

WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:

HOW WOMEN COULD AND COULDN'T LEAD IN THE

OLD TESTAMENT

26 November 2022

Does the Old Testament support the idea that the highest leadership of God's people is reserved for men? Or does it really show that there is no such barrier?

This article responds to Mike Winger's video 'Women in Ministry Part 3: How Women Could and Couldn't Lead in the Old Testament'.¹

If you are in a hurry, go to www.bit.ly/3jAqv8G for a quick summary.

You can see our online or pdf articles on other videos by Mike at www.terranwilliams.com/articles/. Or use these links:

- [Part 2 \(Genesis\)](http://www.bit.ly/40lo9oh) — www.bit.ly/40lo9oh
- [Part 3 \(OT Women\)](http://www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX) — www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX
- [Part 4 \(NT Women\) part A](http://www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB) — www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB
- [Part 4 \(NT Women\) part B](http://www.bit.ly/3X08GXx) — www.bit.ly/3X08GXx
- [Part 8 \(Meaning of Head\)](http://www.bit.ly/3RwliET) — www.bit.ly/3RwliET
- [Part 9 \(Wives submit\)](http://www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv) — www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv
- [Part 10 \(1 Cor 11, Head Covering\)](http://www.bit.ly/3Y2Zp2l) — www.bit.ly/3Y2Zp2l

Still to come: Part 5 (Female Apostles), Part 11 (1 Cor 14, Silencing Women), Part 12 (1 Tim 2).

Please do not misunderstand our title 'What Winger Presently Gets Wrong' as implying any personal criticism of Mike. On the contrary, by including his name in the title, we are acknowledging the prominence of the ministry to which the Lord has called him. His Bible teaching is often of good quality and of much benefit to many people. He is a valued brother in Christ. But on this topic of Women in Ministry we are convinced that he has made mistakes and has misread Scripture.

Who are we, and why are we responding to Mike Winger?

Andrew Bartlett is based in the UK. He is the author of ***Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*** (2019). He has been studying Scripture for nearly 60 years. In his day job as an international arbitrator and judge, he specializes in dispassionate analysis of texts, evidence and arguments. He has a degree in theology and has served in lay leadership in several churches.

¹ The video can be found on Mike's own site biblethinker.org and on YouTube.

*Terran Williams is a South African pastor-teacher, with a ministry of planting and nurturing churches. He is the author of **How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy** (2022) and a number of other books.*

'Complementarianism' subordinates women under men's authority in the church and in the home. When Andrew and Terran wrote their books, Andrew was a member of a complementarian church and Terran had just completed his long tenure as a leading pastor of a complementarian church. They each engaged with leading scholarly complementarian works and independently concluded that God's word does not subordinate women under men.

Mike Winger started releasing his video teachings on 'Women in Ministry' soon after Terran's book was published. Because Mike's lengthy videos have been watched by many thousands of people, he has emerged as one of the world's most influential complementarian teachers. On reviewing Mike's videos, Andrew and Terran found that there were substantial inadequacies in Mike's research, reasoning, and handling of Scripture.

Since the ordinary believer is more likely to get their information about Scripture from free online resources than from scholarly books, Andrew and Terran decided to team up and write some freely available responses to Mike's teaching. Terran credits Andrew with doing the lion's share of the work.

We love Mike's heart. He says: 'If you're a scholar who's really studied in this area and you want to give me pushback, I really would like to read it now. If I'm wrong, I want to know it. Love to see that pushback.' [Part 8 video, 0hr6mins] We commend Mike for his openness, and we thank him for his invitation. We are hopeful that his engaging with our feedback will result in a good conversation in which we all make progress in our understanding of God's word.

We also commend him for trying hard to think clearly and teach biblically. But if you think that Mike consistently succeeds in that aim, we urge you to read first our two-part article responding to his video about Women Leaders in the New Testament, at www.bit.ly/3YPVNRr

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Much to agree upon, but some blind spots

There are many things in Mike's Part 3 video concerning women in the Old Testament which we agree that he gets right. These include:

- Some 'complementarian' scholars incorrectly minimize Old Testament women by not fully acknowledging what they did, while some 'egalitarian' scholars incorrectly maximize and stretch the data.
- Contrary to what some complementarians say, the ministry of Miriam, as a prophetic leader, was not limited to women, or only in private, or only by singing. Numbers 12:2 implies that God spoke to the people through Miriam, and there is no implication there of the limitations which some complementarians imagine. Exodus 15:20-21 is an example of Miriam's public, prophetic leadership.
- Huldah was a prophet. She was sufficiently prominent that the King sought God's direction from her.
- The ministries of Miriam and Huldah refute the idea that God only uses women when there are no suitable men.
- Deborah exercised real authority in ancient Israel with God's approval, as a high-level leader. The example of Deborah shows clearly that God does not forbid all high-level leadership by women.

But there are also some blind spots. We will concentrate on what Mike says about Miriam, about Deborah, and about the Old Testament priesthood.² Here are the headlines:

1. Miriam was sent by God to exercise prophetic leadership of the people of Israel. Mike has a blind spot about Micah 6:4. Miriam was a co-leader, junior to her brother, Moses.
2. Deborah was raised up by God to be the highest spiritual and civic leader of Israel. Mike mistakenly denies this.

² This article draws from Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (IVP, 2019), chapter 5.

3. Complementarians claim that the highest spiritual leadership is reserved for men. When he did this video, Mike thought that the OT priesthood supported this claim. It does not.

If you find any errors in what we have written, please write and tell us, so that we can make any needed corrections. You can email us at terranwill -at- gmail.com.³ Please put these words in the subject-line: Winger Part 3.

Miriam

Moses' sister Miriam is a prophet, and a leader of Israel sent by God (Exodus 15:20-21; Numbers 12:2; Micah 6:4). Her leadership is subsidiary to that of Moses (Numbers 12:1-15). She is not a priest like her brother Aaron.

It is unclear whether Mike accepts that Miriam's ministry in Exodus 15 was to both men and women. On the one hand, he says that her ministry was 'at least sometimes focused on women'. On the other hand, he notices that in v 21 Miriam's prophetic song is 'to them', where the word 'them' is masculine, so it cannot refer back to the female musicians and dancers in v 20. It refers back to the Israelites generally, including men: see v 19 and v 1. Careful attention to the text shows that Miriam's ministry was to both men and women.

Mike concentrates on rebutting some incorrect remarks made about Miriam by one particular egalitarian author (Linda Belleville). That is understandable. But it is unfortunate, because it seems to drive him into error in the opposite direction.

Mike cites egalitarian, Philip Payne: 'The prophetess is sent by God "to lead" Israel (Mic 6:4; cf. Exod 15:20-21).' Mike says this is a reckless handling of the text (0hr19mins). Mike puts on the screen the ESV of Micah 6:4: 'For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.' He says that 'sent before' 'does not exactly mean "lead" ... it could mean that but it's a much softer term.'

It is not correct for Mike to describe this translation choice ('lead') as reckless. Here's why.

At least 14 English versions translate here with the word 'lead' or 'leader', including the most widely used and trusted, the NIV.

As an example, here is the NET rendering of Micah 6:4:

'In fact, I brought you up from the land of Egypt;

I delivered you from that place of slavery.

I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam *to lead you.*' (emphasis added)

It should be remembered that the NET Bible was written by people associated with Dallas Theological Seminary, a conservative institution, where faculty are required to agree that

³ You'll need to replace "-at-" with "@".

women are not senior pastors and the office of elder is for men. This can give confidence that the translation is unlikely to contain egalitarian bias.

Does Mike seriously think that all these translators and translation committees are reckless? And that this includes the scholars who prepared the NET Bible? Or, rather, are they carefully providing a clear and accurate translation which fits the context?

What does Micah 6:4 mean, if it does not mean that Moses, Aaron and Miriam were sent by God to lead the people of Israel? In this context, what could 'sent before you' sensibly mean, other than that God sent them as leaders for the people?⁴

Mike does not directly answer that question, but he seems to agree that Miriam is a leader to some extent.

Verse 4 is God's word through the prophet Micah. When we read the contested phrase in context, paying attention to the parallelism of the poetic lines, it is apparent that Moses, Aaron and Miriam are viewed as the main leaders who led Israel between Egypt and the promised land (Moses, of course, being over the other two). The rescue is God's; the three are the leaders God gave them in that context.

Deborah

We have seen that Miriam served as part of a leadership team of God's people, with Moses as the main leader. In contrast to Miriam, Deborah served as the highest leader of God's people.

Israel had numerous leaders between the time of Joshua and the beginning of the monarchy. It has been traditional to call those leaders 'judges'. That is why the book in which Deborah appears is called 'Judges'.

But the ordinary sense of the word 'judge' in English does not accurately convey the meaning here.

English translations of Judges 4:4 differ over whether Deborah was 'judging' Israel (for example, ESV) or 'leading' Israel (for example, NIV, NET). The Hebrew word is capable of both meanings. In this book the emphasis is on the broader meaning. This is unmistakably clear both from Judges 2:16–19 and from the book as a whole. The book is a chronicle of successive leaders whom God raises up for Israel, to deliver them from enemies and give them peace. The

⁴ Wayne Grudem answers this question with a strikingly wooden and improbable interpretation. He says the three were physically at the front of the people, Aaron and Miriam merely accompanying the sole leader, Moses; thus 'the three of them went "before" ... the people of Israel': *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 143-144. But the text does not say 'went before', it says 'sent before you'. The prophet is referring to God's great act of bringing the people out of Egypt; to mention the mere physical position of the three at the front would not be relevant; the point is that they were sent by God as leaders of God's great act of deliverance. And Aaron was certainly a leader (Exodus 7:1-2).

same Hebrew verb which is translated by ESV as ‘judge’ in Judges 4:4 is translated by ESV as ‘rule’ in Ruth 1:1 (‘In the days when the judges ruled ...’).

Deborah is such a ruler or leader, as is shown by the account of her leadership of the nation in Judges 4 – 5.

Mike says that Deborah is ‘a really strong case for at least occasional high level – not highest level but high level – female leadership in the Old Testament in Israel by God’s appointment’ (0hr47mins).

Whether Deborah’s leadership of Israel was at the ‘highest level’ is easily discovered. We can ask two questions: (1) Who in Israel had a higher leadership function than Deborah? (2) Who in Israel was under Deborah’s authority? We can find the answers by reading Judges 4 – 5. The answer to the first question is ‘no-one’. The answer to the second question is ‘everyone’. Her leadership of God’s people was at the highest level.

So, why does Mike say that her leadership was *not* at the highest level?

First, he says that there was no highest-level leader because there was no king.

But the absence of a king does not support Mike’s position. The monarchy had not yet been instituted, so the highest level of leader was not a king. There was likewise no king in the time of Moses, but that does not downgrade Moses’ leadership.

Besides, Mike’s contrasting of Deborah with later kings, as if she held a lower authority, shows an un-nuanced reading of the interplay of kings and prophets in the era of the kings. During the post-Davidic kingships, many prophets are depicted in the Bible text as the true leaders of Israel.⁵

Next, Mike says the nature of the leadership exercised by a ‘judge’ was (A) to declare a decision, like a Supreme Court, on issues that could not be decided by local community leaders (compare Deuteronomy 17:8-9) and (B) to be the military leader who would deliver Israel.

And he says in regard to (A), Deborah’s authority was only over the people who brought a matter for decision to her (0hr53mins; 0hr55 mins). Then, in regard to (B), she was not a military leader (1hr02mins). So, she has less leadership in some ways than the other judges (1hr09mins).

Regarding (A), Mike is not making a good point. Since Deborah was the Supreme Court (Judges 4:5), everyone had to respect her decision, especially the local community leaders. The fact that she was not directly involved in governing local communities from day to day does not lower her position. Her authority was higher than the community leaders’. Indeed, the narrator’s description of her supreme judicial function emphasizes her wisdom and

⁵ See Tim Mackie & Whitney Woollard, ‘Kings Vs. Prophets’, at <https://bibleproject.com/blog/kings-vs-prophets/>.

prominence, as compared with the other eleven ‘judges’ in the book, none of whom is described as judging disputes.⁶

Regarding (B), this is another misguided point. Mike rightly acknowledges that Deborah instructs Barak, the commander of the army. She summons Barak (4:6). She gives him God’s directions (4:6). She orders him to go and fight (4:14). Her leadership is over the army, because she directs the army’s commander.⁷ This does not reduce her level of authority but highlights it. Would Mike seriously say that the leadership of the President of the United States is limited because he is not a trained fighter and does not lead the armed forces into battle but instead issues directions to the commanders to go and fight?

Mike also says that Deborah’s leadership is different from a typical governor because as a prophet she is not deciding herself what is to happen but is relaying God’s directions. In fact we do not know, during her 40 years as leader, how often she received an explicit word of guidance from God and how often she exercised her own judgment. But her function as a prophet of God (Judges 4:4) does not reduce her leadership position; instead it enhances it, as compared with the other eleven ‘judges’ in the book, none of whom is described as a prophet.

We should also note that there is nothing in the text which indicates that either God or Israel had any reservation at all about her leading the nation.

So, Mike’s assertion that Deborah has less leadership than the other judges does not reflect how she is portrayed in the text. She has most in common not with the other so-called judges but with Samuel, who prophesied, decided disputes at the highest level, and oversaw military victories in the time before the monarchy (1 Samuel 3:19-21; 7:2-17). Who can doubt that Samuel served as the great leader of God’s people? Deborah’s similarity to Samuel removes any doubt about her position as the highest leader of Israel.

⁶ The other eleven are Othniel (3:7-11), Ehud (3:12-13), Shamgar (3:21), Gideon (6 – 8), Tola (10:1-2); Jair (10:3-5); Jephthah (10:6 – 12:7); Ibzan (12:8-10); Elon (12:11-12); Abdon (12:13-15); Samson (13 – 16).

⁷ Care is needed not to misread the ESV’s rendering of what Deborah says to Barak in Judges 4:6: “*Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun ...’*” (emphasis added). The ESV’s translation philosophy is to try to be as literal as possible (by which they mean as near as possible to word for word, or formal equivalence), which often includes literal translations of Hebrew idioms. Perhaps the Hebrew in 4:6 could be intended literally, but this form of words is commonly an idiom which uses a question that is intended to be understood as a statement. We understand the NIV (like CEV, ERV, EXB, ICB, MEV, NABRE, NCB, NCV, NIRV, NLV, NRSV, RSV, and VOICE) to give the meaning as it would be expressed in native English (dynamic equivalence): “*The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ...’*” (emphasis added). (To appreciate this Hebrew idiom, see 1 Samuel 10:1, where Samuel pours oil on Saul’s head and says (in ESV) “*Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?*”. Samuel is not asking Saul to say whether the Lord has anointed him. Nor is Samuel reminding Saul that the Lord anointed him on some earlier occasion.)

For the above reasons, Mike's conclusion that Deborah's leadership of God's people was not at the highest level is incorrect. Under God, Deborah was the highest civic and spiritual authority in Israel.

Reflecting on his conclusion, Mike says: 'Egalitarians using the passage to refute normal distinctions between men and women based on Deborah does seem like a stretch' (1hr10mins).

This remark misses the significance of Deborah for Mike's overall topic of women in ministry.

The question at issue is whether God may call women to lead his people. Many complementarians say 'no', women should not lead, because God created men to be leaders over women. *The example of Deborah shows that this cannot be right.*

At the end of the video, Mike rightly acknowledges that Scripture does not rule out all women from all leadership (1hr50mins). Certainly, Deborah's God-given leadership is inconsistent with a supposed principle that women may not lead men or exercise authority over them. But it goes further than that. Deborah is an example of a woman called by God to lead at the highest level and to exercise the highest authority over God's people.

Why Deborah is so encouraging

Let's stand back and view the narrative context where the account of Deborah's leadership is placed.

She exemplifies a theme in Judges that God calls and uses people without being bound by how people are ranked by human culture.

The story immediately preceding that of Deborah is the story of Ehud, the left-handed deliverer (Judges 3:12–30). In ancient Near East culture, the right hand was associated with strength, authority and wisdom; the left with weakness, foolishness and waywardness.⁸

The story immediately following Deborah's is that of Gideon, described as the youngest member of the weakest clan (Judges 6:15).

The three stories demonstrate that, contrary to the prevailing human culture, God's call to leadership is not excluded by left-handedness (Ehud), by gender (Deborah), by the laws of primogeniture (Gideon) or by human weakness (Gideon again). God uses those who seem weak or undervalued as his agents of deliverance.

This foreshadows the humility and seeming weakness of Jesus at the Cross, which in reality achieved a great deliverance. And this humility and weakness continue in those who are called by God to be his chosen instruments for blessing the world. As Paul writes:

⁸ See Genesis 48:12–20; Exodus 15:6, 12; Isaiah 48:13; Psalm 110:1; Ecclesiastes 10:2; Matthew 25:33, 41.

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, NIV)

In ancient Israel, women were often regarded as weak, and their leadership was undervalued. But God used Deborah, like Ehud and Gideon, as his agent of deliverance. Barak obeyed her leadership and the entire nation rejoiced in it. How much more should we be ready to believe that, today, God is not limited by gender when he issues his call to service and distributes the needed spiritual abilities (Acts 2:17-18; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

The Old Testament priesthood

The Old Testament priests were male. Women did not qualify. Mike discusses a variety of possible reasons for this. He correctly acknowledges that Scripture itself does not state a reason.

His own suggestion is that it is explained by what he calls 'the male role of authority' (1hr43mins). He links this to the idea of representation. He says Adam represents us more in Scripture than Eve. Priests represent the people. The High Priest on the day of atonement looks forward typologically to Christ bearing sins as our representative (1hr45mins).

Mike concludes that the OT priesthood is 'soft evidence toward a soft complementarian view' (1hr46mins). And he says that the prohibition of female priesthood is 'very consistent with the complementarian view of the highest spiritual role of authority, of an office of authority, not being given over to women' (1hr49mins).

We agree that the OT priesthood has significance as looking forward to the work of Christ. But Mike's conclusions are incorrect because his reasoning is faulty. Here are six flaws:

Flaw 1. Confusing 'authority over' with representation

As he did in his Part 2 video, Mike is confusing 'authority over' with representation. To explain again:

If we say that an ambassador represents the Government of the United States of America, so that the ambassador's words and actions count as the words and actions of the US Government, we are not implying that the ambassador leads the US Government or has authority over the US Government. When an athlete competes internationally on behalf of their nation, they represent their nation: if they win, their nation wins, if they lose, their nation loses – but they are not in authority over their nation. When young David slew Goliath as

Israel's representative, he did not (yet) have authority over the nation as king – regal authority was still in the hands of Saul. That Adam represents humanity does not mean that Adam has authority over humanity. *Representation of someone* and *authority over someone* are two different concepts.

Therefore, the representative function of priests is not the same as their authority over other people. Whether they have such authority is a separate matter.

Flaw 2. Overlooking the biblical distinction between priests and non-priests

Mike's reasoning depends upon a supposed distinction between men and women in regard to the OT priesthood. But that is not the distinction which Scripture draws. The Levitical priests were only a small subset of the Levites. To serve as a priest, a person had to be a male descendant of Aaron without physical defect (Exodus 28-29, Leviticus 21:19-23, Numbers 3:1-10).⁹ Aaron was one of Levi's great grandsons; Levi was the third of Jacob's twelve sons. The biblical distinction is between the small number who meet these restrictive requirements and everyone else, whether men or women.

The biblical distinction does not map onto a supposed 'male role of authority' over women.

If Mike thinks that the qualifications for priesthood are explained by a differentiation in creation-derived authority, he needs to explain why a descendant of Aaron has more creation-derived authority than a descendant of Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), and an able-bodied person more than someone with a physical defect. Mike's theory does not reflect the biblical requirements.

Flaw 3. Being unrealistic about the difference between men's and women's bodies

Let us suppose that, contrary to the above, it makes sense to look for distinct reasons for the several qualifications for serving as priest. The requirement to be a descendant of Aaron is perhaps intelligible on the simple basis that Aaron was the first high priest. But what about the other physical requirements – to be male and without defect? What might their rationale be?

Let us consider the requirement of being without defect. This excludes anyone with an injury, a disability, a deformity, or a visible chronic disease such as a skin condition. We can be confident that a person's value or position in God's sight is unaffected by such features, since every human being is made in God's image. We might therefore look for a symbolic meaning. We might guess that this requirement of physical wholeness is intended as a symbolic pointer to the ultimate need for a perfect priest to approach God as the people's representative.

⁹ Age requirements are also mentioned – being 20, 25 or 30 years old, and less than 50 years old (see Numbers 4, 8; 1 Chronicles 23). There is some uncertainty over whether the age requirements applied to those serving as Levites *including* the priests or to those serving as Levites *except* the priests. If the latter, they could have been related to the physical duties of carrying the tabernacle and its furnishings: compare 1 Chronicles 23:25-27. If the age requirements applied to the priests, they could have been intended to secure that the priests served only when 'whole', because fully mature (having finished growing) and still in prime physical condition (not suffering the deteriorations of age). This would be in line with the requirement of absence of physical defect, discussed under Flaw 3 in the main text.

Then what about the requirement of maleness? Similar reasoning could apply. A woman with regular active bleeding could have been regarded as not whole. The law of Moses deemed menstruating women to be ceremonially unclean and therefore not permitted in the sanctuary. Some might smirk at this now, but in ancient Israel it loomed large. Moses commanded:

'When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. If a woman has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness. As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.' (Leviticus 15:19, 22, 25, ESV).¹⁰

Mike raises several counter-arguments.

He says there is no Scripture which states that menstruation is the reason why women could not serve as priests (1hr37mins).

But this is not a point in favor of his own position; it is a point against it. It is common ground that Scripture does not state the reasons for the qualifications for serving as priests. In so far as this silence is an objection, it applies equally to Mike's suggestion that 'the male role of authority seems like a better explanation'. Mike candidly acknowledges the Bible does *not* say that women are disqualified because God wants to preserve male authority (1hr43mins).

Mike further counters that it would be easy for women not to serve during their period of uncleanness. After all, women could draw near and participate in worship at other times. They were not continually unclean, but 'only occasionally', as also were men (1hr38mins and in Mike's notes).

But this is a weak and unrealistic response. There is no substantial similarity here with the experiences of men. It is indefensible to describe one week out of every four, and sometimes longer than one week, and continuing year after year for decades, as 'only occasionally'. Continuous service was clearly not a practical proposition at the time when the priesthood was instituted.¹¹

Accordingly, one could reasonably infer that women's natural monthly cycle may have effectively disqualified them from serving as priests, whether because of their frequent and regular 'uncleanness' or because, being subject to regular bleeding, they were not regarded as whole.

¹⁰ We sometimes refer to or quote the ESV in this article. We do this simply because it was produced by complementarians and is a favorite among complementarians. Our use of it does not imply endorsement of it as a version or preference over other versions.

¹¹ Hundreds of years later, there are some indications in 1 Chronicles 24:1-5 of a rota system for the serving Levites. If there was such a system, and if it applied to the priests, there would still have been no way of preventing clashes between that kind of rota and women's menstruation cycles.

We are speculating here. We are doing this only because Mike has ignored the full requirements for the priesthood and is offering a speculative reason for one element of those requirements. Since Scripture does not say expressly that menstruation was the reason why no women could qualify, we are not able to offer certainty.

Flaw 4. Missing the true significance of Deborah

Mike's speculation about male authority is definitely contrary to Scripture. Did God ever give 'the highest spiritual role of authority' to a woman? Yes, he did. We have seen that Deborah was raised up by God to hold the highest authority in Israel, both civic and spiritual. God did not reserve such authority to men alone.

Flaw 5. Neglecting the New Testament fulfilment of priesthood

Seen in its broad biblical context, the significance of the OT priesthood does not support Mike's view about reserving highest spiritual authority to men. God's plan was for all of his people to be priests (Exodus 19:6). Biblically, the priesthood of the old covenant foreshadows the ministry of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, in whom all believers become priests, both men and women, now and in eternity (Hebrews 2 – 10; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

If qualification for priesthood were regarded as a litmus test of highest spiritual authority, the lesson would be that under the new covenant such authority is fully shared by both men and women.

Flaw 6. Biblically, being a priest 'has nothing to do with ... being an elder'

Mike revisits the topic of priesthood in his Part 6 video, where he addresses an egalitarian argument. He understands that argument as drawing a straight line from women's New Testament priesthood to women's New Testament eldership. We will consider what he says in more detail when we get to Part 6. For now, we notice that what he says in his Part 6 video appears to correct some of the mistaken teaching in his Part 3 video.

In Part 6 he rightly makes clear that priesthood and eldership are two separate topics. The OT priesthood does not foreshadow the function of church elders or pastors. The NT priesthood consists of all believers. Biblically, church elders or pastors are not like OT priests; they do not mediate between God and his people. Being a priest 'has nothing to do with ... being an elder' (Part 6: 0hr57mins).

Since being a priest has nothing to do with being an elder, it is wrong to say that OT priesthood is 'soft evidence toward a soft complementarian view' (Part 3: 1hr46mins) and that the prohibition of female priesthood is 'very consistent with the complementarian view of the highest spiritual role of authority, of an office of authority, not being given over to women' (Part 3: 1hr49mins).

Conclusions

The requirements for the Old Testament priesthood do not support a complementarian position. Under the new covenant, things are different: all believers, whether men or women, constitute the priesthood. The qualifications for OT priesthood are not relevant to the qualifications for NT eldership.

Mike rightly accepts that Scripture does not rule out all women from all leadership. The God-given leadership of Miriam and Deborah is inconsistent with a supposed principle that women may not lead men or exercise authority over them.

But Mike's treatments of both Miriam and Deborah are examples of a complementarian interpreter seeking to minimize the ministry of OT women by not fully acknowledging what they did.

According to numerous contemporary translations, in Micah 6:4 God says that he sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead the people of Israel. This is a faithful rendering of the sense of the Hebrew text. Even a well-known version by complementarian scholars translates it in this way. Mike claims that this is reckless misinterpretation. He offers no satisfactory reason for doing so. Indeed, he seems to accept that Miriam did in fact exercise leadership in Israel through her prophetic ministry, including leadership of men.

Mike sees in his review of Old Testament women a principle that leadership of God's people *at the highest level* is reserved by God to men. But this is in conflict with the text. Close attention to Judges 2:16-19 and 4 – 5 shows that God raised up Deborah to be Israel's spiritual and civic leader at the highest level. She even summoned, commanded and commissioned Israel's most powerful man. Of all the leaders in the book of Judges, she alone is similar to Samuel, the great leader, in the threefold tasks of judging the people's disputes, prophesying God's word, and issuing instructions for battle.¹²

Old Testament women do not provide any support for Mike's view that church eldership is reserved for men.

Deborah reminds us that God is not limited by gender when he issues his call to service and distributes the needed spiritual abilities.

There are only a few named women prophets in the Old Testament, Miriam and Deborah being the most prominent. Are they just a passing phenomenon? What is especially relevant to the contemporary church is the expectation which the Old Testament casts for the Messianic kingdom. Joel prophesied that – when the empowering Spirit would be poured out in 'the last days' – the number of women (and men) prophets would greatly increase (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18).

¹² For further discussion of Deborah, see Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ*, 93-94 (chapter 5, under 'Women's leadership and authority in the Old Testament') and Williams, *How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy*, chapter 10, under 'Deborah The Judge'.

We suggest that the numerous called and gifted women leaders in the worldwide church today are testament to God's keeping of that promise.

<https://terranwilliams.com/what-winger-presently-gets-wrong-how-women-could-and-couldnt-lead-in-the-old-testament/>