

Haftarah Helper 5781: Beshalach

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Judges 4:4¹-5:31

The Parashah and Haftarah recount great Israelite victories, and their songs to God in response. The Haftarah takes place long after Joshua's death; no national leadership has arisen. Israel's tribes partially occupied their Divinely assigned portions of Canaan, striving for dominance with local idolatrous Canaanites. When Canaanite groups threatened, ad-hoc, charismatic, military leaders - "judges" - assembled men to fight and save them.

Haftarah Breakdown

The Canaanite king, Jabin, his general, Sisera, and their 900 iron chariots oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. The prophetess Deborah, the judge of that era (4:4-5), sent a message to Barak, instructing him to ascend Mt. Tabor with 10,000 men while she drew Sisera's forces into the wadi (seasonal river bed) of Kishon (4:6-11). God flooded the wadi (5:23), trapping the chariots. Barak's troops descended and slaughtered their foes. Sisera fled (4:12-17), taking refuge in the tent of Yael since she and her fellow Kenites were at peace with Jabin; nonetheless, she and the Kenites were Israelite allies. She betrayed Sisera, hammering a tent peg into his temple to kill him as he slept (4:18-23). After this Divine victory against Jabin (4:24), Deborah and Barak sang the following song to God:

[Verses 5:1-5: Praise of God for allowing the Israelite volunteer forces to defeat their enemy.](#)

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| Judges 5:2 | שופטים ה:ב |
| When [the enemy makes] breaches among Israel, [and when, at the same time,] the people volunteer - bless the Lord! | בְּפָרַע פְּרָעוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עִם בְּרָכּוֹ ה' : |

[Verses 5:6-8: The Israelites were weak, oppressed, and idolatrous until Deborah, "Israel's mother," rose to power.](#)

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| Judges 5:7 | שופטים ה:ז |
| Habitation of unwallled villages ceased - they ceased in Israel until I, Deborah, arose; I, a mother in Israel, arose. | חִדְלוּ פְּרָזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חִדְלוּ עַד שִׁקְמֹתַי דְּבוּרָה שִׁקְמֹתַי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל : |

[Verses 5:9-13 Deborah rouses herself and Israelite society to battle with bold praises of God's victorious might.](#)

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| Judges 5:10 | שופטים ה:י |
| [You who] ride on white donkeys, those that sit on rich cloths, and those walking on path[s] - speak [of God's victories!] | רֹכְבֵי אֲתָנוֹת צְהָרוֹת יֹשְׁבֵי עַל-מִדִּין וְהַלְכֵי עַל-דֶּרֶךְ שִׁיחַ : |

[Verses 5:14-18: Praise for the tribes who aided in the battle, and condemnation for those who did not.](#)

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| Judges 5:15 | שופטים ה:ט"ו |
| Issachar's princes were with Deborah; like Barak was Issachar, traveling into the valley. Among Reuben's divisions were [only] great resolutions of heart. | יִשְׂרָי בְּיִשְׁשָׁכָר עִם-דְּבוּרָה וַיִּשְׁשָׁכָר כֵּן בְּרָק בְּעֵמֶק שְׁלַח בְּרַגְלָיו בְּפִלְגֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדֹלִים חִקְקֵי-לֵב : |

¹ Ashkenazim begin here. Sepharadim begin at 5:1.

Verses 5:19-22: God directs the forces of nature to aid the Israelites in battle.

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| Judges 5:21 | שופטים ה:כ"א |
| The Kishon wadi swept them away - that ancient wadi, the Kishon wadi. March on, O my soul, with strength! | נחל קישון גרפם נחל קדומים נחל קישון תדרכי נפשי עז: |

Verses 5:23-27: In contrast to the Israelites dwelling in Meroz who are cursed by God for not aiding their fellow Israelites, Yael the Kenite is blessed for assassinating Sisera.

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| Judges 5:24 | שופטים ה:כ"ד |
| Most blessed of women is Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of women in tents. | תברך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקיני מנשים באהל תברך: |

Verses 5:28-30: Sisera's mother worries and weeps while imagining his forces' pillaging.

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| Judges 5:28 | שופטים ה:כ"ח |
| Through the window she looked forth; Sisera's mother sobbed through the lattice: "Why is his chariot late in coming? Why tarry his chariots' strides?" | בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא בעד האשנב מדי וע בשש רכבו לבוא מדוע אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו: |

Verse 5:31: Sisera's defeat heralded decades of peace in Canaan.

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| Judges 5:31 | שופטים ה:ל"א |
| So [like Sisera] may perish all Your enemies, O Lord - but let those who love Him be as the sun going forth in its might! The land was tranquil for forty years. | כן יאבדו כל אויביך ה' ואהביו כצאת השמש בגברתו ותשקט הארץ ארבעים שנה: |

Connections

The Talmud asserts that the **defeat of Sisera's army was greater than the drowning of the Egyptian army** at the time of the Exodus:

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| Pesachim 118b | פסחים קי"ח עמוד ב |
| The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the ministering angel of the sea: "Spew out [the dead Egyptians] onto dry land." [The angel] said before Him: "Master of the Universe! Is there a servant whose master gives him a gift and then takes it from him?" [God] said to him: "I will give you one and a half times their number ...wadi Kishon will be My guarantor." Immediately, it spewed them out onto the land... What does "one and a half times their number" refer to? (Exodus 14:7) states about Pharaoh, " Six hundred chosen chariots", whereas regarding Sisera, (Judges 4:13) states: " Nine hundred iron chariots." | אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לשר של ים פלוט אותן ליבשה אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם כלום יש עבד שנותן לו רבו מתנה וחוזר ונוטל ממנו אמר לו אתן לך אחד ומחצה שבהן...אמר לו נחל קישון יהא לי ערב מיד פלט אותן ליבשה ... מאי אחד ומחצה שבהן דאילו בפרעה כתיב שש מאות רכב בחור ואילו בסיסרא כתיב תשע מאות רכב ברזל |

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