

One Woman, Three Kings

The Story of Deborah, Saul, David and Solomon

By Steven Liebowitz, ED.D

The Bible tells us that 175 years after Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt, there arose a woman, Devorah, a daughter of Ephraim, to be a Judge over her people, a prophetess and a righteous example unto them. The Bible also tells us of Devorah's husband, Lappodoth; Barak, the great Hebrew general; Sisera the Canaanite general; Yael the Kenite, slayer of Sisera; and of Sisera's mother, Bethena. The Bible touches only the high points of their lives. What follows is a more complete story.

Chapter Five

The squadron of five massive chariots reigned in before the brigade stables at full gallop, one after another, in faultless precision. The dust settled on the motionless drivers and spearmen; only the teams of splendid horses moved, stamping and neighing, nostrils flaring. The parade ground, too, though now crowded with uniformed men, was silent. A moment later, as Sisera stepped from the building's dim interior into the light, a cheer broke from every throat, and the soldiers banged their weapons on their shields. "Baal Hakim!" They shouted. "Baal Hakim! Baal Hakim!"

Sisera raised his arms above his head, fists clenched, and looked smiling into each of the cheering faces. He was tall for a Canaanite, bulky with a reddish-blond beard and hair. He stood 5'10" and weighed 215 pounds. His size alone inspired confidence. But it was his deeds on the field of battle, his sense of justice, and his compassion for his troops that inspired ardor. Jabin, the Over King himself, was rumored to be jealous of him. But there was none to replace him. For sixteen years, Sisera had fought gloriously.

Yet he was getting tired. His warm brown eyes were tinged with sadness and he felt the corners of his mouth droop and his arms grow heavy. They were splendid soldiers and the drill they just completed had gone flawlessly, yet still I am tired. Their adoration strengthens me. Yet I can not do it all alone. It is necessary to bring forth additional leaders. Should something happen to me, the Canaanite Federation would be at great risk. This is not sound leadership.

He let the sadness drop from him and gestured for his warriors to be still. At first they redoubled their clamor, finally, they fell silent.

"Soldiers!" he said to them. They cheered again. He waited. They fell silent. "This is the

anniversary of our great victory at Hazor! The battle was fought by King Jabin's father's father to take back our capital from the Haibru invaders. Since that time we have fought again and again to keep these barbarians from destroying our culture. Their desert god knows nothing of the wealth and beauty of our cities; of our justice and the serenity of our fields and orchards. They foul our air and pollute everything with their sheep and burnt offerings. We try to live in harmony with them but they refuse to respect Baal and Astarte. There can be no god but their god and they kill those of their kind who are tolerant, accept our gods and come to live amongst us. How long shall we allow this?"

"No longer!" the multitude shouted back at him. "No longer, Baal Hakim!"

Sisera allowed them to shout and clamor, then resumed. "My mother awaits me!" They cheered. "Your mothers, wives and sweethearts await you. We shall not tarry here much longer. I promise you! Soon there will be an end to drills." He raised his fists above his head, turned and re-entered the dim recesses of the stables. His soldiers broke ranks noisily.

But in the stable, the sounds were muffled and the heavy, sensual aroma of horse flooded his nostrils. Hay crackled beneath his heavy sandals. Pausing, Sisera inhaled deeply and pulled off his helmet. Sweat dripped, running down his forehead to sting his eyes. In the dim light, the scent of horse mingled with his own body odor, rekindling a memory of fucking in the stables when he was a boy.

Walking quickly, he entered a stair well and climbed three stories to his command room. Sheepskin maps were strewn across the two large tables in the center of the room. On a smaller table next to the window overlooking the parade ground was a decanter of good wine from the Galilee and three golden chalices. Though, not normally one for ostentation, Sisera did appreciate the finer things, and saw no reason to deprive himself of them unless absolutely necessary.

He poured the rich purple liquid, admiring its heavy flow and the contrast of its deep color with the shine of the gold, and drank greedily. Oh, I needed that, he thought. How I ache! He tugged at his heavy leather breast plate. As he poured to fill his cup again; Zeber and Sostrum, his two adjutants entered the room. They too, seemed tired. Though ten years and eight years younger, Sisera, knew the strain they were experiencing was as great as his. They tugged off their copper helmets and set them on the map tables.

"What you said out there about younger leaders," Sostrum said. "Is correct."

"But I said nothing about that, Sostrum," Sisera said.

Sostrum looked confused and Zeber laughed. “It’s true, Sostrum. Sisera said nothing about younger leaders.” He moved to the wine, poured a cup for his colleague, handed it to him, poured one for himself, and raised his chalice in a toast. “Here’s to our companionship,” he said spilling a drop for the gods on the rough hewn planked floor. “We understand one another’s minds so well, we need not speak what we are thinking!”

Laughing, Sisera and Sostrum, spilled and drank deeply.

“But you did speak of our wives, sweethearts and mothers,” Sostrum said, squinting in Sisera’s direction. Sisera stood full in the glare from the large window and it was difficult to see his features. “Did you not, my lord?”

“I did, Sostrum. I did indeed. I know my mother misses me sorely; and again has plans to marry me off.” Sisera shook his head. “I have enough of duty, here, with the Army. I need not have it in my bed, too! As Baal is my witness, when I need a woman, I will have her. I have no need of marriage to fuck.”

“Well spoken, my good lord,” Sostrum said, and Zeber nodded. “But we have been here Charoshet for nearly a year. I know my wife and family....”

“And mine,” Zeber echoed.

“In Hazor are wanting to see me.” Sostrum concluded; then added: “And I believe two thirds of the men feel the same.”

Sisera had his back to them and was starring out the window, nodding. He’d heard and agreed with every word. The city bustling beneath them was a regional center of trade and moderately fortified. Caravans brought finished goods from Charoshet’s many small artisans and factories throughout Canaan. There were temples and palaces, in fact he looked into the courtyard of Astarte’s large temple, but they were not the temples and palaces of Hazor. The women were willing, more than willing; the wine was good and the food acceptable, even delicious at times. But it was not Hazor. There was no royalty here, unless one counted the merchant ‘princess.’

“You are right,” Sisera said, turning to face them and moving away from the window so they could see him more easily. “We have had enough of garrison duty.” He drained the last of the wine and strode to the map table, gesturing the others to join him.

“Our spies tell us that Barak is concentrating a few hundred Haibus here,” Sisera put his index finger on the map, “at Mt. Tabor.” Sostrum and Zeber leaned forward. “I propose we strike at him decisively, here in the valley before Megiddo.”

“Yes,” Zeber said. “In that flat land we can use our chariots to advantage.”

“We can also bring infantry from Beth Shan and Taanach to form a great human barrier that will stop any escape to the west and south,” Sostrum said.

“We already have the north blocked,” Sisera said. “If Barak chooses not to fight, his only option is over the mountains to the Sea of Galilee and Ammon and the Syrians are not likely to allow that.”

“When will this begin, Lord?” Zeber asked.

“Our success depends on having as many Haibrus in the bag as possible,” Sisera said. “We can not bother with a few hundred. We must have many thousands. All of their fighting strength if possible.” Zeber and Sostrum nodded. “So we must continue our campaign of harassment and intimidation to provoke them to mass and fight.”

Sostrum was not happy. “But this is what we are doing now, Lord,” he said, tugging at his beard. “And here we are, away from our women and families, suffering. Can we not do something more to provoke them?”

“What would you suggest, Sostrum?”

“Maim prisoners, especially the soldiers; sacrifice prisoners to Baal.”

Sisera’s lip curled with distaste and he frowned. “We are soldiers not butchers or fanatics.”

“True, lord. Yet...”

“Yet we go on as we have been, Sostrum. I will, however, give more and longer leaves.”

Sostrum bowed deeply. “Thank you my lord. May I have your permission to withdraw?”

As Sisera waved him away and Sostrum departed, Zeber said, “Think not ill of Sostrum, my lord. His wife is very sick and his children are not being well cared for.”

“Yes, I know. It weighs heavily on me. We have many such amongst us. But we are not butchers or fanatics! I want to destroy the barbarian Haibrus, but not by destroying the very things, the civilization we are fighting for. Surely, you understand that Zeber?”

Zeber looked deeply into Sisera’s eyes. Yes, Sisera thought, he does understand.

“Please help Sostrum understand it also, Zeber. Watch over him.”

“I will, my lord.” Zeber turned and left.

Sostrum was waiting for him in the stables below. “We can not continue this futile war of attrition,” he said.

“Indeed,” Zeber agreed. “But you can not commit atrocities. Sisera will surely hang you if

he finds out.”

Sostrum leaned forward, touching his beard to Zeber’s. “And who will tell him?”

Sostrum’s eyes burned into Zeber’s.

“Not I,” Zeber said.

“Good,” Sostrum said, smiling. “I will visit the new batch of prisoners later. I recall one, a soldier who was wounded, but not too, badly. Perhaps if he is sent back without an ear or eye.... Perhaps then they will hate us enough to fight.”

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