

Judges 5:14-22, 31

The Song of Deborah commemorates the victory of Deborah and her general Barak (**Judges 4**) over the Canaanite King Jabin and his general Sisera who had oppressed Israel for 20 years.

The Rabbis include this in their list of ten songs: the song of Israel in Egypt, the Song at the Sea, the song at the well, the song of Moses, the song of Joshua, the Song of Deborah, the Song of David, the Song of Solomon, the song of Jehoshaphat, and a new song for the future (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta de-Shirah, Beshalah 1. (We read previously this week about the “new song” in **Psalm 96**)

The Rabbis maintain that anyone for whom a miracle was performed and who recites a song, is forgiven for his sins and becomes as a new person. During the time of Barak and Deborah a miracle was performed for the Israelites, they recited song, and all their sins were pardoned.

Deborah was the fourth judge of Israel and a prophetess, like Miriam (**Exodus 15:20**) and Hulda (**2 Kings 22:14**). Also named prophetesses were Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Esther (BT Megillah loc. cit.)

“Deborah, wife of Lappidoth [*eshet lapidot*], was a prophetess.” The Rabbis derive “*eshet lapidot*” from the word *lapid* (torch) and this phrase would therefore refer to her vocation, which was preparing the wicks for the Tabernacle (BT Megillah 14a). This interpretation also says her husband's other name was Barak.

Genesis 49:21 - “Naphtali is a hind let loose, which yields lovely fawns”; “a hind let loose” is a reference to Deborah, who would be born into this tribe (Midrash Tehillim [ed. Buber], 22:1).

Deborah would sit outdoors, under a palm, to teach Torah in public, because a woman would not normally be alone with men within her house (Seder Eliyahu Rabbah loc. cit.). Similarly, Sisera thought he would be safe in Jael's tent, because men were not allowed to enter a woman's tent while she was alone.

The link with the **Numbers 7** Torah reading concerning the offerings of the Princes of Israel is this description of how each tribe responded to Deborah's call to muster for war against King Jabin. Some stayed away, others enthusiastically volunteered.

verse 2 - "when the people willingly offered themselves" reflects the offerings of the Princes.

It also connects with **Psalm 96** because this is a "song" like the new song in the Psalm.

In might have been a call and response with Deborah singing one verse and Barak, possibly with a chorus of men, responding with another.

Compare the songs of Moses, (**Exodus 15** and **Deuteronomy 32**). Because this is poetic language, translation is especially difficult.

Judges 5:1-2 - "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."

Instead of "for the avenging of Israel" the Jewish translation has: "When breaches are made in Israel," meaning the people had fallen into idolatry and lost their previous glory.

See **Judges 4:1** - "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead."

Another interpretation: She said (**Judges 5:2**): "When locks go untrimmed in Israel [or: when Israel is avenged]" — by means of whom does God take vengeance of the nations of the world who vex Israel? "When people dedicate themselves." Some see this as referring to Nazarites.

Judges 5:3 - "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel."

Rashi - "I shall sing, I shall sing": This word is repeated. At Sinai and at Tabor it was said, "I am the LORD thy God." At Mt. Carmel it will be said twice, (**I Kings 18:39**) 'The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God (ה' הוּא הַאֱלֹהִים)' in the days of Elijah."

Judges 5:4-5 - "LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel."

The might and glory of God was with Israel when they first entered the Promised Land to occupy it. But...

Judges 5:6-7 - "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the traveled through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."

The Jewish translation has: "caravans ceased, and travelers walked on crooked paths." to avoid highway bandits.

Shamgar was a previous judge (**Judges 3:31**) who repelled Philistine incursions into Israelite regions, and slaughtered 600 of the invaders with an ox goad. But since his day things had gone downhill.

"in the days of Jael" - Jael must have been in old age when she killed Sisera. In her youth this same spirit in her resulted in some notable deed of resistance, but which did

not stop the deterioration of Israel's situation.

"inhabitants of the villages" ceased = *perâzôn* - The Septuagint has a more likely meaning of "Princes." There were no leaders or rulers to judge or protect the people.

And this is the link with **Numbers 7** - The Princes of Israel, who were first to make offerings for the Tabernacle, had been reduced to impotence by the time of Deborah. Many of the tribes did not respond to her call for uprising against King Jabin.

Judges 5:8 - "They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?"

The rabbis noted this was predicted in **Deuteronomy 32:25** - Falling away from God into idolatry would bring chastisement: "From outside, the sword will bereave, and terror from within."

"a shield or spear" - the context seems to favor the meaning that, in spite of these degradations, there was not a warrior in all Israel who dared to put on his armor.

Judges 5:9 - "My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD."

Those Princes of the tribes who did respond to Deborah's appeal surpassed their offerings in **Numbers 7** by offering their very lives during this crisis.

Judges 5:10 - "Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way."

Those who were previously afraid to travel because of the enemy or of lawlessness, but now went with safety, could testify to the outcome - victory, security and freedom.

Judges 5:11 - "They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages (*perâzôn*) in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates."

perâzôn = "princes" again. Or, "the righteous acts of his governance in Israel"

Judges 5:12 - "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam."

This is an example of Deborah and Barak's back and forth singing.

Jewish translation has "Praise! Praise! Deborah. Praise! Praise!"

Rashi - Our Rabbis said, because she praised herself by saying (v. 7) "Until I Deborah arose," the Divine spirit left her (therefore she had to arouse (עוֹרֵר) it) here.

"lead thy captivity captive" - Barak's victory was a foretaste of Christ's - see **Psalm 68:18** and **Ephesians 4:8**.

Judges 5:13 - "Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty."

NET - "Then the survivors came down to the mighty ones; the LORD's people came down to me as warriors."

Probably means that the few mean and miserable survivors of oppression under the Canaanites had gained dominion over the Canaanite nobles. And Deborah had dominion over them as well.

Response of the Princes of the Tribes

Judges 5: 14 - "Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer."

Or "Ephraim, who uprooted Amalek" and "out of Zebulun they who march carrying an officer's staff."

Responding to Deborah's call were the tribes of Ephraim, Zebulun, Naphtali, Benjamin, Issachar and "Makir" - he was the only son of Manasseh, so that tribe's western division is meant. Manasseh was located half within the Jordan and half on the other side to the east. Those within Israel's domains responded.

Reuben didn't respond, after "intense searching of heart. Gilead (the eastern part of tribe of Manasseh) stayed beyond the Jordan. Dan and Asher - located on the seacoast - remained in their ships.

Rashi renders the "divisions" of Reuben by a similar word that means "shrewdness." And what was his shrewdness? He dwelt by the edges (משפְּתַי) of the battle to hear who would win so that he should join with him.

The tribes of Judah and Simeon (and the Levites) are strangely not mentioned.

The silence respecting Judah is remarkable. We may conjecture that Judah and Simeon were sufficiently occupied in keeping off the Philistines, or that, having secured their own territory, they remained in selfish isolation. - *Ellicott's Commentary*

The Stars Fought

Judges 5:20 - "From the sky the stars fought, from their paths in the heavens they fought against Sisera."

Angels are pictured as the host of heaven, meaning the stars. Alternately, the heavens could have sent hail or a mighty storm that caused Sisera's chariots to be bogged down, and the River Kishon's waters to sweep them away (**verse 21**).

The Rabbis applied to this war **Psalms 19:3**: "Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out." Joshua's day speaks out that of Deborah. Joshua's day witnessed the performance of the miracle (**Joshua 10:13**): "And the sun stood still and the moon halted," and similarly, in the day of Deborah (**Judges 5:20**): "The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera" (Midrash Tehillim 19:9).

Deborah and Barak recited the Hallel prayer after seeing the miracles that God performed for them. They said (**Psalms 115:1**): "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your name bring glory for the sake of Your love and Your faithfulness," and the spirit of divine inspiration responded (**Isaiah 48:11**): "For My sake, My own sake, do I act." It was enacted that Israel recite Hallel at every important epoch and at every misfortune that comes upon the world; and when they are redeemed, they recite it for their redemption (BT Pesachim 117a).

- <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/deborah-2-midrash-and-aggadah>

Judges 5:22 - "Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones."

Rashi - The hoofs of their horses slipped off because the heat of the star would boil the mud and the nail would slip off, as one scalds the feet in boiling water and the hoofs would slip off. And since they slipped off, the feet were stricken (מִלְמַד) (Mechilta Ex. 14:24).

Who or What was Meroz?

Judges 5:23 - "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty."

The Angel of the Lord is usually the manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ. Rashi says the Angel of the Lord was Barak acting as an agent (angel = messenger) of the Holy One.

"According to the Talmud (Moed Katan 16a), Meroz is a certain planet in the stellar sphere, and because the mention of it in **Judges 5:23** is preceded by the phrase, "the stars in their course fought against Sisera" (v.20), it thus follows that Meroz must be defined as a celestial body or constellation.

"its inhabitants" refers to its "camp" or surrounding stars according to the Zohar.

At the time of the American Revolution, Patriot writers argued that the Loyalists were guilty of the sin of Meroz, in that they neglected to defend their country, religion and

liberty.

Meroz most likely was a town nearby that refused Deborah's call - maybe from a tribe who HAD responded, and was therefore cursed. Perhaps it was a stand-in for the reluctant tribes who didn't show up, but for whom a curse would be inappropriate.

Jael

Judges 5:24-30 - The incident of Jael and Sisera.

Like Judith, she cut off his head after piercing it, as David cut off Goliath's, after he had slung a stone into his forehead.

In **Judges 5:24** Jael is praised in the same manner as Mary is by the angel Gabriel in **Luke 1:42**. So is Judith in **Judith 13:18** - "You are the most blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth." Jael and Judith are types of Mary foreshadowing the crushing of the head of the Serpent as prophesied by God in **Genesis 3:15**.

Judges 5:31 - "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years."

Another reference to the stars, with the sun passing through each constellation of the zodiac or "mazzaroth" telling the story of the coming Deliverer of **Genesis 3:15**.

- **Psalm 19:4-5** - "...In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

Rashi - "as the sun when he goeth forth in his might": Which will occur in the coming future seven times seven the light of all the seven days of creation which is 343 times as much (as one day). This equals the sum of forty nine times seven. [Tanchuma].