

Beshalach: Judges 4:4¹-5:31

For generations after Joshua's death, Israel's tribes partially occupied their divinely assigned portions of Canaan, striving for dominance with local idolatrous Canaanites and neighbors. When the Israelites were threatened, ad-hoc, charismatic, military leaders - "judges" - assembled men to fight and save them. The Haftarah recounts one of these figures' great victories. Their subsequent song to God is similar to the Parashah's great Song of the Sea.

Haftarah Breakdown

A Canaanite king, Jabin, his general, Sisera, and their 900 iron chariots oppressed the Israelites of the Galilee for twenty years. They were based at Haroshet Hagoyim, 10 miles east of Caesarea², in the northwest of the Jezreel Valley and its wadi (seasonal river bed), Kishon (4:3). The Israelite's judge was a prophetess, Deborah, who dwelt in Ephraim, to the south (4:4-5). At God's command, she sent a message to the city of Kadesh in Naphtali in the Upper (northern) Galilee. She instructed her general, Barak, to assemble 10,000 men to the Lower Galilee and ascend Mt. Tabor, rising above the Jezreel Valley's eastern end. Deborah and her forces approached from the south, drawing Sisera's forces into the wadi (4:6-11) which God then flooded (5:23), trapping the chariots. Barak's troops descended and slaughtered their foes. Sisera fled (4:12-17), taking refuge in the nearby tent of Yael since she and her fellow Kenites, Israelite relatives and allies, were at peace with Jabin. She welcomed but then betrayed him, killing him in his sleep (4:18-23). After defeating Jabin (4:24), Deborah and Barak sang the following song to God:

Verses 5:1-5: Praise of God, who "came from" Edom and Mt. Sinai to lead the Israelite volunteer forces to victory.

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 בָּרְכוּ ה':

Verses 5:6-8: Until Deborah, "Israel's mother," arose, Israelites served Canaanite gods. Canaanites controlled the main Galilean highways, forcing traders to use byways and chasing Israelites from open areas to fortified ones.

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.	חָדְלוּ פְּרָנוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חָדְלוּ עַד שְׁקַמְתִּי דְבוֹרָה שְׁקַמְתִּי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

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

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!]	רִכְבֵי אֲתָנוֹת צְהָרוֹת יִשְׁבִי עַל־מַזְנוֹן וְהִלְכִי עַל־דָּרָד שִׁיחִו:

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

Judges 5:15	שופטים ה:ט"ו
Issachar's princes were with Deborah; like Barak was Issachar, traveling into the valley. Reuben's divisions had [only] great searchings of heart.	וְשָׂרֵי בְיִשְׁשָׁכָר עִם־דְבוֹרָה וַיִּשְׁשָׁכָר כֶּן בָּרַק בְּעַמֻּק שִׁלַּח בְּרַגְלָיו בְּפִלְגֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדִלִים חֲקַמֵי־לֵב:

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

² According to University of Haifa archeologist, Adam Zertal; [Long time archaeological riddle solved](#) (Jerusalem Post).

Verses 5:19-22: Though the Canaanite forces assembled willingly, God deployed the heavens and a rainstorm to help the Israelites defeat them.

Judges 5:21	שופטים ה:כ"א
The wadi of Kishon swept them away - that ancient wadi, the Kishon wadi! March on, O my soul, with strength!	גַּחַל קִישׁוֹן גָּרְפָם גַּחַל קְדוּמַיִם גַּחַל קִישׁוֹן תִּדְרָגֵי נַפְשִׁי עֲזֵ:

Verses 5:23-27: In contrast to the residents of Meroz whom God curses for not aiding their fellow Israelites, Yael the Kenite is blessed for assassinating Sisera.

Judges 5:24	שופטים ה:כ"ד
Most blessed of women is Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of women in tents.	תְּבָרַךְ מְנַשֵּׂיִם יַעֲלֵ אִשֶּׁת תְּבָרַךְ הַקַּיִנִּי מְנַשֵּׂיִם בְּאֶהֱל תְּבָרַךְ:

Verses 5:28-30: Sisera's mother worriedly awaits her son's delayed return from battle. Her wise maidens and she comfort themselves, knowing that he and his forces are divvying up the Israelite booty, and their women for ravage.

Judges 5:30	שופטים ה:ל
"Aren't they dividing the spoil they have found? A damsel [or] two damsels for each man; for Sisera, a spoil of dyed garments; spoil of embroidered cloths; a pair of embroidered cloths round every neck as spoil!"	הֲלֵיא יִמְצְאוּ יִחַלְקוּ שָׁלַל {ס} רַחֵם רַחֲמַתֶּיִם לְרֵאשׁ זָבָר {ס} שָׁלַל צְבָעִים לְסִסְרָא {ס} שָׁלַל צְבָעִים רַחֲמָה {ס} צָבַע רַחֲמַתֶּיִם לְצוּאֵרֵי שָׁלַל: {ס}

Verse 5:31: Deborah prays for the similar defeat of God's enemies. Decades of Israelite peace in Canaan ensue.

Judges 5:31	שופטים ה:ל"א
Similarly [like Sisera], may all Your enemies perish, O Lord! Let those who love Him be as the sun going forth in its might! The land was tranquil for forty years.	כֹּן יֵאָבְדוּ כְּלֵי־אוֹיְבֵיךָ ה' וְאֶהְיֶה כְּצֵאת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבְרָתוֹ וְתִשְׁקַט הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה:

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:

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 אותו ליבשה אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם פלום יש עבד שנותן לו רבו מתנה וחוזר ונוטל ממנו אמר לו אתן לך אחד ומחצה שבתנו...אמר לו גחל קישון יהא לי ערב מיד פלט אותן ליבשה ... מאי אחד ומחצה שבתנו דאילו בפרעה כתיב שש מאות רכב בחור ואילו בסיסרא כתיב תשע מאות רכב ברזל

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