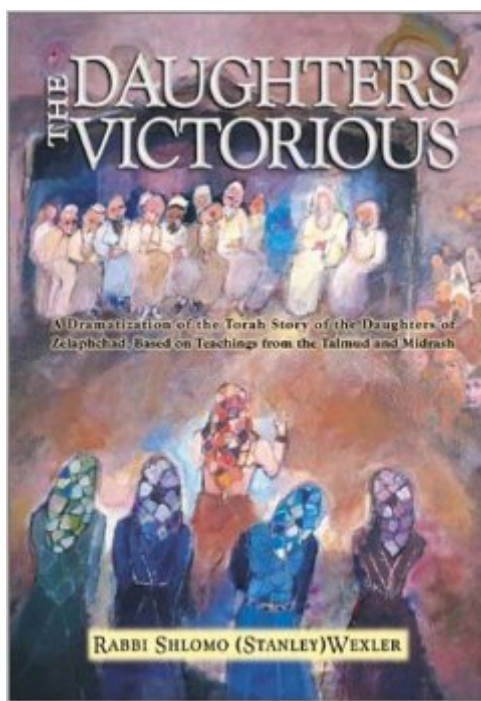


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# The Daughters Victorious



## Synopsis

Based on the biblical story, Rabbi Wexler takes us on a fictional journey into the lives of five brave and determined sisters who transformed Judaism and women's rights when they fought for their property and educational rights, the results of which can be seen in Judaism's laws of inheritance. All of this happening 3,000 years before the most advanced Western civilizations acted in a similar manner.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I found *The Daughters Victorious* to be fun to read and also highly enlightening. Although I have a substantial religious education, I learned things from the book that I never knew before and I have recommended the book to numerous friends and family members. I have also passed the book on to my two (Orthodox) teenage daughters, as I believe it presents fascinating insights into what life truly was like for the generation that left Egypt and wandered in the desert on the way to the Promised Land. I was deeply dismayed, however, to read in Dr. Ben-Dov's generally positive review that numerous mild sexual illusions (sic) will make this book out of bounds to many religious young people. I am sure that this work must be among the most appropriate I have ever read. There are no descriptions of sexual activity in the text and no questionable language. Plus the book was written by a well-known Orthodox Rabbi and was endorsed by five highly respected Orthodox scholars. This work, of course, is not a children's book. The subject matter may not be suitable for the very young because it introduces a world with which they are not

familiar. It deals with a time when multiple marriages were permitted in Judaism and romance between a married man and a single woman was sanctioned. Today's teenagers, whether religiously observant or not, should have no trouble dealing with this type of subject matter. Jewish children are taught the Torah from the earliest ages. Sexual passages in the Bible are not presented by allusion but are extremely explicit. No one has suggested that the Bible be out of bounds to young people. I feel that *The Daughters Victorious* handles its subject matter in a very proper manner. I, personally, had trouble putting *The Daughters Victorious* down once I began reading it and I strongly recommend it to readers of all ages and backgrounds.

As one of three in an all-girl family, I can relate to the problems that confronted the five brilliant, bold and beautiful daughters of this book. The story here is historical fiction at its best: the author takes a couple of paragraphs from the Bible and dramatizes the full meaning of what is actually the first women's property rights case in history. Leading the quest to obtain the sisters' rightful inheritance is the eldest sister whose own romantic struggle is particularly poignant. Like the male author of *Memoir of a Geisha*, the author -- a Rabbi no less -- writes with extraordinary insight into and compassion for the female soul. Lawyers will love this book for the sisters' case finally goes to the highest Court (Bleak House lovers take note!) -- only the judge is none other than Moses himself. Against the backdrop of opulent Egypt when the children of Israel were enslaved and then the barren desert where they wandered for 40 years, the lives of these extraordinary Biblical women are depicted with depth and wit. Educators will adore this book for its emphasis on the methods and values of teaching Torah and ethics. I started reading this book while on vacation in Israel and felt it enhanced my visit to the Holy Land. There's plenty here even if you're not a feminist and not Jewish, although it's at the top of my gift list to give to those who are both.

This intriguing novel is based on the sparse report of a puzzling case brought to Moses by five sisters, who had no brothers. They wanted the then existing law denying women a share in the land of Canaan be changed and that they receive their father Zelaphchad's share of the land that the Israelites left Egypt to conquer. Virtually no information about the case is given in the Bible. Numbers 27:3 and 4, in the translation of The Jewish Publication Society, has them argue: Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company of them that gathered together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he had no son? Give us a possession among the brethren of our father. This brief wording raises many questions. Who

was Zelaphchad? Why did he die in the wilderness? What is the significance of he not participating in Korah's rebellion? What was his "sin"? Why shouldn't the daughters inherit their father's share of land? Is it significant that the names of his five daughters are mentioned three times in the Bible? Then there are questions that go beyond the Torah words. How did Zelaphchad behave during the period of Egyptian slavery? Did Moses know him? Was he a good man? Who were the daughters? Were they married? This petition was advanced at the end of the forty-year desert wondering; why wasn't it presented earlier? Besides answering these and a host of other questions, Wexler focuses his drama on three main plots: the inequality of women in ancient times, both in regard to inheritance and otherwise; the ardent love of Zelaphchad's family for land in Canaan, the future State of Israel; and the strong desire to study and know Torah. There are also many sub-plots, such as the love life of the five sisters and the clashes between them and the clashes between the tribes. In view of the limited biblical information, Wexler had to decide how to flesh out his story. He settled on gathering material from the ancient midrashic and talmudic elaborations on the tale. But he also used his own inventive mind. The ideas and events that he inserts are clever, attention holding, and challenging. Some of his inventions may raise questions in readers' minds, and this is good, for all good novels should do so. An example is his description of Zelaphchad's reaction to God's decision to kill all males between the ages of twenty and sixty because of the false report of ten spies who returned with a poor description of Canaan. Why, he asks, should innocent people, like himself, die because of ten misguided people and the foolish group who accepted their report? Zelaphchad's reasoning seems right. Additionally, while the Torah states that some people who refused to accept the decree went to wage war against the Canaanites, Wexler's description of Zelaphchad's reaction raises the question again that he, and not God or Moses, may have been right. Zelaphchad argued that when the Israelites stood at the Red Sea, the leader of the tribe of Judah, Nachshon, took matters into his own hands, entered the Sea, and God saw that he had good intentions and split the Sea. Why shouldn't the Israelites show their love for Canaan by moving to conquer it; shouldn't God see that their intentions are good and come to their aid? Other incidents may bother some readers, such as members of the tribes of Joseph praying at his coffin for help in attaining their desires. Still others may argue that Wexler used anachronistic material when he assumed that later procedures and attitudes existed during the forty-year desert wondering. Questions such as these do not mar the novel in any way. They enhance its enjoyment, just as discordant notes enhance a symphony. Readers will therefore enjoy the story. They will be intrigued about how the issue of discrimination against women is handled. They will finish the novel asking themselves, Was the case of the daughters of Zelaphchad decided correctly? Were the daughters treated fairly? Why did it take a

generation to reverse the decree? How is it possible for the people to reverse God's decree?

I tremendously enjoyed the wonderful visualization of what it must have been like living in the desert with Moses as our leader. I felt as if I were living in one of the tents near the main characters. Wonderful historical information.

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