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Blessed be Ja’el

5: 24-31

Blessed be Ja’el DIG: What is admirable in Ja’el? Why is the description of Sisera’s mother so pathetic? Why does Deborah go into such detail in her song? Why is the Bible’s characterization of Deborah so encouraging for women? How are Deborah’s last words in this hymn both a prayer to YHVH and a call to Isra’el?

REFLECT: Ja’el made the decision to support Isra’el no matter the cost. How would you rate your support for Isra’el? Other than ADONAI, for whom would you likely compose a song of praise? What aspect of Deborah’s song has benefited you the most? Try composing a song about God’s victory in your life.

While the Israelite city of Meroz failed to do its duty, the Gentile Ja’el did not fail.

As **Deborah’s** victory **song** continues (**to see link click At - Deborah’s Victory Song**), **Deborah’s blessing** on **Ja’el** reminds us of **Gabriel’s** words to **Mary** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ AI - The Birth of Jesus Foretold to Mary**). Because of **Barak’s** hesitation, **Deborah** announced that **a woman** would get the credit for killing **the general** of the **Canaanite** army (**4:8-9**). The phrase **crushing his head** doesn’t mean that **she** decapitated **him**. With one stroke **the tent peg went** through **his temple**.¹²⁵



The Seventh Stanza: The Praise of Ja’el (5:24-27): Most blessed among women is Ja’el, the wife of Heber the Kenite. May she be blessed above all women who live in tents (5:24 NLT). While the Israelite city of Meroz took the side of the Canaanites, the Gentile Ja’el took the side of Isra’el, even going against her husband. It should be noted that there is no condemnation of Ja’el’s actions whatsoever, only praise. There are many people that condemn her for her actions of deception; totally ignoring that during wartime, deception of the enemy is part of the rules of war. However, there are no words of condemnation of her actions in the text. The Bible only praises her, and one should not let his or her own subjective misjudgment color their thinking about certain biblical characters. He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him cheese. She was treating him like royalty. Then with her left hand she reached for a tent peg, and with her right hand for the workman’s hammer. The Hebrew text uses different, but similar-sounding words for striking. She struck (Hebrew: *chalmah*) Sisera with the hammer, crushing (Hebrew: *machakah*) his head. With a shattering blow (Hebrew: *machatzah*), she pierced (Hebrew: *chalpah*) his temple.¹²⁶ At her feet he sank, he fell, and lay still at her feet. And where he sank, there he died (5:25-27 NLT). The description of Sisera’s death in this verse gives the impression that he was standing in the tent when Ja’el struck him and then fell dead at her feet. But

he was lying down **asleep** when **he was slain (4:18)**. We may have here some Hebrew poetic license, but it’s also possible that in the agony of **his death**, **Sisera** raised **himself** up from **the tent** floor and then **sank at her feet** and **died**.

The Eighth Stanza: The Mother of Sisera (5:28-30): The **singer** moves from describing **Sisera’s death** to portraying **Sisera’s mother** watching for **her son’s** return. **From the window, Sisera’s mother looked out. Through the window she watched for his return, saying, “Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why don’t we hear the sound of chariot wheels (5:28 NLT).** What a pathetic picture of hope where there is no hope! How many people today are looking out **the window** of false assumptions and expecting something to happen that will never happen. **Sisera was dead; he** would never come home to **his mother’s** love again.¹²⁷ **The wise women of the Canaanite court answered her,** even though **she** kept trying to convince **herself** that **he** would be coming soon. **His mother** and **her** attendants kept telling **themselves** that everything was going to be fine (but it wasn’t). **She** thought out loud: **Of course! They must be dividing the captured plunder – with a woman or two for every man.** The Hebrew literally reads: *A womb, a pair of wombs for each man.* These are sexual expressions. They reflect the realities of war for the victorious soldiers. **The women** of conquered foes were used primarily for sexual gratification – for rape or to become sex slaves. This **woman’s** loyalty to **her son** and **her people** blinded **her loyalty** to other **women**.¹²⁸ Another treasured prize of war was expensive clothing. **A plunder of colorfully embroidered garments, two embroidered scarves for every soldier’s neck (5:29-30 CJB).** The demise of **Sisera** and the portrayal of **his mother** are clear indications of **God’s** determination to **judge** the wicked. **The mother’s** thoughts about **plundering** and raping helpless, innocent **women** reveal what **Sisera** had undoubtedly done countless times before. But this time **he** would not humiliate a single **woman**; instead, a single **woman – a Kenite woman** – would humiliate **him** and turn **him** into **plunder**.

How can we apply the scene of **Sisera’s mother**? In one way, it’s a sad, tragic scene. But in the large scope of **the poem** as a whole and **the fourth cycle** in which **it** is found, **it** provides us with an important balance to the events that we have already seen, especially those in the tent of **Ja’el**. It prevents us from simply concluding that **Sisera** was an innocent victim. In different circumstances, **Sisera** wouldn’t have hesitated to victimize **Ja’el** any less than **he** would have hesitated to victimize Deborah or any other **woman**. **His** track record is graphically testified to by **his own mother** – who, in fact, was not only perfectly content with this but

apparently had encouraged this behavior in **her son**. The **poem’s** presentation of **her** thought processes serves to show that **her son’s** life desires are like **hers**: **plunder** and self-gratification. Such wickedness at the expense of others will not go unjudged: **Ha’Shem does not hesitate to punish and destroy those who reject Him (Deuteronomy 7:10). He lavishes steadfast love to a thousand generations. He forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet, He doesn’t acquit the guilty (Exodus 34:7a).**¹²⁹

The Ninth Stanza: The Closing Prayer (5:31a): May all your enemies perish like this, **ADONAI**. This assumes that those who fight against **Isra’el** also fight against **ADONAI** and is in keeping with the cursing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant: **I will curse anyone who curses you (Genesis 12:3b). But may those who love Him be like the sun going forth in glory (5:31a CJB)!** This closing prayer contrasts **the enemies** of **ADONAI**, who like **Sisera** go out in darkness, with **the people of God**, who are like **the noonday sun**. The battle at Megiddo was more than just a conflict between two opposing armies. It was a conflict between the forces of **darkness** and the forces of **light**. We either **love Messiah** and walk in **the light** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Df - You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World**), or we are **His enemy**, and perish in **the darkness**. **Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God (James 4:4).**¹³⁰

The Rest (5:31b): What the events recalled in **the story** and **the song** did produce, however, was another intermission, so to speak, in **Isra’el’s** downward spiral. **Then there was rest in the land for forty years.** Only when **the song** is completed is the entire **Deborah-Barak story** closed with the now famous formula of **rest for the land (5:31b NLT).**

Judges portrays a degenerative society. Yet, **Deborah** is without a doubt the most honorable human figure in the book and one of the most remarkable people in the entire TaNaKh. As the prophet of **God** in a dark and dismal age, she represented a ray of light and hope. **ADONAI** is the true hero in the account, but her character and achievements should not be minimized. In an era of weak men, **YHVH** raised up a woman to serve as a lightning rod against His wrath. The priesthood’s silence in **Chapter 5** is deafening. But just because they were in spiritual decline did not mean that **the LORD** had totally abandoned His people. He still had a representative. **She** didn’t sit at Bethel or Shiloh where the Tabernacle resided, but outside the town, received the pleas of the Israelites on God’s behalf. Her commissioning of **Barak** represents divine authority. In fact, as **His** representative,

she went the second mile and accompanied **him** into battle, as a recognized representative and spokesperson for **the Commander in Chief**.

That was **her** role; no more, no less. In doing so **she** was granted full authority to take **her** place among the continuous line of **God’s** servants and **prophets**. While they served as agents of **God’s** grace in every age, in none was it more welcome than in the dark days of the judges. To borrow a note from an anonymous first century author, “In **Deborah** the grace of **God** has been awakened; through her, the works of **YHVH** have been seen.” That people in our day, especially **women**, should find inspiration in **Deborah** is not surprising. **She** didn’t displace men in officially established positions of leadership, but **her** gender did not disqualify her from significant service to **the LORD** (see the commentary on **Genesis Lv – Women and Spiritual Gifts**). And so it is at any age. **God’s** call to service often catches **His people** by surprise, but when **He** calls, we must respond to **His** command, even when it appears to run counter to conventional thinking.¹³¹

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that **You** love and desire to use all who believe in **You**, Jews and Gentiles alike, including **Ja’el the Kenite (4:17)**, to bring honor to **Your** holy **Name**. There were several other Gentiles that were used by **God** in the TaNaKh: **Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High** blessed **Abraham**, and served as an early picture of **Messiah’s priesthood (Genesis 14:18-20)**; **Rahab**, a Canaanite woman from Jericho hid Israelite spies because of her faith in **the God of Isra’el**, was woven into the genealogy of **Yeshua (Joshua 2:1-21; Matthew 1:5)**; **Ruth**, a Moabite widow left **her** homeland to follow **Naomi** and embrace **the God of Isra’el**, becoming the great-grandmother of **King David (Ruth 1:16; Matthew 1:5)**; **Naaman**, a commander in the Syrian (Aramean) army whom **ADONAI** healed of leprosy through **Elisha**, leading him to worship **the One True God (Second Kings 5:1-15)**; **Cyrus the Great**, the pagan king of Persia whom **Ha’Shem** called: **His anointed**, used **him** to conquer Babylon and allow the Jewish exiles to return and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (**Isaiah 45:1**); **Balaam**, a pagan diviner from Mesopotamia whom **the LORD** compelled to speak truthful blessings over **Isra’el** rather than curses (**Numbers 22-24**). In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*