

Judges 5:1-31

Deborah's name is an anagram in Hebrew of “she spoke” (dibberah). Deborah is not a battle commander. Her weapon is the word.

She is not just called a “prophetess” = *nebi'ah*, which already contains the feminine ending. The text adds the word for “woman” - *ishah* - for emphasis.

The Song stresses that Deborah was a “mother in Israel” (**Judges 5:7**). Her femaleness is neither hidden nor incidental: it is an integral part of the story. As a Judge she nourished Israel through her teachings and her counsel.

"Eshet lapidot" could be translated “wife of Lapidot,” but it also means “woman of torches” or “fiery woman.” Perhaps she is the torch that set Barak (“lightening”) on fire.

Interestingly, in Mesopotamian mythology, the torch and the lightning (tsullat and hanish) are the heralds of the storm god. This story then finds God reclaiming these mythological types for Himself, showing light and lightening bolts are reserved for the true God alone.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/deborah/>

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.

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.

The Song

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."

Deborah probably wrote this song, but was joined with Barak in singing it - perhaps like a call and response, alternating verses, perhaps with accompanying choruses of men and women for each.

Deborah could not call upon Deborah, exhorting herself to awake, &c., as in Jdg 5:12. Neither could Barak exhort himself to arise, &c., in the same verse. Again: Barak could not sing, Till I Deborah arose, a mother in Israel, in Judges 5:7.

Prophecy is sometimes described as coming in song and music:

- **1 Chronicles 25:1** - "Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for

the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals."

"when the people willingly offered themselves" -

- **Psalm 110:3** - "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth."

Or, "thy young warriors come to thee thick and bright as the morning dew."

David was no doubt quoting Deborah's Song. Peter mentions this Psalm on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**).

Our "willingness" might seem to be in contradiction to God's sovereignty. But this is a mystery, and we should not "rise above the cloud" in trying to figure it out. Somehow we participate, through our willingness, in bringing about God's kingdom in our world as we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The "day of thy power" can mean the "day thine army" i.e. "the day when Thou dost muster Thy forces and set them in array for the war."

That's why this whole Song along with Judges 4 is reflected in the Book of Revelation and God's ultimate victory.

To be "willing" means "a voluntary, glad surrender of the will and heart to God."

- **Romans 12:1** - "I beseech you, brethren! by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

Rashi _ "when the people offer themselves willingly": When the masses feel motivated to repent

The phrase is also used elsewhere to denote volunteering to fight - in the listing of King Jehoshaphat's mighty men of valor:

- **2 Chronicles 17:16** - "And next him was Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the LORD; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valor."

Repentance enlists us in spiritual warfare. We join other "mighty men of valor" - but that is defined for us not by our natural abilities or resources, but because the Angel of the Lord designates us as He did Gideon, who confessed his humble station in life, his weakness, his despair and the sad spiritual condition of himself and his countrymen:

Judges 6:12-16 - "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.

"And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did

not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

"And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?"

"And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

"And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

The Angel - who is really the Lord - sends fire to consume Gideon's offering, as a type of his acceptance of Gideon himself.

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."

The kings and princes were the ones gathered in alliance with Jabin. But it could also include all earthly rulers throughout history.

Rashi says Deborah says "Hear" and "I" twice because she is addressing Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel. The Holy One did not rob (by withholding) the reward of Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel, who arrived at the giving of the Torah, expecting it to be given upon them, and turned away in shame. The Holy One said to them, "I will pay you double fold. It was said at Sinai, (Ex. 20:2) 'אֲנֹכִי (אֲנֹכִי) I am the Lord your God,' at Tabor it will be said, 'I... I...' אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי. It was said at Sinai, 'I am the Lord your God (ה' אֱלֹהֵי) , at Carmel it will be said twice, (I Kings 18:39) 'The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God (ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים)' in the days of Elijah."

Judges 5:4 - "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."

This is a reference to Moses' blessing of the tribes:

- **Deuteronomy 33:2** - "And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them." (or rather "with flaming fire at His right hand.")

The Lord went before Israel into battle, coming from Sinai, then after going around Edom, He "came from Mt. Seir" to attack Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, and conquered them.

"The earth trembled" - an earthquake, or the fulfillment of the prophecy of

Deuteronomy 2:25 - "This very day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon all the nations under heaven. They will hear the reports of you and tremble in anguish because of you."

(See also **Exodus 15:14**)

"the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water" - This could refer to the battle of Mount Tabor in which a storm led to victory, or back to the giving of the Torah: The Targum has the heavens "Dripped a life-sustaining dew."

Judges 5:5 - "The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that (or "as") Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel."

In the same way that Sinai was enveloped in smoke and fire, so the enemies of Israel melted away.

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 travelers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."

Here the judge Shamgar (**Judges 3:31**) is noticed again, and equated with Jael. This hints that Jael the Kenite had some success through her good deeds in helping Israel even before killing Sisera. But neither she nor Shamgar were able to decrease lawlessness during the time leading up to the battle of Mount Tabor. Israelites even had to abandon their villages and seek shelter in fortified cities because of marauding bandits.

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?"

God lifts his hand from Israel when they rebel.

"Shield nor spear" - Israel had only work implements to fight with. This shows that the victory was by God's intervention alone.

The Targum seems to understand it of Sisera's army, that came against Israel with shields, spears, and swords; and makes the number of them to be in all 300,000, which is just the number of foot soldiers Josephus makes his army to consist of; and yet, though so numerous and so well armed, could not stand before Barak with 10,000 men only. - *John Gill*

Rashi - The Almighty confused all of them in the battle with the stars, and the brook of Kishon raked them away.

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

Referring either to teachers of Torah who volunteered to tell the people, "Bless the Lord and return to Him," or to the nobles and tribal chiefs who rallied their people to join the battle through their own example of bravery.

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

The Jewish translation has "The riders of white donkeys, those that sit in judgment, and those that walk on the path, tell of it."

In contrast to the previous lawless time, after the defeat of Jabin and Sisera, nobles could travel freely, judges could dispense justice and common people could walk without fear.

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 in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates."

People could return to their villages.

"go down to the gates" - The elders and judges would sit at the gates, hear disputes and dispense justice. This was now possible again.

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

"lead thy captivity captive" - Those who had held Israel in slavery, cutting down cedars, are now taken captive by Barak.

Another sign that this battle points to the cosmic victory of God:

- **Psalm 68:18** - "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them."

- **Ephesians 4:7-10** - "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)"

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."

"him that remaineth" = those who survived. The Israelite now had dominion over the haughty Canaanites who had previously ruled over them.

The Tribes and Their Responses

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."

Deborah is listing tribes that helped in this battle. Ephraim was possibly her own tribe, and so she mentioned Joshua, also of Ephraim, who attacked the Amalekites (**Exodus 17:13**).

Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin; Machir refers to the half-tribe of Manasseh, those beyond Jordan in Gilead did not help, (verse 17) so this must be those who dwelt on the west side of Jordan who came to help Barak. Zebulun was on the seacoast, and were merchants, who laid down their pens and took up arms to assist Barak.

Judges 5:15-16 - "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart."

"even Issachar" = the rest of the tribe of Issachar, according to the Targum.

"he was sent on foot into the valley" - extremely dangerous against iron wheeled chariots

"the divisions of Reuben" - Reuben could not make a decision to respond to Deborah's call, so this powerful tribe sat out the battle to remain with their sheepfolds and flocks.

"great thoughts of heart" - thoughts great in number, haughty, or loud and intense

The Targum of Jonathan renders it "shrewdness." And what was his shrewdness? He dwelt by the edges (מִשְׁפָּתַי) of the battle to hear who would win so that he should join with him.

Unless the stirring of faith and the Spirit illuminates our thinking, we will always decide for self and for safety. Reuben was not threatened by Jabin and his Canaanites. Why should they risk their flocks and good life to help their Israelite brothers?

That's why Jesus tells us "Take no thought for your life..." (**Matthew 6:25**) i.e. do not worry, have no care. Otherwise we will always be able to justify betrayal.

Judges 5:17 - "Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches."

"in his breaches" = in the bays and havens where they had much shipping

Judges 5:18 - "Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."

Rashi - He scorned himself and submitted himself to die in battle with Barak, and

likewise Naphtali on the high places of the field, on Mount Tabor.

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*

Judges 5:19-20 - "The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera."

Targum- "from heaven war was made with them"

Rashi - from their courses: The tip of the star being in heaven and its edge upon earth

Possibly this means that angels participated in the battle. Stars (**Deut. 4:19; Jer. 8:2**) are a type of the "host of heaven," (**I Kings 22:19; II Chron. 18:18**) the numberless angelic armies that fight for God. Even believers are described this way:

- **Daniel 12:3** - "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

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).

Judges 5:21 - "The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

Targum, "the river where signs and mighty works were done for Israel of old."

The Kishon River was the site where the prophets of Baal were executed on Elijah's orders, following Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal nearby on Mount Carmel (**1 Kings 18:20-39**).

It runs through the Valley of Jezreel or Megiddo. The valley was the scene of a victory by the Israelites, led by Gideon, against the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the Children of the East (Judges 6:3)

Recall that Armageddon (Har Megiddo) is the site of the ultimate and final victory of God over his enemies. (**Revelation 16:16**)

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 (הִלְמוּ) (Mechilta Ex. 14:24).

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."

Who or what was Meroz? Possibly a village of Israelites who refused to aid them in the battle. The Talmud (Moed Katan 16a) identifies Meroz as a star or celestial body or an angel who refused to take part in the stars fighting against Sisera. "its inhabitants" refers to its "camp" or surrounding stars according to the Zohar.

Perhaps it was a stand-in for the reluctant tribes who didn't show up, but for whom a curse would be inappropriate.

The "sin of Meroz" refers to apathy. 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.

- **Zephaniah 1:12** - "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil."

- **Romans 12:11** - "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

- **Revelation 3:15-16** - "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Judges 5:24-27 - "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

"blessed shall she be above women" -

- **Luke 1:42** - "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women"

As we said last week, Jael was a foreshadowing of Mary, who would bring the Messiah

into the world. He would in turn crush the head of the serpent in **Genesis 3:15**.

Another mother...

Judges 5:28-30 - "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?"

Targum is, "why are the runners hindered, who should bring me a letter of the victories?"

Deborah points out the unperturbed expectation of violence and rape against women after a victory, reflected in the use by Sisera's mother of a vulgar term for female genitals, translated "damsel." She in turn expected gifts of multicolored garments from the plunder.

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."

"when he goeth forth" - 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**.

- **Psalms 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 says this shining will be super bright;

Rashi - 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].

Believers are again compared with celestial bodies, this time with the sun itself "when he goeth forth in his might."

God is also compared to the sun:

- **Malachi 4:2** - "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

- **Luke 1:78-79** - "Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring

[dawn] from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.'"

- **Psalm 84:11** - "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly."

- Habakkuk 3:4 - "His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. 4 His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden."

- **Matthew 17:2** - "and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light."

- **Revelation 1:16** - "He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."