

Immediate Context

Judges 5 is a song of praise written in light of the victory realized in Judges 4. The lesson from the prior chapter cited key points from Judges 5 that helped us better understand how the battle unfolded and the role of the key players. This lesson will only summarize those points in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and to focus us in on unique insights that we only realize in chapter five.

Judges 5:1-5 – Sinai Came Near

This song was sung by both Deborah and Barak, with Deborah appearing to take on a more primary role as the author.

- A major theme of this song is introduced right off the bat. What is it and why is it significant? The chief and initial praise of this psalm is that so many of the people of Israel fulfilled their roles and stepped up to the plate. God then secured the victory.
- Who received glory for the movement of the leaders and the participation of the people? Deborah and Barak's cry was, "Bless Jehovah". They saw the participation of so many to be the work of God. Consider that while this battle was an act of faith for both Deborah and Barak, it was also an act of faith for everyone who participated. They considered it a work of God that was worthy of the ears and attention of kings and rulers.
- In verses 4 and 5, we read about God's tangible participation in this battle through a storm. What is significant about the mention of Sinai in verse 5? Sinai was where the Lord met Israel, gave them the clearest sense of His presence and voice, and entered into covenant with them. By referring to their battle as a Sinai-experience, they were rejoicing in the nearness and faithfulness of God to Israel in this event. He was not tied to a far-away mountain or to a prior year, He is a God who is present-tense and near.

Judges 5:6-8 – The Starting Point

- Why does Deborah name this era after Shamgar and Jael? First, Deborah appears to be the writer and does not exalt herself as the chief figure of this era. However, she characterizes this span of time by the valiant behavior of two heroes: a judge and a woman. From what we have studied, it is likely that both of these heroes of Israel were not Jewish. Evidently, both of these individuals made a great impression upon her and she sees them as key deliverers of Israel.
- What is the "peasantry" and what is their affliction? They were the inhabitants of the unfortified villages, who were afraid to go into the fields, to travel, trade, and communicate with the other inhabitants of Israel. We begin to get a sense of the weight of oppression Israel bore. The northern tribes affected by these Canaanites were isolated from one another as well as their southern brothers and sisters. The middle/working class was obliterated and people were forced into poverty. Idolatry was also rampant, leaving the nation powerless (no shield or spear) in the face of their enemies who had brought the war to their gates (their front doors). This was daily life for Israel for 20 years before the victory. **While sin promises us joy, it will ultimately bring bondage that steals our freedom and joy and burdens us under oppression. Can you relate?**

Judges 5:9-11 – Something to Sing About

- The significance of the people’s participation is again highlighted as a point of praise. God delivered, but He did so through willing people.
- Who are the ones riding on white donkeys and sit on rich carpets? They were the wealthy merchants who travelled the highways, buying and selling goods. Because of their travels, they also served as a line of communication with the outside world. They had seen Israel’s oppression for 20 years and now this victory. Deborah is saying that this victory of the Lord’s is news that should travel beyond the borders of Israel. What He has done should be told to others so that they might know how He delivered the oppressed and encourage them to trust Him as well. **This is the work of evangelism. Our victory over sin through Christ is the greatest battle ever fought and won and the results are real to all of the saved. His constant presence and working in our life should be the source of our joy and motivate our lips to praise so that His name might be made great from the rising to the setting of the sun.**

Judges 5:12-15a, 18 – Praise for the Participants

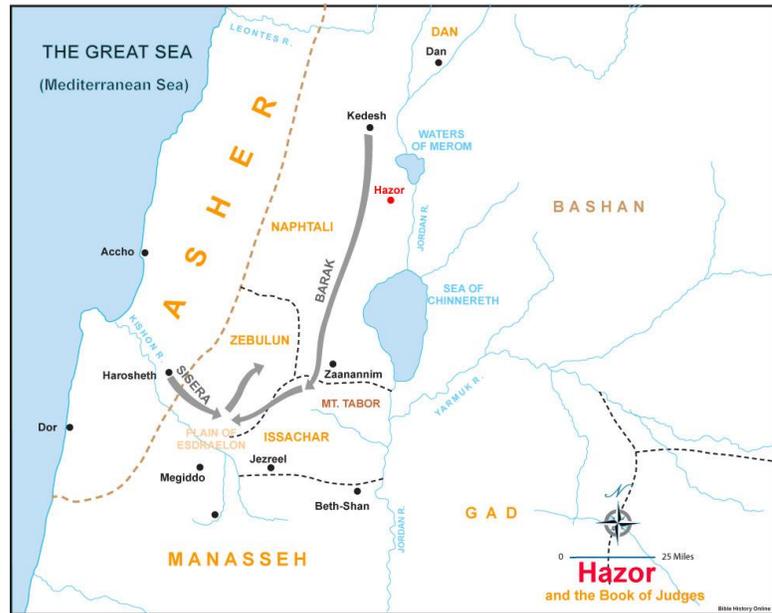
We see here the Lord calling Deborah to away (rouse up) and sing a song. The content and purpose of this song have an important message for us.

- Why are Israelites called “survivors” in verse 13 and who are the “nobles”? They are survivors of the oppression of Jabin and Sisera. The nobles (mighty) appears to be a reference to the military superiority of the Canaanites.
- Deborah calls the participating Israelites, “the people of the LORD”, the only such reference to Israel in Judges. She then begins to list the role of the tribes who aided in battle, each one specifically (verses 14-15a and 18). Why did she do this? Each of these tribes volunteered to fight in obedience to the call of Barak. They risked their lives and stepped forth with faith in God and His chosen leaders. Their faithfulness should be affirmed as praiseworthy. **Affirmation is important and is best applied when it is personal and specific. Biblical affirmation is not flattery, but recognizing the image of Christ in others and making that a point of praise.**

Judges 5:15b-17, 23 – Criticism and Curses for the Spectators

- Two verses are devoted to Reuben. What happened with this tribe? Reuben’s allotment was across the Jordan River and therefore not likely affected by the oppression of the Canaanites, as the iron chariots could not afflict them. Their only reason for participating would be out of duty to a fellow tribe of Israel. It sounds like Reuben seriously considered participating in the fight and may have even resolved to do so, but faltered when it came time to go. They remained among the sheepfolds. **Your faith is demonstrated by what you do, not just by what you say.**
- What was the excuse of Gilead, Dan, and Asher? Gilead is the land located across the Jordan, adjacent to Reuben. This was likely the homeland of the tribe of Gad. Dan and Asher were also more distant, dwelling along the Mediterranean Sea and engaged in a profitable shipping enterprise. Their distance and lack of involvement with the Canaanites made them indifferent to the oppression of their brothers and to participating in this battle. **Their indifference did not limit God, but it excluded them from a blessing and further eroded God’s intended unity.**

- Where is Meroz? Who were they and why were they singled out for a curse by the Angel of the Lord? Reuben, Gilead, Asher, and Dan were verbally rebuked for their indifference but Meroz was cursed. No one knows where Meroz was located, but it was believed to be a city in the vicinity of Mt. Tabor, in the thick of the oppression and the battle that took place. Even the stars (the angels) were involved in this battle (verse 20), but the inhabitants of Meroz failed to participate. Their apathy and cowardice became their downfall and the fact that there is no remnant of this city demonstrates the efficacy of the curse. **Indifference from a distance is disappointing, indifference in the midst of the battle is inexcusable. The one who does not provide for their own household has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8)**



Judges 5:19-22 – God Came to Fight

This passage provides some of the detail regarding God’s direct intervention in this conflict against the Canaanites. Much of this was already discussed in the previous lesson. The best of Jabin and Sisera’s forces came to fight a battle they should have handily won, but God intervened through this rainstorm, making the ground difficult for the chariots to navigate and swelling the Kishon to a torrent that swept the armies away. There was no victory or plunder for the Canaanites.

Judges 5:24-27 – Jael’s Blessing

- Why do we have such a vivid description of Sisera’s murder in this passage? This is a song and the repetition and detail is meant to have an emotional punch. Remember too that this is divinely inspired. **God’s judgment and wrath can be unpleasant to think about, but they are righteous and perfectly measured out.** Israel is being shown that oppression of God’s people is not something He takes lightly. Even the martyred saints under the throne of God cried out for vengeance against those who killed them (*Revelation 6:9-11*). They are not rebuked by God, only told to remain patient. **God is patient, but as demonstrated at the cross, when it falls it will fall swiftly and completely.** As we will see in the next passage, there is a poetic justice to Sisera dying at the hand of a woman, at her feet, within her tent.

Judges 5:28-31 – Freedom from Oppression

- What do we learn about the oppression of the Canaanites from the words of comfort offered to Sisera's mother? They not only conquered Israel, but would happily divide their property and forcibly violate their women. Apparently this was common practice among the Canaanites.

We close with a benediction prayer for justice against the enemies of God and the victory of God's people. We also see the poetic justice of a nation who would violate women having their greatest military hero die by the hand of a woman, at her feet, in her tent. This was a humiliating way for Sisera to die, but it was just. After this victory, there was again rest for a generation (forty years).