

Judges

Lesson 10

Picking up from the last lesson, we come to the people of Deborah's song.

(g) The People of Deborah's Song (5:13-24)

(i) Those Who Came to Fight (5:13-15a)

Working her way through the details to set the scene, it is now time to sing about the war she led. We come to the people of Deborah's song. We start with those who came to fight. Verse 13. *"Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors."*¹⁴ *"From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office."*^{15a} *"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels...."* (5:13-15a)

The "survivors" in verse 13 is translated better in other verses as "remnant." Deborah is stating that a simple remnant of Israel was drawn forth to rule over the "nobles." Which nobles? The only answer is the Canaanite nobles ruling the Nation of Israel.

The "people of the LORD" who came to help defeat the Canaanite nobles were the warriors. Who were these people and from where did they come? The first who came to fight were from Ephraim, specifically, those who dwelt in the area where Amalek once lived. When did the Amalek's live in Ephraim's land? If you will remember, one hundred and eighteen years before this time in the story, Eglon of Moab had enlisted the help of the Ammonites and the Amalekites to take control of Israel. For eighteen years, Eglon with his Moabites, along with the men of Ammon and Amalek with their families moved into the land of Benjamin and Ephraim to live. Jericho, the city of palm trees was in Benjamin's land under the authority of Judge Ehud. The tribes had to take the land back from these oppressors. One hundred years before this point in time, Ehud and the Israelite warriors took that land back. These men were from current Deborah's home territory and no doubt they traveled with her and Barak when they journeyed to Hazor.

The tribal area of Ephraim was bordered on the south by the tribal area of Benjamin. Deborah's song tells us that the Benjamites joined Deborah and Barak in the fight. At this point in the story, Ephraim and Benjamin were close. Deborah's palm tree where she ruled as a magistrate was just a few miles from each tribal area. The Benjamite warriors joined in the battle.

"Machir commanders came down." Where did commanders come from? Machir was the only son of Manasseh. Manasseh was the brother of Ephraim. Manasseh's tribal area was north of Ephraim's land. When the land was allotted by Joshua, Ephraim's land was carved out of Manasseh's land. However, we must remember that half the tribe Manasseh lived on the east side of the Jordan River and the other half lived on the west side of the river, north of the tribal allotment of Ephraim. This reference must mean the commanders who lived on the west side just north of Ephraim. When Deborah and Barak made their announcement concerning the campaign, the commanders of Manasseh, Machir, came to help with the organization of the campaign.

Once in the north portion of the Promised Land, the tribe of Zebulun was enlisted. If they could hold a "staff of office," they joined the campaign. What does that phrase mean? It is a reference to those who had the authority to muster the troops of the tribe of Zebulun to battle.

The "princes of Issachar were with Deborah." Who were the "princes of Issachar?" In this song, Deborah had revealed some personal information that we were not privy to in her introduction in chapter 4. The Hebrew rendering says, *"my princes of Issachar were with Deborah."* If correct, Deborah was born a descendant of the tribe of Issachar. She married *Lappidoth* of the tribe Ephraim, which was

permissible by the LORD in the law. Therefore, the mention of *Lappidoth's* name in her introduction was to identify him as belonging to the tribe of Ephraim even though Deborah belonged to the tribe of Issachar. Belonging to *Lappidoth* gave validity to Deborah to judge at her palm tree in Ephraim's land. Because of Deborah's involvement in this campaign, the rulers of Issachar supported her. It meant the army of Issachar would be there to help. With Barak, all of these cousins of the nation of Israel joined together and *"Into the valley they rushed at his heels...."* Whose heels? Sisera, who was the commander of Jabin's army.

(ii) Those Who Failed to Fight (5:15b-17)

In this song, Deborah revealed those who came to fight. Now Deborah reveals those who failed to fight. Verse 15b. *"Among the divisions of Reuben There were great resolves of heart."*¹⁶ *"Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben There were great searchings of heart."*¹⁷ *"Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings."* (5:15b-17)

Four of the northern tribes failed to fight with their Israelite brethren – Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher.

Reuben searched its heart and wanted to fight, but could not draw the will to fight. It procrastinated in its pastures with its flocks instead of helping its brethren.

Gilead was the land on the east side of the Jordan River. It was the half tribe of Manasseh who controlled that portion of land. Neither did this half tribe come to help its brethren.

Dan's men stayed on its ships. This verse does not mean Dan was a ship going people. Dan's tribal area was on the border of the Mediterranean Sea in the central portion of the Promised Land. Living there near the sea ports, the men of Dan would have worked on the docks in the shipping industry. They stayed at work on the ships rather than help their brethren.

Asher followed suit with the tribe of Dan. Asher's tribal territory bordered on the Mediterranean Sea in the northern portion of the Promised Land. It remained at the ports instead of helping their brethren nearby. Ports were also called *"landings,"* where the ships would arrive.

(iii) Those Who Had to Fight (5:18-19)

Deborah has told us about those who came to fight, those who failed to fight, and now she tells us about those who had to fight. Verse 18. *"Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death, And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field."*¹⁹ *"The kings came and fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver."* (5:18-19)

The battle against Sisera and his army would take place in the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali. The headquarters of Jabin and Sisera was in Naphtali's land west of Lake Merom. But the LORD had instructed the Israelites to use Mount Tabor to lure Sisera and his army away from home base. Mount Tabor was in Zebulun's land. The battle would start there on the *"high places of the field"* around Mount Tabor. The men of Zebulun and Naphtali were willing to fight to their deaths to win back Israel's freedom.

Verse 19 uses the word *"kings."* We must remember that every Canaanite city with its surrounding villages had a king. When the *"kings came and fought,"* it simply meant all the rulers of all the Canaanites cities and villages with their men joined together under Sisera to fight the Israelites.

The villages of Taanach and Megiddo both sit on the left side of the Kishon River. In chapter 4 we learned that the battle started at the foot of Mount Tabor and proceeded from there. Taanach lays about fifteen miles from Tabor. In chapter 4 we also learned that the Israelites fought and killed the Canaanite army, but its commander got away and ran to his home town. The heaviest part of the battle occurred at Taanach where the waters of the Kishon had passed by Megiddo. The Canaanites were not successful. The winner in the battle always gathered the spoils of the other army which included silver. At that time in the history of Israel, silver was more valuable to the

average man than gold because it was the common currency used by the common man to purchase supplies and food. Because the Canaanites were all destroyed, they took no silver in spoils.

(iv) Those Who Helped the Fight (5:20-23)

But in Deborah's song, she included those who helped the fight. These helpers were under the divine control of the LORD. Verse 20. *"The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera."*²¹ *"The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength."*²² *"Then the horses' hoofs beat From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds."*²³ *"Curse Meroz," said the angel of the LORD, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants; Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, To the help of the LORD against the warriors.'"* (5:20-23)

The LORD used the forces of nature to help His people. Meteorites fell to harm Sisera's army. The flooding of the Kishon river rushed against Sisera's army. All that has been mentioned allowed the horses of the Canaanites to be frightened and trample their owners.

Who was Meroz? Meroz was a village that sat twelve miles from Samaria. It was in the path of the battle leading from Mount Tabor to Naphtali sitting on the Kishon River. Deborah is telling us that as the battle passed through Meroz, the inhabitants did not lend a hand in the fight. Therefore, the "angel of the LORD" cursed the people of that town.

(h) The Woman of Deborah's Song (5:24-27)

The army of Sisera was dead, but Sisera was still alive. We know the story of his tragic death but at this point in the chapter we are introduced to the woman of Deborah's song - Jael. Verse 24.

*"Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent."*²⁵ *"He asked for water and she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds."*²⁶ *"She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple."*²⁷ *"Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead."* (5:24-27)

Deborah added one new fact in this passage. In addition to the milk, Jael also fed Sisera curds. When milk was churned, the curds were often pressed to form cheese. In this case, it is right for us to assume that she gave Sisera milk to drink and cheese to eat. A meal fit for a noble.

(i) The Consequence of Deborah's Song (5:28-30)

Even though Deborah was a judge, she was also a woman with female feelings. Deborah looked at the consequence of Deborah's song that looked past his death to his own mother. Verse 28. *"Out of the window she looked and lamented, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?"*²⁹ *"Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed she repeats her words to herself,"*³⁰ *"Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed work, A spoil of dyed work embroidered, Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?"* (5:28-30)

For twenty years her Canaanite commander son always came home. A little extra was in his pocket for his mother. A new maiden or two on his arm. A beautiful piece of cloth around his neck. But, this time at war, he did not come home to his mother. The consequence of war, the consequence of sinning against the LORD, will always result in the same ending – the mother or love one will be broken hearted. The enemy of Israel was dead.

(j) The Benediction of Deborah's Song (5:31b)

Finally, the writer records the benediction of Deborah's song, the prayer to the LORD concerning Israel's enemies. Verse 31a. *"Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."* (5:31a) It is a correct prayer. It is a prayer that pleases the LORD. It matches His promise to the Nation of Israel. His command was for all of Israel's Canaanite enemies to be destroyed because they worship other gods and not the One and only God.

(k) The Result of the Story of Deborah's Song (5:31b)

The writer added a line below that established the result of the story of Deborah's song. Verse 31b. *"And the land was undisturbed for forty years."* (5:31b) Deborah followed the LORD to free Israel.