal. She was an ancient woman. She was an African woman, half-Hebrew half-Egyptian. By all accounts her brothers were trouble. Her family legacy was falling apart. Joseph, her grandfather who was great in Egypt, was gone, and the family was not living up to his legacy. Perhaps that is in part why a new Pharaoh forgot who Joseph was. Chances are, around the same time Sheerah was growing up, the descendants of Joseph and his brothers were becoming enslaved in Egypt.

Perhaps Sheerah took matters into her own hands. But unlike her uncles, she did not steal cattle. She left, and went out and built something new.

Later when the Israelites return to this land, after Joshua’s victories, the land is divided up among the tribes of Israel. Each tribe represents the descendants of one of 11 sons of Jacob. But two tribes are given, not to Joseph, but to the descendants of his two children. The tribe of Manasseh and a tribe of Ephraim.

And guess what piece of land Ephraim is given? It’s the very land where Ephraim’s daughter-descendent built three cities. Listen to Sheerah.

What does this wise, powerful woman have to tell us today? We may come from difficult circumstances. We may have obstacle after obstacle in our way. We may be disenfranchised by those in power, be enslaved to the ways of this world. But we can still become daughters and sons of Sheerah, descendants of a builder. We can become someone who sees the circumstances around them--whatever they maybe--and says no way. I’m not letting that define me. I will build something new.

In order to build a city you’ve got a dream. You have to envision it. You have to dig down deep to create a foundation. And you can’t do it alone. You have to lead the charge. Recruit a team and inspire your people by your vision. Sheerah did all of these things. If she had not, she could not have done what she did.

What are you dreaming? Who are you inspiring? Who are you bringing around you to help you do what you know you have to do?

Listen to Sheerah, this wise woman who led the way, overcame the pain in her family, and built a new story, a new legacy. May our stories, like hers, not be hidden or

forgotten. May we, too, be women and men of faith who lead the way, as we dream of something new and build the world as God intended it to be.

May it be so. May it be built. Amen.