

Yahweh's Benevolence vs. Anat's Malevolence:  
A Comparative Analysis of Judges 4–5 and COL ii 1–COL iii 2

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**Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

The actions of ancient Near Eastern warrior gods are often depicted as acts of vengeance, greed, and brutality, serving selfish ambition and never-ending power struggles. These gods and their warfare ethic dominated the worldview of the ancient world in which the events of the Old Testament took place. The actions of the Hebrew God are often included, even emphasized, in discussions of ancient divine warfare today. There are supposed similarities between the actions of war gods like Anat from the Ugaritic pantheon and those of Yahweh from ancient Israel. Unfortunately, this has led to the present-day belief that the God of the Old Testament is violent and vengeful, harboring hidden, malevolent motives. However, a closer look at the warfare ethic of Yahweh and that of Anat reveals a stark distinction between the ethics of each deity in their violent dealings with their enemies.

By comparing the warfare ethic of Yahweh in Judges 4–5 and Anat in the Baal Cycle, it will be made apparent that Yahweh's violent actions against the Canaanites are ultimately merciful. The stark distinction between the ethic and motives of these two deities make an apologetic for the morally superior warfare ethic of Yahweh and, consequently, His inherently benevolent nature.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is prepared according to the guidelines of the *Society of Biblical Literature* (2014), which is recognized as the format of choice in most graduate programs. The *Society of Biblical Literature* (SBL) specifies 1" margins on all sides (section 2.1), top, bottom, left, and right margins.

## Yahweh's Benevolence vs. Anat's Malevolence:

### A Comparative Analysis of Judges 4–5 and COL ii 1–COL iii 2

#### Introduction

In the ancient Near East, warfare was an inescapable firsthand experience for many and affected virtually all major aspects of their lives.<sup>2</sup> Sun Tzu, a well-known Chinese military general and philosopher, wrote in his work *The Art of War* that “War is the greatest affair of the State, the basis of life and death, the Way (Tao) to survival or extinction.”<sup>3</sup> Although warfare dominates the affairs of various nations throughout the world today, a glance at history shows that its presence in the ancient world substantially outweighs the experience of modern people.<sup>4</sup> Kurt A. Raaflaub states that “war was pervasive and deeply ingrained in human thinking through most of world history.”<sup>5</sup> This aspect of ancient society is witnessed through countless historical accounts written as annals, reliefs, administrative documents, and letters.<sup>6</sup>

While the ubiquity of warfare in the ancient Near East is accredited by these historical sources, it is also authorized through the abundance of religious mythology that relays countless stories of divine beings waging war against and alongside each other and humanity.<sup>7</sup> In the

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Trimm, *Fighting for the Kings and the Gods: A Survey of Warfare in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of current conflicts include war in Afghanistan, civil war in Syria and Ethiopia, war between Russia and Ukraine, and the drug wars in Mexico; Kurt A. Raaflaub, “Searching for Peace in the Ancient World,” in *Peace in the Ancient World: Concepts and Theories* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 8-12.

<sup>5</sup> Raaflaub, “Searching for Peace,” 10.

<sup>6</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for the Kings*, 6-9.

<sup>7</sup> Charlie Trimm states that “All armies in the ancient Near East viewed warfare as fundamentally religious” because of their worship of divine warriors, call for their help, messages received from them, lamentations over their abandonment, acceptance of divine weapons, and observation of divine involvement in battle (Trimm, *Fighting for the Kings*, 553). There are also depictions of the gods fighting against monsters. For example, the Israelite God, Yahweh, is depicted as fighting a serpent named Leviathan (Isa 27:1; Ps 74:13-14). Also, the Ugaritic storm god, Baal, is known for defeating a sea monster named Yam (CTA 2.iv. 18-27).

Bible, Yahweh is depicted as going forth “like a mighty man, like a man of war” who “stirs up his zeal” (Isa 42:13).<sup>8</sup> This implies His position as a warrior and leader of great heavenly armies. One of the most well-known accounts of God acting as a divine warrior is seen in Israel’s exodus from Egypt, where He wars against the Egyptian army by allowing the waters of the parted Red Sea to fall back on them, killing their entire fleet (Exod 14).<sup>9</sup> A popular myth from Egypt itself, the *Leiden Hymns*, speaks of deities like Raiyt and Amun Re acting as divine warriors in their battles against various opponents (COS 1.16.23-26).<sup>10</sup> The Hittite *Illuyanka Tales* describe a battle between the storm god and the serpent (COS 1.56.150-51), whereas another tale, the *Song of Kumarbi*, describes a battle between Alalu (the king) and Anu (his cupbearer) (COS 4.6A:39-44).<sup>11</sup> One of the most famous tales of divine combat from ancient literature comes from Mesopotamia and is titled, *Enuma Elish*. This is a Babylonian myth that depicts the victory of Marduk over Tiamat (one of the chief gods), making him the chief king of the gods (COS 1.111.390-402).<sup>12</sup> As is evidenced by these myths, along with countless others, the gods were viewed as intimately involved in the warfare of the ancient world.<sup>13</sup>

The ethics of war during this time are worth noting in the conversation of warfare in the ancient world. While efforts to preserve peace were present, many historical accounts boast the

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<sup>8</sup> All references are taken from the *English Standard Version: Anglicized Edition*, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> For a closer look at the parting of the Red Sea and how Israel saw Yahweh acting as a divine warrior against the nation of Egypt see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC 2, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 299-306.

<sup>10</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for the Kings*, 554.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 557-59., William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, ed. *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, Vol. 4 of *The Context of Scripture*, Leiden: Brill, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for the Kings*, 560-61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 553-67.

victories of kings and detail the brutality of their exploits against their enemies.<sup>14</sup> An example of brutality in West Semitic warfare comes from “a Luwian inscription from Maras,” which “describes Halparuntiyas, a king of Gurgum, abusing the people of a city he captured” by cutting off their feet and making the children eunuchs.<sup>15</sup> Cruel actions like this are mirrored in West Semitic mythology, like in the Baal Cycle, where Anat cuts off the hands and heads of her enemies and wears them around her neck and waist (CTA 3.ii.5-16). Ancient warfare also often included mass extermination of people groups.<sup>16</sup> Israel is well-known for following the commands of their divine warrior, Yahweh, to employ *herem* warfare against their enemies. This is commonly defined as one’s enemies being “devoted to [complete] destruction” and is often referred to as ‘the ban.’<sup>17</sup> The books of Deuteronomy and Joshua both give various accounts of Yahweh commanding Israel to enact *herem* warfare against the Canaanites (e.g. Deut 7:2; Josh 6:21). These examples of brutality and extermination portray a complex warfare ethic that is intimately connected with the motives of divine beings. A closer review of ancient warfare texts in Judges 4–5 and the Baal Cycle will provide an in-depth look at the behavior of the divine warriors, Yahweh and Anat, and bring more clarity to the nature of their actions.

### **Just Warfare Theory**

In this discussion, it is important to explore how scholars have defined just warfare as it relates to certain prescribed guidelines for waging war against an enemy. This is commonly known as Just Warfare Theory, which has been defined as “a war against military aggression or

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<sup>14</sup> For a further discussion of peace in the ancient world, see Raaflaub, “Searching for Peace,” 12-25.

<sup>15</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for Kings*, 366.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 379-92.

<sup>17</sup> There has been great debate about the definition of this term, which has resulted in a necessitated look at the context of each use throughout the Bible. For an in-depth look at the varying definitions see Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 28-77.

the serious intentional threat of military aggression or a war of intervention to protect fundamental human right.”<sup>18</sup> According to this theory, a war is determined to be just by the fulfillment of the requirements set out by *jus ad bellum*, which is the set of conditions that are generally accepted requirements for a just war.<sup>19</sup>

The conditions of *jus ad bellum* include, just cause, proportionality, a reasonable chance of success, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, and a public declaration of war.<sup>20</sup> Just cause can best be understood as the foundation of a case for war, which could include an assassination of the leader, illegal occupation of land, or threat to the common life of the people.<sup>21</sup> Proportionality refers to the analysis of whether the good that is being protected is worth the harm that is being inflicted through warfare. That is, will the inflicted harm be outweighed by the good that is trying to be protected.<sup>22</sup> A reasonable chance of success, prevents fighting “against all odds” and determines that war is enacted only in the case of reasonable success.<sup>23</sup> This diminishes unnecessary conflict and destruction. Legitimate authority recognizes the necessity for war to be pronounced and enacted by the highest authority over a group of people. That is, whoever has the authority to speak for a group of people is the one who should sanction the war.<sup>24</sup> Right intention is like just cause, but with a significant distinction. *Jus ad*

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<sup>18</sup> Richard J. Arneson, "Just Warfare Theory and Noncombatant Immunity," *Cornell International Law Journal* 39, no. 3 (2006): 663.

<sup>19</sup> These guidelines were set out in the United Nations Charter of 1945. Helen Fowles, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Helen Fowles, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 52-53. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 54.

<sup>22</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 56.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

*bellum* specifies that “one cannot use a just cause as an excuse to wage a war that is not really being fought in response to the received or anticipated wrong, but rather for some other purpose such as regime change or economic advantage.”<sup>25</sup> Last resort implies that war should only be acted out after all other means of solving the disagreement or dissipating the threat are exhausted.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the public declaration of war calls for an explicit warning to be made before war is begun.<sup>27</sup> According to Fowles, it is understood that “When all of these conditions are met, we can say that a state has an overall just case for war: the war as an enterprise is just.”<sup>28</sup>

Within just warfare, there is an important distinction made between the combatant and non-combatant. That is, those who are involved in fighting (soldiers) and those who are not (civilians, wounded soldiers, prisoners of war). According to just warfare theory, justice in warfare is acted out by, “above all, respecting noncombatant immunity.”<sup>29</sup> That is, noncombatant’s have the right not to be deliberate targets of attack.<sup>30</sup> This respect is reflected in the treatment of noncombatant prisoners of war who have ceased their participation in hostilities due to illness, surrender, or injury. According to just warfare, these individuals are entitled to a “benevolent quarantine” while in captivity, which bans any act of killing, torture, or “inhuman treatment” by their overseers.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, combatants (soldiers) are granted what is known as the “combatant’s privilege,” which is “the right to kill and wound enemy soldiers and to destroy

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Arneson, “Just Warfare Theory,” 664.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Allen S. Weiner, “Just Warfare Theory & the Conduct of Asymmetric Warfare,” *Daedalus* 146 (2017): 60.

enemy military property without criminal liability.”<sup>32</sup> According to just warfare, fatal actions committed and received by soldiers is allowed when the guidelines of *jus ad bellum* have been fulfilled and war had begun.

Regarding the just nature of how war is acted out, another set of guidelines, *jus in bello*, is consulted for rules that should be followed when fighting against an opponent.<sup>33</sup> This recognizes that there is at least some connection between “morality and war, and that we can make sense of the idea that there are rules governing war just as there are rules governing morality in ordinary life.”<sup>34</sup> *Jus in bello* outlines four guidelines for how a combatant should fight in war: qualification as a combatant, legitimate targets, legitimate tactics, treatment of prisoners of war. For acts of war to be enacted upon the opponent, the opponent must qualify as a combatant, which is an individual who submits to an authority, displays a distinctive identifying emblem, openly bears arms, and obeys the rules of *jus in bello*.<sup>35</sup> These indicators of combatant status identify them as a legitimate target for their opponent, and render all other individuals immune to attack. According to article 3 of the Geneva Convention:

“the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons [non-combatants]: (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; (b) taking of hostages; (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment; (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of

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<sup>32</sup> Weiner, “Just Warfare Theory,” 60.

<sup>33</sup> These rules were confirmed by these conventions: The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Convention of 1949, and the subsequent Geneva Protocols of 1977. Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 99, 105.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. 103.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 105-8.

executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.”<sup>36</sup>

Regarding legitimate tactics, all legitimate war attacks must fall under the guidelines of military necessity and proportionality. Military necessity allows the killing and capturing of combatant enemies, but does not admit cruelty, that is “the infliction of suffering for the sake of suffering or for revenge, nor of any maiming or wounding except in fight, nor of torture to extort confessions.”<sup>37</sup> Legitimate tactics must also include a consideration of proportionality, which is “the harm that one inflicts must be proportionate to the good that is protected, and must be the least harmful means available of achieving the good.”<sup>38</sup> Alongside proportionality, the weapons used must also be regulated to only allow those that are “blunt instruments” that can be sufficiently controlled in order to maintain aim at combatant targets.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the fourth guideline covers the humane treatment of prisoners of war, which is discussed above. The formation of these guidelines for just treatment of opponents in war, outlines the ways in which the violence warfare can be considered morally just.

While these guidelines of just treatment towards individuals in war are widely accepted today, such standards are starkly contrasted by the standards of ancient warfare. Ancient warfare is notable for their intense brutality and cruel nature, not just in the destruction and plunder of cities, but in the killing and torture of human opponents. Saul M. Olyan states that “violent and

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<sup>36</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 75 UNTS 287, 1949, Article 3.

<sup>37</sup> D. Schindler and J. Toman, “Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (Lieber Code),” in *The Laws of Armed Conflicts* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988), 3-23.

<sup>38</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 112.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

ritualized acts committed against the bodies of living foreign war captives or domestic offenders are commonplace in both biblical and cuneiform literary corpora and in visual representations from Mesopotamia and elsewhere in ancient West Asia.”<sup>40</sup> Quite frequently, corpses were defaced by the stripping of clothing and weapons, as well as the severance of body parts; hands, feet, and heads being the most frequently detached. These body parts were often publicly displayed as an act of warning, humiliation, or pride (cf. 1 Sam 31:12).<sup>41</sup> Such actions are reflected in the narrative of Anat’s battle, where she severs the hands, feet, and heads of her human victims and strings them around her neck and waist as a way of flaunting her victory over them and humiliating their mutilated bodies (lines 5-16). Although gruesome, this was the typical way of dealing with opponents in ancient warfare. Such actions, when viewed in light of modern guidelines for just warfare, bring into question the just nature of ancient warfare.

### **Judges 4–5 Exegesis**

Judges is a historical narrative following Israel’s conquest of Canaan that gives an account of Israel’s cycles of rebellion, resulting oppression, and freedom by a divinely appointed judge.<sup>42</sup> The book was written to give a historical-theological account of the chaos that ensued when Israel did not obey Yahweh’s commandments and to display their need for a king to rule.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Saul M. Olyan, “The Instrumental Dimensions of Ritual Violence against Corpses in Biblical Texts,” *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, Oxford Scholarship Online Edition), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 2. In the Old Testament, Saul famously sets the bride price for his daughter as 900 Philistine foreskins.

<sup>42</sup> Judges is mostly prose, but includes some poetry, cf. Judg 5; These events are believed to have occurred during the time period beginning with the death of Joshua (Josh 2:6-9), which was likely ca. 1380 or 1230 B.C. (depending on the date of the Exodus) and ending with the generation that preceded the monarchy (ca 1050 B.C.). For more information see J.D. Douglas et al., “Judges, Book of,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. by Moisés Silva. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 786-87.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas, “Judges, Book of,” 786.

Although the judges directly rule and lead the nation, the book of Judges depicts Yahweh as the ultimate Judge (Judg. 11:27). Younger states that “He is the One who gives the people into the hands of their oppressors; he is the One who raises up deliverers (i.e., the judges) for them; he is the One who brings his Spirit upon the deliverers and equips them for their tasks (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14).”<sup>44</sup> Likewise, He is depicted as Israel’s divine warrior, who works through the actions of His chosen people, Israel, to fight against their enemies, who are also His enemies (5:20–22; 6:12; 7:2, 7, 22). It is within this context that the events of Deborah’s judgeship over Israel is depicted in chapters four and five.<sup>45</sup> Judges 4 is written in prose form and gives a logical account of the battle between Israel and the army of Jabin, the Canaanite King of Hazor, while Judges 5 is written as poetry to provide an emotional and more figurative account of the battle.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Judges 4**

Judges 4 is the narrative account of the conflict between Israel and the Canaanites. This chapter is divided into four major sections: the call of Barak and summoning of the Israelite army (4:1-11), the battle between Israel and Sisera’s army (4:12-16), the death of Sisera at the tent of Jael (4:17-22), and the conclusive summary of Yahweh’s victory (4:23-24).

#### ***Judges 4:1-3***

The first three verses of Judges 4 are written in the customary format and phraseology by stating the cycle of rebellion, oppression, and relief by a judge that is repeated throughout the

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<sup>44</sup> K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges, Ruth*, NIVAC 6, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 24.

<sup>45</sup> Prior to Deborah’s judgeship, Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar had reigned as judges over Israel and delivered them from affliction. (Judg 3:7-11, 12-30, 31).

<sup>46</sup> Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 177.

book of Judges.<sup>47</sup> The first verse states that Israel has fallen back into sinful patterns and done “what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died” (Judg 4:1). The ‘evil’ that is being referred to here is reminiscent of Judg 2:19, which states, “whenever the judge died, they returned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the Song of Deborah will reveal that they chose to worship “new gods” (Judg 5:8).<sup>49</sup> Israel’s fall into idolatry goes against the covenant stipulations that were agreed upon in Deuteronomy 28, inciting Yahweh’s deliverance of them into “the hand of Jabin” (4:1b). This deliverance of Israel into the hands of Canaanite oppression depicts a transfer of possession of the land back into the hands of Canaanites as it was before Israel had conquered the territory (the “Promise Land” cf Gen 12:1; Josh 1:2-4; Deut 9:1-6).

The next verse introduces Jabin as the king of Hazor,<sup>50</sup> which was likely the “capital” city in the land of Canaan as is stated in Josh 11:10.<sup>51</sup> Hazor was an influential city of great size that dominated the valley north of the Sea of Galilee for five centuries.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Jabin was likely

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Judg 2:11; 3:12; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1.

<sup>48</sup> Based on previous occurrences of this repetitive phrase, “other gods” could be referring to “the Baals and the Ashteroth” (Judg 3:7), which are mentioned as gods of Mesopotamia (Judg 3:7-8). Mesopotamia could include the land of Canaan here. Thus, the gods prevalent here were prevalent in the land of Israel under Jabin’s rule in Judg 4:1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 178. n. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Jabin was a dynastic name gives detail about Israel’s oppressor, “Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.” A question is raised here regarding whether this Jabin relates to the one who is mentioned in Joshua 11:1-14. In the Joshua account, Jabin, the king of Hazor, organized a coalition against Joshua and was defeated by the Israelite army. Thus, there appears to be an inconsistency with the reappearance of Jabin here in Judges. There are various theories regarding the likelihood of relation between these two kings. However, it is important to know that the presence of a direct connection is unlikely. See Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, AB6d, ed. John J. Collins (New Haven: Yale University, 2014), 252.

<sup>51</sup>For further discussion on historical and textual difficulties with the city of Hazor, see Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC6. ed. by E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2002), 188-9.

acknowledged as the primary king over Canaan. The second figure mentioned in this verse is the commander of Jabin's army: "Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim" (Judg 4:2b).<sup>53</sup> He is mentioned in 1 Sam 12:9 as the "commander of Hazor's army" and will come to play a significant role in the account of Israel's victory over Jabin.

The narrator goes on to convey the cries of Israel that were lifted to Yahweh in their oppression and fear of Sisera's army, which boasted "900 chariots of iron" (4:3). Iron chariots were popular instruments of warfare during this period that aided warriors with speed and stability for wielding weapons.<sup>54</sup> When compared with other historical records accounting the quantity of an army's chariotry, this is a significant number.<sup>55</sup> This picture of the strength of Sisera's army is a sufficient example of rabbinic lore that made Sisera into a world conqueror, rivaling the reputation of Alexander the Great.<sup>56</sup> Sasson states that Sisera was an enemy that "was truly worthy – for Israel, if not also for God."<sup>57</sup>

### ***Judges 4:4-10***

Interestingly, there does not appear to be any preceding statement regarding Yahweh's explicit intention to respond to Israel's cry for help as is expressed in verse 3. Rather, it appears that verses 4-10 serve as an exposition of the customary statement that Yahweh "raised up a

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<sup>52</sup> Block, *Judges*, 171.

<sup>53</sup> Sisera is also the name of a temple servant during the exile; Ezra 2:53, Neh 7:55. Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*, 253.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*. 159-60, 254.

<sup>55</sup> For example, In the Battle of Kadesh, Ramses II had 200 chariots to face Jing Muwatalli of Hatti, who had more than three thousand chariots. Likewise, Shalmaneser III approached battle with two thousand chariots against an army with more than two thousand. Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*, 254.

<sup>56</sup> Sasson, *Judges*, 254.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 254

deliverer for the people of Israel.”<sup>58</sup> It is here in verse 4 that another main character is introduced to the narrative: “Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth” (Judg 4:4).<sup>59</sup> The designation of her as a prophetess places her in a longstanding tradition throughout the Old Testament of others such as Miriam (Exod 15:20) and Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22), who functioned as prophetesses. Thus, through the voice and actions of Deborah, the Lord responds to their cry for help and leads them into battle against their oppressors.<sup>60</sup>

In verses 4-5, Deborah is depicted as “judging over Israel” and sitting under a palm tree where “the people of Israel came up to her for judgement.”<sup>61</sup> As Yahweh’s appointed judge over Israel (i.e. the leader of Israel), Block states that “She communicates Yahweh’s response to the people’s cry, but she is not the answer.”<sup>62</sup> Rather, through the person of Deborah, Yahweh serves as the true Judge and Leader of Israel as is alluded to in Judg 11:27. Just as He is the one who led them into their oppression, He is the one who will lead them out of their bondage.

Next, verse 6 introduces “Barak, the son of Abinoam from Kedesh Naphtali,” who will serve as the commander of the Israelite army in the impending battle against Sisera. Here,

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<sup>58</sup> Block p. 191; cf. 3:9, 15.

<sup>59</sup> Deborah means “bee,” which has incited rabbinic comments that connect “her name to the insect, with its reputation for relentlessness (Deut 1:44) and swarming attacks (Ps 118:12), yet also for producing honey.” Sasson, *Judges*, 254.

<sup>60</sup> Block refers to this passage as a “call narrative, more particularly a ‘protested call’ account in which the challenge to enter divine service is resisted by the person called.” See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 191.

<sup>61</sup> The introduction of Deborah as the judge over Israel here would have come as a shock to the reader, since women taking such roles were rare (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 193). The lack of divine appointment here raises questions regarding whether she was actually fulfilling the role as the “deliverer of Israel,” (or simply) as an arbitrator over disputable issues (Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*, 256. Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar). Daniel Block argues that Deborah should not be identified as a judge over Israel like those who came before her (Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar; cf. Judg. 3:7-11, 12-30, 31). Rather, Block challenges her apparent divinely appointed judgeship by raising questions regarding the absence of such diagnostics as the intervention of Yahweh, inspiration and empowerment by the Spirit, responsibility “to save” (*yāša’*), and recognition as the savior of Israel. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 193-97

<sup>62</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 195.

Deborah relays Yahweh's call to action to Barak, anticipating his reluctance to obey her instructions from Yahweh, which she responds to with the rhetorical construction *halo' yhw* ('has not Yahweh?'). This expresses the assurance of the word of Yahweh.<sup>63</sup> Rather, it is not Deborah speaking, but Yahweh. Again, Yahweh is ultimately the one leading the nation of Israel into war against the Canaanites, who are enemies of both Israel and Yahweh.

The instruction of gathering 10,000 troops is also worth noting since it indicates a feature that would have been surprising to the original reader, as well as to Barak. Based on the size of Sisera's army, an army of 10,000 troops would be more than enough to ensure victory. Sasson states that "God is purposely playing down the army he will send against Israel's foes...he could have urged the sending of a fraction of this amount and still triumph over these foes."<sup>64</sup> This instruction displays the sure victory of Israel.

In verses 4:6-7, Deborah delivers the command of the Lord to Barak, which prophesies that Yahweh will deliver Sisera into his hands. In verse 7, Yahweh's indicates that He "will draw out Sisera." The Hebrew word that is used here is *mashak*, which connotes a much stronger implication meaning "to pull, drag, draw out," which stresses the involvement of Yahweh in setting up the battle.<sup>65</sup> This command to take up arms is reminiscent of Yahweh's manipulation of Pharaoh's armies in Exodus 14 and Ezekiel 38-39, where the enemy "is portrayed as a puppet controlled by the hands of God...the One who sold Israel into the hands of Jabin will also engineer the oppressor's defeat."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Robert H. O'Connell, *Judges, Ruth*, VT 63 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 108.

<sup>64</sup> Sasson, *Judges*, 259.

<sup>65</sup> See NRSV translation of Judg 4:7; Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 181. Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*, 258-59.

<sup>66</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 199.

Verse 8 narrates Barak's request for Deborah's presence in battle, which displays his recognition of her status as God's mouthpiece.<sup>67</sup> Block states that "The request to be accompanied by the prophet is a plea for the presence of God."<sup>68</sup> This invocation of a divine being is a typical practice of ancient people going into battle.<sup>69</sup> This narrative of Yahweh's call for Barak to muster up an army follows the pattern of what are known as 'call narratives,' which are found throughout Scripture.<sup>70</sup> Deborah's preceding response falls into the call narrative pattern where Yahweh would typically guarantee His presence to a reluctant agent.<sup>71</sup> The timing of her agreement with Barak's demands is crucial because it implies that Yahweh will be present with Barak as he leads the Israelite army into battle.<sup>72</sup> Barak does not need to fear because Yahweh will fight against the Canaanites for them.

Following the prediction of Barak's victory in 4:7, Deborah proclaims another prophecy that "the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judg. 4:9).<sup>73</sup> This appears to contradict the prophesy that the glory will be bestowed on Barak (4:7), but the result ultimately proves both prophecies to be reliable. When both predictions come to pass, they will serve as a sign to Barak that Yahweh has

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<sup>67</sup> Barak's response has often been misunderstood as a sign of his cowardice or skepticism (Barnabas Lindars, "Deborah's Song: Women in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 65 (1982): 161, 164; Sasson, *Judges, Ruth*, 260.). Although his motives behind this response are not explicitly stated, internal evidence and supplemental translations provide a better understanding of this reply.

<sup>68</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 199.

<sup>69</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for Kings*, 567.

<sup>70</sup> Exod 3:14; Isa 6:1-13.

<sup>71</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 200; cf. Exod 3:12; Judg 6:16; 1 Sam 10:7; Jer 1:8

<sup>72</sup> In these call narratives, it is also typical of Yahweh to provide signs of His presence. In this narrative, both the prophesy of Barak's victory (4:7) and the victory of the woman (4:9).

<sup>73</sup> The reader, and possibly even Deborah herself, has every reason to expect her to be the prophesied deliverer. However, an ironic twist to the narrative will soon play out.

intervened as their divine warrior fighting against their enemies.<sup>74</sup> After giving this prophecy and command, Deborah arises and goes with Barak to Kedesh, where he summons the tribes of Zebulun and Napthali to assemble for battle (Judg. 4:9b-10). Ten thousand troops respond to the Barak's call to arms and join him; marching up to Mount Tabor to prepare for battle.

### ***Judges 4:11***

The narrative then pauses briefly for an aside in verse 11, which gives information about Heber the Kenite and his estranged relationship with Israel.<sup>75</sup> This note appears to be random and unimportant. However, the original audience, who were familiar with Israelite storytelling would have recognized this as an important piece of information to keep in mind for the unfolding story.<sup>76</sup> This note provides background information for a character named Heber, a Kenite, who was a descendent of Hobab (father-in-law of Moses) and had pitched his tent near Kedesh. This piece of information serves as a foreshadow of characters and events that will appear later in the story.

### ***Judges 4:12-16***

Following this aside, the story plays out in two parts: verses 12-16 detail the fulfillment of Deborah's first prophecy (4:6-7), while verses 17-22 describe the fulfillment of her second prophecy (4:9). Both scenes work together to clear up ambiguities from the narrative leading up to this point.<sup>77</sup> The plot development in verses 12-16 parallels the scene in verses 6-10, where

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<sup>74</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 200.

<sup>75</sup> Heber was previously mentioned in Judg 1:16, which states that "the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people."

<sup>76</sup> Robert B Chisholm Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, Kregel Exegetical Library, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013), 229.

<sup>77</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 201.

Barak summons his army. In parallel to that call, Sisera assembles his men, along with 900 chariots of iron, to move against Barak's army (4:13). Here, the narrative makes it appear that Sisera is acting of his own volition: however, the reader is aware that Yahweh's invisible hand is at work, using Sisera's actions to contribute to His plan of war and ultimate victory.

Through the proclamation of Deborah, Yahweh instructs Barak to advance into battle saying, "Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand" (4:14a). Deborah again anticipates Barak's reluctance to the call when stating "Does not the Lord go out before you" (4:14b)? This "underscores the certainty of the victory but serves to heighten Barak's reluctance without great assurance."<sup>78</sup> To counteract this reluctance, Deborah's implication that Yahweh will go before Barak in battle reveals that He is Israel's true commander and is the one who will receive the glory for their victory over the Canaanites.<sup>79</sup>

Barak proceeds to descend Mount Tabor with his army of 10,000, to which the Lord responds by routing "Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword" (4:15).<sup>80</sup> This verse is important because it serves as the "key to the entire chapter."<sup>81</sup> Although 10,000 troops are moving against Sisera, it is the hand of Yahweh that causes them to be routed against Barak and the "edge of the sword."<sup>82</sup> When observing the original text, it is worth noting that the subject in this sentence is taken off of Barak and placed on Yahweh, making Him the subject of the verb. This change of focus metaphorically takes the sword out of

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<sup>78</sup> Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 183-84.

<sup>79</sup> However, it appears that Barak did not fully comprehend the assurance of Yahweh's glorification that is implied here. For, he later pursues Sisera seemingly out of a desire to gain the victory for himself (4:22).

<sup>80</sup> Yahweh has "routed" armies before, Exod 14:24; Josh 10:10.

<sup>81</sup> Block, *Judges and Ruth*, 204.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Barak's hand and emphasizes "that all the action occurs 'before' (*lipnê*) him."<sup>83</sup> The sword is now figuratively being wielded by Yahweh, who kills the entire army so that "not a man was left" (4:16b). This metaphoric transfer of the agent of war to Yahweh is depictive of indirect divine violence, which "involves divinely mandated violent actions performed by a third party... [in which] YHWH hands the instruments of violence into the hands of humans."<sup>84</sup> This evidently displays that Yahweh is Israel's divine warrior who goes before His hosts to fight against His enemies.<sup>85</sup>

It is amid the chaos of battle that Sisera dismounts his chariot and flees from the scene of battle on foot.<sup>86</sup> Before following the narrative of Sisera's escape (and eminent demise) the narrator concludes the battle with the details of defeat (Judg 4:16). Ignoring Sisera for the time being, Barak pursued the army all the way back to Harosheth-hagoyim, where the whole army was slaughtered until "not a man was left" (Judg 4:16b).<sup>87</sup> This phraseology is reminiscent of the command for *herem* warfare given to Israel in the Deuteronomic Code, specifically in Deut 7:2, which says, "When the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them." Here, Yahweh acts through the actions of Israel to "destroy" (Deut 7:24; 33:27), "exterminate" (Deut 9:3), and "dispossess" (Deut 7:17; 9:1, 3; 11:23) the Canaanites by

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel I. Block, "How Can We Bless YHWH? Wrestling with Divine Violence in Deuteronomy," Pages 31–50 in *Wrestling with the Violence of God: Soundings in the Old Testament*, BBRSSup10 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 32-33.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> We are not told why Sisera chose to flee, but it could have been for a variety of reasons. A spooked horse, a trapped chariot (in mud), or simple hopelessness. Sasson, *Judges*, 263-64.

<sup>87</sup> These words here are redolent of the wording used in Exodus 14:28 to describe the finality of the Egyptian army's demise. Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1995), 196.

executing *herem* (Deut 3:2 [cf. 2:32-35]; 13:15-16) “by the sword” (Deut 2:33; 3:3; 7:2; 13:15-16; 20:13) as He had previously commanded Israel to do in response to Canaanite oppression (Deut 7:16).<sup>88</sup>

The defeat of Sisera’s army here fulfills what was prophesied by the Lord in Judg 4:6-7; that Sisera and his army will be given into Barak’s hand. It is the fulfillment of this prophesy that serves as a sign to both Barak and the readers that Yahweh is the true leader of the battle.

### ***Judges 4:17-22***

Following the downfall of Sisera’s army, the narrative picks up where it left off in Judg 4:15b with a reference to the foreshadowing element from verse 11. A new character, named Jael, is introduced as “the wife of Heber the Kenite,” the man previously mentioned in verse 11.<sup>89</sup> She will play a key role in the unfolding narrative since it is to Jael’s tent that Sisera flees and takes refuge.<sup>90</sup>

Upon Sisera’s arrival, Jael meets him and offers her hospitality, inviting him into her tent and encouraging him to “not be afraid” (4:18b). She addresses Sisera using the term ‘*adôn*, which likely means “sir” and signifies her recognition of his superiority over her. Here, Jael is not just being polite, rather she is reassuring, which Sisera recognizes as her respect.<sup>91</sup> Her kind

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<sup>88</sup> Block, “How Can We Bless,” 33.

<sup>89</sup> This comes as a bit of a shock to the original reader, since the previously mentioned character was Heber, not Jael. One would expect Heber to be the primary character here.

<sup>90</sup> There are various reasons for Sisera’s choice to retreat to Jael’s tent. The most likely reason is that Sisera was seeking refuge with Heber because of his alliance with Jabin (Judg 4:17b). Such alliances often include aid during hostilities. Sasson, *Judges*, 264-65.

<sup>91</sup> This is a common address used by women towards men; however, her injunction to “not be afraid” (‘*al-tîrā*’) is striking. For it is rather incomprehensible for a woman to speak in such a way to the commander of a powerful army (Sasson, *Judges*, 266). Surprisingly, Sisera passes over Jael’s violation of societal norms and accepts her offer of refuge. The word ‘*adōni*’ has also been used by women when “stroking the ego of a man,” e.g. Abigail facing David in 1 Sam 25:24-31. Sasson, *Judges*, 265-66.

words and hospitality quickly lower the commander's defenses, leaving him at her mercy under the covering that she offers (4:18c). This moment is significant because it displays the reversal of authority between Jael and Sisera, placing Sisera's fate into Jael's hands.

At the request of Sisera (4:19a), Jael offers him a drink of milk, which is likely in accordance with typical ancient Near Eastern hospitality.<sup>92</sup> Her neglect to fulfill his initial request portrays the way in which she maintains control of the situation. Next, Sisera attempts to seize the control once more by commanding Jael to "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No'" (4:20).<sup>93</sup> This is an ironic command here since it is Jael whom Sisera must be on guard from. Lindars suggests that this request grants Jael the perfect opportunity to retrieve the tent peg and hammer that will serve as the murder weapon.<sup>94</sup> The control that Jael is able to maintain throughout this confrontation is significant when considering the lesser role that woman typically played in this culture. This is another instance of indirect divine violence, where Yahweh mandates the violent action of Sisera's death by aiding Jael in maintaining the upper hand and placing the instrument of violence into her hands.<sup>95</sup>

It is at this point that the narrative reaches its climax when Jael takes a tent peg and hammers it into the temple of the commander as he lies fast asleep (4:21). The description of his death is brutal in detail, mirroring the vivid description of Ehud's death in Judg 3:21-22.<sup>96</sup> The

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<sup>92</sup> The reasoning behind her decision to offer milk instead of water (as Sisera requested) is debated. It is suggested that she does so as a way of calming him to sleep or as a way of intensifying the "mothering" motif that is evident in her actions. Block, *Judges*, 207. Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 185.

<sup>93</sup> Block remarks here that "in prescribing her answer to the question, 'ayin, 'There is no one,' he is passing judgment on himself, for in the end this mighty general of Jabin turns out to be a nobody. Block, *Judges*, 207.

<sup>94</sup> Lindars, *Judges*, 199.

<sup>95</sup> Block, "How Can We Bless," 32-33.

specific reference of her hand in this verse (“and took a hammer in her hand”; 4:21a) is significant because it points back to Deborah’s prophecy in verse 9 that “the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (4:9). The fulfillment of this prophecy through Jael’s murder of Sisera is indicative of Yahweh’s continual action as the divine warrior fighting against His enemies through the hands of both Israel and Gentiles.

Following the death of Sisera, Jael goes out to meet Barak, who has now come in pursuit of Sisera. By entreating Barak to enter her tent as she had with Sisera, he discovers Sisera’s body with a tent peg through his temple. Younger points out that this is an “ironic juxtaposition” since the “victor and vanquished [are] in the same tent of Jael.”<sup>97</sup> She has conquered them both, first by killing Sisera, and then by depriving Barak of his honor.<sup>98</sup> This sequence of events is striking because of the sudden dual fulfillment of Yahweh’s two prophecies that Sisera will be delivered into the hands of Barak (4:7) but also into the hands of a woman (4:9).<sup>99</sup>

#### ***Judges 4:23-24***

In conclusion of the narrative account, a summary of events is inserted, completely omitting any mention of the characters that played such key roles in the narrative. Rather the author states that “God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel” (4:23). This omission blatantly indicates that Yahweh is the one who fought against and defeated Jabin’s army. This conclusion is further emphasized in the victory song of Judges 5.

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<sup>96</sup>Using the same verb (*lakah*) that is used in 3:21. Block, *Judges*, 208, n. 273; Younger, *Judges*, 186.

<sup>97</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 186.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Block, *Judges*, 208-9.

## **Judges 5**

Following the narrative account of the battle between Israel and Jabin, the author includes a victory song that is sung by Deborah.<sup>100</sup> This song is particularly analogous to the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 and is one of the oldest poems in the Old Testament. As an example of Hebrew poetry, it displays characteristic features such as its division into a series of individual stanzas (strophes), which are able to stand on their own but still contribute to the overall theme.<sup>101</sup> This poem has received much attention within biblical scholarship for the complexities of its structure and extensive use of literary elements such as alliteration, paranomasia, chiasmus, and formulaic constructions.<sup>102</sup> Sasson describes this poem's admirable qualities by stating that "What is admired in this exchange of stimulation is how beloved phrases are recast in new settings by the displacement of words, the manipulation of metaphors, the revitalization of imagery, and the formation of new cadences."<sup>103</sup> This song of victory following the battle against Jabin is a vital element that complements the narrative as a way of enforcing Yahweh's role as a divine warrior who fights against Israel's enemies, the Canaanites.

### ***Judges 5:1-8***

The first two verses introduce the forthcoming song by attributing the poem to Deborah and Barak, while also acting as a tripartite invocation, inviting the people of Israel to sing along with their praises to Yahweh.<sup>104</sup> Verses 2 and 3 offer an invocation to praise ("bless the Lord!");

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<sup>100</sup> Some people prefer to see this poem as a ballad rather than a victory song since it includes details that do not relate to the greatness of Yahweh (e.g. Jael's murder of Sisera and Sisera's anxious mother). Block, *Judges*, 213.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 212.

<sup>103</sup> Sasson, *Judges*, 280.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 282-83.

5:2) as well as an exhortation to “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord the God of Israel” (5:3). These two admonishments are followed by two causes for praise and the people’s response in verses 4-8.<sup>105</sup>

Verse 2-3 speaks to the kings and princes of non-Israelite kingdoms,<sup>106</sup> encouraging them to listen and respond in praise to Yahweh (5:3a), just as Deborah does in the second half of the verse (5:3b).<sup>107</sup> Verses 4-5 form one act of events that serve as the first reason to praise Yahweh. Younger calls this section, “Yahweh’s epiphany on earth,”<sup>108</sup> which depicts Yahweh coming forth from Seir, in Edom, with a powerful storm that shakes the earth and mountains saying, “Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel (5:4-5).”<sup>109</sup> The storm imagery here is used polemically against the Canaanite storm god, Baal.<sup>110</sup> This scene is significant because it depicts Yahweh as marching forward to fight against Israel’s enemies.<sup>111</sup>

Verses 6-8 depicts the situation before Yahweh came with the storm. These verses describe the difficulty of transportation during this time (5:6b-7a) until “I, Deborah, arose as a

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<sup>105</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 192.

<sup>106</sup> Like the invocation in Psalm 2:2, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Block, *Judges*, 192-93.

<sup>108</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 193.

<sup>109</sup> Here, the storm motif that is present in previous scenes, such as Yahweh’s appearance at Mount Sinai, is evident (Exod 19:16-20; Chisholm, *A Commentary*, 236).

<sup>110</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 193. Cf. Ps 68:7-9; Hab 3:3.

<sup>111</sup> Chisholm, *A Commentary*, 236.

mother in Israel" (5:7b).<sup>112</sup> This mention of Deborah's arrival as leader of Israel symbolizes the arrival of Yahweh to lead Israel against Sisera's army.

Verse 8 concludes this section with mention of Israel choosing new gods, which subsequently brought war to their gates and introduced the necessary possession and use of shield and spear.<sup>113</sup> Here, it is made evident that Israel was experiencing oppression from the Canaanites because they had chosen to disobey Yahweh and worship other gods. For the Lord had brought suffering and persecution upon them because of their transgression of the covenant made with Abraham (Deut 27–28). This emphasizes the consequences of choosing to disobey Yahweh's commandments.

### ***Judges 5:9-13***

In parallel to verses 2-8, the author states an invocation of praise in verse 9, which is inspired by those who offered themselves willingly for military service (cf. 5:2b). Following this invocation an exhortation is presented to those "who ride on white donkeys" and "sit on rich carpets" and "walk by the way" (5:10).<sup>114</sup> The next few verses include two causes for praise and a response of the people (5:11, 12–13). Verse 11 depicts musicians<sup>115</sup> extolling the "righteous triumphs of the Lord" at "the watering places," which instigates a response from "the people of the Lord" who march down to the gates of the city. The tribute of glory to Yahweh here is

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<sup>112</sup> This mention of travel restrictions suggest that the Canaanite oppression involved the disruption of trade. Chisholm, *A Commentary*, 236.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 195 n. 71 and page 196.

<sup>114</sup> This terminology appears to have royal and kingly nuances. Possibly referring to those of royal status.

<sup>115</sup> The meaning of this term is uncertain.

reminiscent of typical ancient Near East victory songs, with an exaltation of Yahweh for the victory.<sup>116</sup>

Verse 12 depicts the call for Deborah and Barak to arise as leaders of Israel against their foe. Lindars comments that “This verse marks the transition from the introductory sections to the first main theme of the response of the tribes.”<sup>117</sup> It is notable that verse 12a is the poet’s appeal to Deborah for her prophecy as preparation for war and verse 12b as Barak’s necessary response of action.<sup>118</sup> Following this call for their leadership, verse 13 recalls the response of the tribes to Deborah’s exhortation (“song” in 5:12a). The “remnant of the noble; the people of the Lord marched down for me against the mighty” (5:13).

### ***Judges 5:14–18***

In this section of the poem, Deborah gives an account of the tribes that responded to the call and marched into battle against Jabin. While this section includes praise for those who willingly volunteered their assistance (5:14–15b), it also laments the ones who resisted the call (5:15c–17).<sup>119</sup> Those who chose to participate are mentioned at the beginning (Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, and Issachar, 5:14–15a) and end (Zebulun and Naphtali, 5:18) of this section, which forms an *inclusio* to highlight the four tribes that did not participate (Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher; 5:15c–17).<sup>120</sup> Although these tribes refused involvement, verse 18 concludes this section with praise for the people of Zebulun and Naphtali, who “risked their lives

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<sup>116</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 197.

<sup>117</sup> Lindars, *Judges*, 249.

<sup>118</sup> Deborah and Barak are mentioned one more time in 5:15 at the conclusion of the section on the tribes who respond to the call to war.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 231-32

<sup>120</sup> Machir is likely a subdivision of Manasseh, possibly being mentioned as a synecdoche.

to the death...on the heights of the field.” Here, Deborah singles out both tribes to honor their sacrifice for the nation of Israel.<sup>121</sup> Deborah recognized the problems of vulnerability and disorder in the nation of Israel, which “undoubtedly derives from the economic and military superiority of the Canaanites living in the fertile valleys.”<sup>122</sup> This evidently portrays the effect that the reoccupation of the Canaanites in Israel’s land had on their lives individually and as a unified nation.<sup>123</sup>

### ***Judges 5:19-23***

This section gives an account of the battle that takes place between Israel and Sisera’s army, ending with the curse of Meroz in verse 5:23. In verses 19-22, the war is depicted as a battle on earth and in the cosmos. Verse 19 begins this sequence of events with an introduction to the battle on earth. Verse 5:19a-b depicts the assembly of numerous small vassal states who were living under submission to Jabin’s authority.<sup>124</sup> The construction of verse 19 illustrates the enemies as going on the offensive by rallying their forces “at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo” (5:19b).<sup>125</sup> According to the final line of this verse, it appears that the goal of Sisera’s army was to plunder Israel, which ultimately failed as they “got no spoils of silver” (5:19c).

Following this description of battle, the poetry paints a picture of the cosmic battle that is being waged in the cosmos (heavens) stating that “From heaven the stars fought, from their

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<sup>121</sup> It is interesting to note that there is no mention of the last two tribes of Israel, Judah and Simeon. Block suggests that “either this song antedates the ascendancy of Judah under David’s reign or that it reflects a subtle anti-Judahite posture.” Block, *Judges*, 234.

<sup>122</sup> It could also be a leftover effect of Merneptah’s campaign in Palestine in 1207 B.C. Block, *Judges*, 235.

<sup>123</sup> Helen Fowles, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 52-53. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 54.

<sup>124</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 199.

<sup>125</sup> “Since Megiddo is not located on the Wadi Kishon, the phrase “the waters of Megiddo” anticipates the course of the battle.” Block, *Judges*, 236.

courses they fought against Sisera. The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might! (4:20-21).” Verse 20 depicts the stars entering the battle as instruments of God (cf. Isa 40:26) fighting against Sisera (5:20b).<sup>126</sup> The introduction of this imagery draws from a common ancient Near Eastern literary motif: “according to which the gods intervene on their devotees’ behalf by engaging the heavenly hosts.”<sup>127</sup> This phenomena aligns well with the name that is commonly attributed to Yahweh, *yhwh tsaba ’ot*, the “Lord of hosts” (cf. 1 Sam 1:3; Isa 9:7). This represents Yahweh’s role as the true commander of the war being waged against Sisera’s army. This is further displayed through His introduction of a powerful storm (“the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon”; 5:21), which floods the Kishon river, rendering Sisera’s chariots useless and throwing the army into a tumult. Verse 22 depicts the chaos that ensues, as horses are loosed from their chariots, running wildly around the battlefield. The power of the storm in verse 21 is matched here by the powerful pounding of the hooves as the horses gallop away from the scene alongside the fleeing army.<sup>128</sup>

It is interesting to note the absence of the Israel’s direct involvement in the fighting during this battle scene. Rather, the poet chooses to highlight the role of Yahweh acting as a divine warrior, inflicting all actions of war against the Canaanites. Their absence in the actions of war depict this as Yahweh’s war alone.

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<sup>126</sup> Sasson, *Judges*, 303-04.

<sup>127</sup> Block, *Judges*, 237.

<sup>128</sup> Younger notes that “the galloping is made audible by the poet in the wonderful onomatopoeia, *daharot*, *daharot*: “galloping galloping” (v. 22).” Younger, *Judges*, 201.

Verse 23 transitions to the pronouncement of the “angel of the Lord,” introducing the curse of Meroz.<sup>129</sup> This curse is announced against those who chose not to aid the Israelite army in this battle against Sisera. Although this curse seems to be out of place, it serves as a sufficient transition into the account of Sisera’s demise in the verses that follow.<sup>130</sup>

***Judges 5:24-31c***

The strong chastisement of the absent tribes in verse 23 is further intensified by the way in which it is contrasted with the description of Jael as the “Most blessed of women...of tent-dwelling women most blessed” in verse 24. This contrast shows how those dwelling in Meroz were cursed by Yahweh for not joining Him in battle, while individuals like Jael were blessed for playing a role in the battle.<sup>131</sup> Block observes that “Meroz represents those Israelites who have taken their stand on the side of the Canaanites; Jael represents those non-Israelites who have taken their stand on the side of Israel.”<sup>132</sup>

This final scene of the Judges 5 narrative depicts a “double portrait of Jael’s deed and Sisera’s mother, which lead to the climactic conclusion of the song.”<sup>133</sup> Verses 25-27 display the reason for the blessing that she receives in verse 24, the slaying of Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army. The description of these events elevates the bravery and courage of Jael by the way the text highlights her quick and concise movements. Her “constant and flowing action” depict

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<sup>129</sup> Although this is the only mention of Meroz in Scripture, this is likely referring to the area of land in which those non-participatory tribes from verses 15c-17 dwell. The repetition of the word “curse” and the statement “curse its inhabitants thoroughly” indicates a strong rebuke of those who chose to remain indifferent in response to the call for aid. Block, *Judges*, 238. Sasson, *Judges*, 305.

<sup>130</sup> It would make more sense for it to be included with verses 15c-17.

<sup>131</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 202.

<sup>132</sup> Block, *Judges*, 239.

<sup>133</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 202.

the scene “as though zoomed in on by the camera, drawing closer attention to the inescapable and gory details of the murder.”<sup>134</sup>

This quick succession of movement in verses 25-26 is followed by a change of pace in verse 27, where the description of Sisera's death is portrayed in a “tantalizingly slow sequence of verbs.”<sup>135</sup> This sequence of lines is an impressive example of staircase parallelism, which gives a reinforced visual impression of an agonizing death. According to Block, the combination of synonymic verbs here “creates the image of a totally vanquished foe.”<sup>136</sup> The distinct finality of Sisera's death here, paired with the complete annihilation of the army (4:16c), suggests that Jael's action should be evaluated in terms of *herem* warfare, since Sisera's death completes the totality of the Canaanite army's extermination.<sup>137</sup>

Following the events of Sisera's murder, the poem transitions to a taunt of Sisera's mother in verses 28-30, who awaits the return of her son from war. The image that Sisera's mother conjures of her son's victorious return starkly contrasts the image of him lying dead on the floor of Jael's tent. The second half of verse 28 depicts a rare (in poetry) insertion of direct speech, where she expresses her feelings through two “Why?” questions.<sup>138</sup> Through these questions, she expresses her worry over the delay of Sisera's return. Her attendants appear to try and console her in her worry, presumably by presenting the best-case scenario.<sup>139</sup> She continues

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 204.

<sup>136</sup> Block, *Judges*, 241.

<sup>137</sup> Younger, *Judges*, 202.

<sup>138</sup> Block, *Judges*, 242.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

in verse 30 to console herself by envisioning Sisera's victory, which will ensure his eventual return. Through complex rhetorical questions, Sisera's mother anticipates a positive outcome.

Verse 31 follows the character parallel of Jael and Sisera's mother with a return to the primary theme of the poem, all glory is attributed to Yahweh. First, the poet expresses the desire for all the enemies of Yahweh to perish just like Sisera and the Canaanites. This is an invocation for Yahweh to deliver judgment on anyone else who chooses to oppose Him just as He did by intervening in the battle against Sisera (5:20–21). Next, the poet calls for Yahweh to bless those who obey Him, causing them to “be like the sun” (5:31).<sup>140</sup>

### ***Judges 5:31d***

The final line of this verse steps away from the poem to insert a repetitive narrative remark that “the land had rest for forty years.” Just as the first three cycles ended in victory for the nation of Israel, so does this one here.

### ***Conclusion of Judges 4 & 5***

The Deborah cycle is full of complexities and nuances that provide a closer look at the nature of Yahweh's role as a divine warrior fighting against enemies of His chosen nation, Israel. He is depicted as Israel's true commander (4:14b, 15, 23) and the orchestrator of events (4:13, 15, 21, 23; 5:20-21, 22). Through the narratives of Judges 4–5, Yahweh is portrayed as the ultimate Judge according to Judges 5:23 and 11:27. By giving Israel over into the hand of Jabin (4:2; 5:6-8) and cursing the absent tribes (5:23), the Lord enacted punishment on the nation in accordance with the promised curses for disobedience as are outlined in Deuteronomy 28. Likewise, He battled against Israel's oppressors, the Canaanites, by routing the whole army

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<sup>140</sup> This closing statement is presented as a double petition addressed to God, which reflects the covenant blessings and curses given in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Ibid.

before the edge of Barak's sword (4:15; 5:19-22) until "not a man was left" (4:16b; 5:21), not even their commander (4:21b; 5:26-27).

### **The Baal Cycle: COL ii 1 – COL iii 2 Exegesis**

The Baal Cycle is an ancient text that has served as one of the most important literary works preserved by the West Semitic people in the second millennium BC.<sup>141</sup> The discovery of this text at Ugarit in 1929 had a tremendous impact on the study of the Canaanite religion by providing a wealth of information that had previously been unknown. More recent discoveries have shown that The Baal Cycle (i.e., the Ba'lu Myth) had a long prehistory among the Amorite people, which indicates its similarities to biblical motifs, that were related to Canaanite mythology. The discovery of texts such as the Ba'lu Myth have revealed the similarities between biblical poetry and Ugaritic poetry, such as their common use of parallel lines that form verses of two or three line-segments ("bicola" and "tricola").<sup>142</sup> Such patterns are seen in various poetic passages throughout the Bible, like in the Song of Deborah from Judges 5.

The Baal Cycle is a collection of Ugaritic myths about the Canaanite storm god, Ba'al, who seeks to rule over all the gods by challenging and defeating his opponents, Yammu, the Sea god, and Mot, the god of Death. Throughout this myth, Ba'al seeks the permission of the chief god El to build a palace for himself, which ultimately comes to pass with the help of the goddesses Anat and Athirat. Of these two goddesses, the most notable is Anat who is the Canaanite goddess of war. Anat appears throughout Ugaritic literature but is most well-known for her role in the Baal Cycle as a supporter of Baal in his quest for supreme kingship. She is depicted in this narrative as Baal's vindictive sister who is bloodthirsty and violent in her actions

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<sup>141</sup> "The Ba'lu Myth," trans. Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.86:241).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

of warfare against other deities, monsters, and humans. She is frequently unrestrained in her nature and is feared by human and deity alike. Neal Walls concludes that “Anat’s exuberance and enthusiasm reflect her basic nature. She is inherently headstrong, impatient, and demanding in her desires,” and is “driven by her own desires rather than concern for the common good.”<sup>143</sup> One of the most striking accounts of Anat’s capricious behavior is found in a scene from the Baal Cycle where she wages war against two human cities, slaughtering all human inhabitants (lines 5-30). The totality of their destruction suggests the enactment of *herem* warfare, as was seen in Judges 4–5. A closer look at this account will provide a clearer picture of her actions and give a glimpse into her motives for war.

**?–II 3a: Anat’s self-cleansing<sup>144</sup>**

Anat’s “self-cleansing” enters the narrative after Baal has defeated Yammu, the god of the sea, and indulged in a grand feast (CTA 2.1.11–CTA 3.1.?).<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately, this section opens with a long lacuna of about twenty-five lines and an unintelligible first line, which has incited much debate within Ugaritic scholarship.<sup>146</sup> The missing information from this introductory passage makes it rather difficult to discern the nature of Anat’s motivations for going to war. It could either be in support of Baal’s quest for kingship, or in pursuit of her own exaltation. Nevertheless, an observation of her actions during the battle that ensues is sufficient to provide a glimpse into her motives. Line II 3 opens at the end of a scene with the mention of

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<sup>143</sup> Neal Hugh Walls Jr., “The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth,” PhD diss. (John Hopkins University, 1990) 244.

<sup>144</sup> Divisions are based off those in Smith and Pitard, “The Baal Cycle,” 143. The “?” is a convention to denote a lacuna in the text.

<sup>145</sup> All quotations from the Baal Cycle come from “The Ba’lu Myth” trans. Dennis Pardee (COS 1.86:241-74) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>146</sup> Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume II,” *VTSup* 114 (2009), 139. Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” 250, n. 70.

“seven girls” applying cosmetics (*'anhbm*), which appears to parallel the mention of Anat “beautif[ying] herself with cosmetics later in III 1–2.”<sup>147</sup> These scenes thus seem to create an inclusio that highlights the violent fighting in between in II 3b-30a. This focus depicts Anat’s conflict as the central part of the story, necessitating closer attention.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, these lines depict “seven girls,” Anat’s attendants, adorning Anat with cosmetics (*'anhbm*) of “henna” and “coriander,” which is a practice done in preparation for battle, likely as a form of warpaint.<sup>149</sup>

Following this introductory line, two battles are depicted in II 3b-16 and II 17-30, which is reminiscent of the common structure for battle scenes throughout the Baal Cycle. In the battle between Baal and Yammu, the events are also divided into two parallel parts. This two-part structure corresponds with common descriptions of *herem* warfare.<sup>150</sup>

### ***II 3b–16: Anat’s bloody fighting***

The battle takes place at the base of Anat’s mountain, in the valley, which she descends to in line 3b to “meet the lads” after closing her house gate.<sup>151</sup> This descension from her house is paralleled with her return to her house before engaging in the second battle (II 17). This parallel creates an inclusio that envelopes the battle scene in lines 5b-16, highlighting her spiteful actions against the “two cities.”<sup>152</sup> These actions are glaringly indicative of Anat’s violent nature, which

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<sup>147</sup> Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 143.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Likewise, the identity of “the lads” (*glmm*) is unknown due to the loss of information that is likely contained in the lacuna at the beginning of this scene. It should be noted, however, that the “adversaries” mentioned in the first battle are not termed *glmm*, meaning that “the lads” are her retinue, not Anat’s “adversaries.” Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” 250, n. 72. The simple mention of “the mountain” is notable here because it neglects to mention Mount ‘Inbubu, the known dwelling of Anat (cf. CTA.i.13-?)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 145-46.

is displayed throughout the Baal Cycle narrative.<sup>153</sup> This battle can be divided into two scenes: Anat battling her enemies in lines 5b-8 and parading her spoils in lines 13b-16, with a depiction of her attachment of body-parts to herself in lines 9-13a.<sup>154</sup>

Line 5b indicates that “Anatu’s begins to smite (her adversaries) in the valley, to attack (them) between the two cities. She smites the peoples (dwelling) on the seashore, wreaks destruction on the humans (dwelling) to the east.” Without the mention of her own mountain, Mount ‘Inbubu, it is impossible to determine the cities that are referenced here. A strong emphasis is placed on the human nature of her victims in these lines with the descriptions of them as “peoples, tribes, and clans” (*l'im*), and “humankind” (*'adm*).<sup>155</sup>

Lines 9-11 follow with a gory description of the results of Anat’s actions in lines 5b-8. These lines depict gruesome images of destruction, “Under her are heads like balls, above her hands like locusts, [and] heaps of fighters’ hands” are being gathered in piles around her feet like grasshoppers after a plague.<sup>156</sup> The imagery of hands and gore piled around her feet is included as a way of portraying Anat’s power, while the comparison to insects (locusts and grasshoppers) indicates their abundance and connotes massive destruction.<sup>157</sup>

Lines 13-15 illustrate what Anat does with the gore that she has produced. She “attaches heads around her neck, ties hands at her waist,” creating an image of a goddess with a necklace

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<sup>153</sup> “In 1.1 III 19-20, 1.3 III 14-17 and IV 8-10, she is commanded by Baal to desist from war. In 1.6 II Anat kills and dismembers Mot, the god of death and enemy of her beloved brother Baal. In 1.3 V 24-25 and 1.18 I 11-12 she threatens to beat El’s head to a bloody pulp. In 1.18 IV she arranges for Aqhat’s death. She describes her conflicts with a number of divine enemies in 1.3 III 38-46.” Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 149.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 146 n. 74.

<sup>156</sup> Pardee, “The Ba‘lu Myth,” 250, n. 75.

<sup>157</sup> Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 154-55.

of severed heads and belt of severed hands. This imagery of gathering up heads and hands is indicative of the way a farmer “gleans” their crop at harvest.<sup>158</sup> After adorning these new “accessories,” she proceeds to wade “Up to her knees...in the blood of soldiers, to her neck in the gore of fighters.”<sup>159</sup>

Following this depiction, there is a shift in perspective from the dead to the living in lines 15-16. By mentioning the weapons (“staff” and “bowstring”) before the captives, Anat is pictured as victorious over those who remain alive.<sup>160</sup> Here, she appears to be rounding up the survivors of the battle, which she then drives toward her palace using both staff and bowstring.

### ***II 17-30a: Anat's slaughter of captives***

The description of events in lines 17–30a closely mirror the sequence of events in 3b–16 through similar images, poetical structures, and terminology.<sup>161</sup> Following this first battle scene (ii.17–18), Anat returns to her house/palace with her captives and begins preparing a feast. This switch in scene from the battlefield to the palace signifies the end of the first major battle scene. It is noted here that “she is not sated with smiting (her adversaries)” or “attacking (them).” This statement foreshadows the impending fatal “feast” in which Anat and her captives are intended to partake.<sup>162</sup> Lines 19–22 build toward the second battle as Anat arranges tables and chairs, seemingly for a feast with the “fighters, armies, and warriors” (i.e. her captives). Pardee mentions that “Though an invitation is not mentioned, the preparations are appropriate for a

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>159</sup> “Huge numbers of corpses and amounts of blood are a standard motif in Near Eastern royal descriptions of military victory... the description of Anat’s victory might be viewed as echoing the style of such royal inscriptions.” Ibid. 157.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 146-47.

<sup>161</sup> For further discussion of their paralleling structure see Smith and Pitard, *The Baal Cycle*, 160

<sup>162</sup> Ibid 159. Language of battle is used in this description.

feast. Apparently (unidentified) soldiers enter expecting a feast, only to be attacked.”<sup>163</sup> This arrangement of a feast (a show of hospitality) mirrors the way that Jael provided hospitality to Sisera as a way of getting him to lower his defenses (Judg 4:19).

After setting the scene, Anat turns on her “guests,” smiting and attacking them as she had done in the previous battle (line 23). Smith and Pitard point out that “the verbs in line 23 are preceded by *m'id*, an adverb which indicates an intensification of Anat’s fighting over what it had been in the first battle.”<sup>164</sup> This battle is reminiscent of Baal’s battle in 1.4 VII 35–36; however, there are distinct differences between the nature of both deities in war. Anat is the only one who battles against human enemies and displays motifs of divine scorn and laughter. The joy that she feels is described in the following lines: “She smites, then looks, attacks, and then gazes (on her handiwork), does Anatu. Her liver swells with laughter, her heart is filled with joy, Anatu’s liver with success (lines 23–24).”<sup>165</sup> This depiction of violence is characteristic of Anat, not Baal, in Ugaritic literature. Walls describes her actions as fulfilling her “demands [of] immediate gratification for her impulsive desires and fights tenaciously to realize her own goals.”<sup>166</sup>

This combat brings about the joy that is expressed in lines 25–27, which depicts “Her liver swell[ing] with laughter, her heart... filled with joy.” This contrasts with the first battle in

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<sup>163</sup> Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” 250, n. 78.

<sup>164</sup> Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 160.

<sup>165</sup> “This tricolon, which shows an ABA structure emphasizing Anat’s interior organs as the seats of emotion (*kbdh*, “her liver/innards” . . . *lbh*, “her heart,” . . . *kbd*, “liver/innards”), . . . Her survey of the battle scene in lines 23-24 produces in Anat the joyful reaction. Anat’s victory produces a full-bodied pleasure.” Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 124. For further discussion on the use of liver/innards and heart as a West Semitic expression of emotion see Ibid. 164-174.

<sup>166</sup> Walls, “The Goddess Anat” 216.

which Anat's emotional state is not observed. This second battle ends with the resolution of her previous disappointment ("But she is not sated"; ii 19–20), stating her drive to keep fighting "Until she is satisfied" (ii 29–30). Thus, to Anat, the first battle was glorious because of the way it ended in Anat's victory, but her vengeance was not satisfied until the completion of the second battle, deeming it the true victory.<sup>167</sup> The reader can see that "The use of language describing her eventual satisfaction emphasizes that she is under no compulsion to reign in her emotions."<sup>168</sup> It is worth noting the difference of outcomes between this battle and the first. In the first battle, there were survivors. However, in this battle, there are none. Here, the passage suggests a finality and completeness of Anat's victory.<sup>169</sup>

The finality of the resulting annihilation and destruction of this battle is reminiscent of the practice of *herem* warfare, which is attributed to the practices of Israelite warfare. This ancient term is one that is implemented in various commands from Yahweh regarding the terms of Israelite warfare and how they are to deal with their enemies (e.g. Deut 13:17; 20:15–18; Joshua 6:17–19). There is great debate about the nature of this term, what it implies, and how it was carried out in the act of war. The definition of this term itself varies from ones like Phillip Stern's which states that it is "considered as a singular 'consecration-to-destruction' of a designated enemy...[or] a 'consecration-through-destruction'...[or] a destruction through consecration,"<sup>170</sup> to that of Susan Niditch, who defines it as "meaning separated, set aside,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 160-61.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>170</sup> Philip D Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window in Israel's Religious Experience* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies 2020), 1.

rendered sacred for the use of God or his priests.”<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, the primary definition necessary for understanding its allusion in Anat's Battle is the “underlying assumption that divine retribution and judgment are being exacted against those destroyed in the ban.”<sup>172</sup> The significant similarities between Anat's two-fold battle and those in the Bible and other ancient texts,<sup>173</sup> while not explicitly stated, suggest that the conflict described here is related to the concept of *herem*.<sup>174</sup>

This correlation is further supported by another Ugaritic text in which Anat engages in a similar battle against enemies, CAT 1.13, lines 3–13. The similarities between the two battles are apparent with the dual mention of bloody warfare, severed heads and hands, adorning herself with the latter, and returning to her mountain after battle.<sup>175</sup> Unlike the battle in question above, this account actually uses the term *herem* in its first line, indicating that this type of warfare is characteristic of Anat's warfare. While the Baal Cycle's account does not explicitly mention *herem* warfare, the abundant similarities between both accounts strongly indicate that Anat participated in *herem* warfare.

While *herem* warfare is commonly enacted on people because of something that they had done,<sup>176</sup> the lack of information in the lacuna at the beginning of this battle makes it difficult to determine the nature of Anat's motivations for enacting such retribution here. The motivation for

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<sup>171</sup>Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29.

<sup>172</sup> Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 175.

<sup>173</sup> For further description of these extra-biblical examples, see Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 175-78.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 178, 180.

<sup>176</sup> As is seen throughout the Old Testament, (e.g. Josh 6:17-19).

such annihilation to serve as a holy sacrifice to Anat is considered, but not completely attested.<sup>177</sup> Anat's incentive for committing such atrocious actions remains a mystery. However, the well-known nature of Anat as an unrestrained, bloodthirsty, and unpredictable being acting of her own independent will suggests the erratic and unprovoked nature of her actions here.<sup>178</sup>

A final note on the placement of this narrative is worth elaborating on since this scene of battle appears to stand apart from the events of the Baal Cycle. Various theories have been presented regarding the reason for the inclusion of this scene.<sup>179</sup> A possibility worth noting is one that considers the inclusion of this battle as a depiction of behavior that was typical of Anat. According to other Ugaritic mythological texts, when messenger-deities arrive to deliver a message or when a deity visits another deity, the narrative typically depicts the divine recipient of the message/visit engaging in an activity that is characteristic of them.<sup>180</sup> Thus, this battle is described as a way of displaying Anat in her role as punisher of humanity.<sup>181</sup> A generous reading of the text would view these battles enacted on behalf of Baal. However, this reading does not fit with Ugaritic narrative structure that suggests Anat acted on her own behalf.

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<sup>177</sup> For further discussion about the Anat enacting *herem* warfare as a holy sacrifice see Smith and Pitard, "The Ugaritic Baal," 180-85.

<sup>178</sup> Walls states that, "Anat consistently acts upon her own desires and is submissive to no one in the extant literature." While she often acts according to the will of Baal, it is evident there that Anat is "acting independently of Baal." Walls, "The Goddess Anat," 136, 228.

<sup>179</sup> Smith and Pitard present the possibility of Anat playing the role of defeating Baal's enemies on earth, while Baal takes care of his cosmic enemies (Yammu and Mot). Smith and Pitard, "The Ugaritic Baal," 185.

<sup>180</sup> For example, "when Yamm's messengers arrive at the divine council in 1.2 I, it is in its characteristic mode of feasting. When Baal and Anat reach Athirat in 1.4 III, she is presented working at her domestic chores. When Athirat visits El in 1.4 IV, he is seated on his throne." Ibid. 185.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

*II 30b–III 2: Anat's Self-Cleansing*

The final section of this narrative depicts Anat's cleansing of herself and her palace after the slaughter of the captives. The switch of subject and employment of passive voice here indicates another shift in perspective and topic. The purification of herself and the palace is divided into three parts: Anat's washing of the carnage from battle (lines 30b–35); her rearrangement of the chairs, tables, and footstools (lines 36–37); and her personal washing and application of cosmetics (line 38; cf. 1.3 III 1–2).<sup>182</sup> The two descriptions of cleansing at the beginning and end of this section frame the rearrangement of furniture in lines 36–37.

Lines 30b–35 depict Anat washing her palace of the blood that has been spilt in battle, which is succeeded by an anointing of oil. This symbolizes the transition from sin to purification.<sup>183</sup> Next comes an interjection describing Anat's personal cleansing of her hands, first in water (lines 32–33) and then “in the blood of the warriors” and “the gore of the fighters (lines 34–35).”<sup>184</sup> Lines 36–37 echo lines 20–22 with a description of the furniture being moved back to its original position, signaling a return to routine after the battle. Lines 38–41 returns the focus to Anat's cleansing of the palace as she “gathers water and washes” with “the dew of heavens, oil of earth, the showers of Cloud-Rider [i.e., Baal].”<sup>185</sup> Following this cleansing of the palace, the scene ends with Anat applying cosmetics to herself in lines III 1–2, which mirrors

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 186-87.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 187-88.

<sup>184</sup> For further discussion on the translation here, see Smith and Pitard, “The Ugaritic Baal,” 189-90.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 191. The mention of “the showers of stars” pouring down water on earth mirror the role that stars play as instruments in Yahweh's army in Judges 5:20. For, the inclusion of the star's aid here seem to indicate their inclusion in Anat's retinue. However, they do not seem to hold any significance in the warfare of Anat as they do in the warfare of Yahweh.

similar events in II ?–3. After which another lacuna follows before transitioning into the events of the next scene.

***Conclusion of COL ii 1 – COL iii***

Although this scene of warfare against humans remains ambiguous, observations of matters such as Anat's affinity for violence, independently determined actions, and selfish motives are evident. Her enactment of *herem* warfare on her human opponents in this battle mirrors her reputation of "smiting and attacking" for her own benefit (line 5b).<sup>186</sup> Her lack of restraint in slaughtering her victims during both battles connotes the unfulfillment of her personal desire for satiation (lines 17–18). This insatiable pursuit of satisfaction is evidenced through the intense and unrestrained nature of the first battle particularly and the second battle specifically.<sup>187</sup> This pursuit of personal gratification displays her disregard for the "the common good."<sup>188</sup>

**Comparative Analysis of Judges 4–5 and COL ii 1 – COL iii 2**

Judges 4–5 and COL ii 1–COL iii 2 depict two deities fighting against their enemies—Yahweh against the Canaanites and Anat against her human neighbors—as a way of accomplishing their own goals. First, in Judges 4–5, Yahweh is depicted as the ultimate Judge (11:27) and Leader of the Israelite army, acting indirectly through the actions of the main characters and Israelite army. As Judge, He delivers curses on Israel for their disobedience of the covenant (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28) and on the select tribes who chose to refrain from battle (Judg 5:23). As Leader of Israel, He leads Israel in war against the Canaanites for the ways

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<sup>186</sup> See footnote 133.

<sup>187</sup> See footnote 148.

<sup>188</sup> Walls, "The Goddess Anat," 244.

in which they have oppressed Israel by possessing their land and disrupted their nations operations (Josh 1:2–4; Deut 9:1–6; Judg 5:14–18, 19–22). According to just warfare theory (*jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*), these two reasons for war are a just cause to enact war.<sup>189</sup>

Similarly, the call for 10,000 troops to fight against Sisera's army is considered to have been a purposeful exaggeration to display the Israel's sure victory. Sasson states that Yahweh "purposely play[s] down the army he will send against Israel's foes...he could have urged the sending of a fraction of this amount and still triumph over these foes."<sup>190</sup> This instruction displays the sure victory of Israel, which is in alignment with the conditions of *jus ad bellum* that calls for a reasonable chance of success.<sup>191</sup>

Regarding the call for legitimate authority and right intention, Yahweh is clearly depicted as the leader of the nation of Israel throughout the Deborah cycle (5:31), who has a right to declare war. Likewise, right intention is adhered by the way in which Yahweh's restrained actions in battle are limited to what is necessary for the freedom of Israel, the destruction of Jabin's army and their leader. The enactment of this war as a last resort is not explicitly stated but is implied through the description of Israel's extensive time under oppression in Judges 4:3b, which states that they were oppressed "cruelly for twenty years." After twenty long years of oppression, the stubborn nation of Israel finally cried out to Yahweh for help (4:3a). To which He responded with the battle against their oppressors. Regarding the public declaration of war, it can be assumed that such a declaration was made according to Israel's guidelines for war (Deut 20:10–12) and the implication that Sisera received their declaration according to Judges 4:12.

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<sup>189</sup> Helen Fowles, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 52-53. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 54.

<sup>190</sup> Sasson, *Judges*, 259.

<sup>191</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 52.

Yahweh's command for *herem* warfare against Sisera's army (and Sisera himself) displays a focus on the combatant as the legitimate target of attack (according to *jus in bello*). Likewise, the swift enactment of *herem* is in alignment with military necessity, which allows for the killing of combatants, but does not allow the cruel infliction of suffering for suffering's sake.<sup>192</sup> The complete killing of Sisera's army is also in accordance with the guideline of proportionality, which means that "the harm that one inflicts must be proportionate to the good that is protected, and must be the least harmful means available of achieving the good."<sup>193</sup> In this case, the freedom of the nation of Israel from oppression is at stake. Thus, the complete destruction of Sisera's army of men that paled in comparison to Israel's army of 10,000, did not provide sufficient terms for refrain from battle. The sacrifice of a couple thousand, saved the lives of a whole nation.

Upon observation of the text in comparison with the guidelines set out by what constitutes a just war, Yahweh's actions appear to be in line with what is set out by the theory of just warfare.<sup>194</sup> Although the stipulation of last resort is a bit ambiguous, there appears to be substantial grounds for belief in such an adherence considering the fidelity towards the other guidelines.

Next, Anat's battle in COL ii 1 – COL iii 2 is enacted against her human neighbors, with ambiguous grounds for battle, making a comparison with the guidelines of just warfare theory (*jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*) a bit more difficult. Due to the presence of a lacuna in the first 25 lines of the scene, hints at Anat's motivations for battle remain a mystery. However, the evident

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<sup>192</sup> D. Schindler and J. Toman, "Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (Lieber Code)," in *The Laws of Armed Conflicts* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988), 3-23.

<sup>193</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 112

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* 52, 99, 105.

depiction of Anat's bloodlust as the driving force for her actions (lines 17, 23–24, 29–30) throughout this narrative display a cause for war that does not align with what would be considered a just cause for war today.<sup>195</sup> Likewise, a consideration of proportionality in this case is important to observe. Like the case for just cause, the concept of proportionality is difficult to determine due to the missing information from the text. Without a mention of just cause, it is difficult to determine adherence to proportionality. However, considering Anat's evident drive for satiation of personal bloodlust, it can be conceived that such a motivation is at the foundation of her decision to slaughter her human opponents. A motivation that aligns with her reputation for disregarding "the common good."<sup>196</sup> This lack of just cause closely aligns with a lack of right intention, which cannot be assessed without the foundation of a just cause.<sup>197</sup>

According to the third guideline of *jus ad bellum*, there does appear to be grounds for a reasonable chance of success. Anat's superior strength is displayed through the imagery of hands and gore piled around her feet, which Smith and Pitard recognize as an illustration of Anat's power.<sup>198</sup> This illustration thus indicates a reasonable chance of success in battle. Whether or not Anat is considered a legitimate authority is more difficult to discern since this figure is meant to be the highest authority over a group of people.<sup>199</sup> Walls states that, "Anat consistently acts upon her own desires and is submissive to no one in the extant literature." While she often acts according to the will of Baal, it is sufficient to assume that in this battle she is "acting

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<sup>195</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 52-53.

<sup>196</sup> Walls, "The Goddess Anat," 244.

<sup>197</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 63.

<sup>198</sup> Smith and Pitard, "The Ugaritic Baal," 154-55.

<sup>199</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 61.

independently of Baal.”<sup>200</sup> Thus, her independent action does not recognize her as a legitimate authority according to *jus ad bellum*.

Regarding the final two guidelines for *jus ad bellum*, last resort and a public declaration of war, there is little evidence supporting their presence in the motivations for this battle. Last resort is difficult to consider due to the ambiguity of events leading up to the battle. Thus, it cannot be stated for certain that actions were not done as a last resort. Concerning the required public declaration of war, it is more likely that it is absent since there is no mention of such a declaration in the lines immediately preceding the beginning of the battle (lines 1–3). However, it is likely that such a proclamation could have been included in the lacuna.

Furthermore, a consideration of Anat's adherence to the guidelines of *jus in bello* is also worth noting as well. First, Anat's actions of warfare are emphasized as being waged against human opponents. This is clear in the way that human terms are used in the description of the first battle depicting her opponents as “peoples, tribes, and clans” (*l'im*), and “humankind” (*'adm*).<sup>201</sup> The generalized nature of these descriptions makes it difficult to determine if these individuals should be considered combatants or noncombatants. However, the description of her opponents in the second battle as “fighter(s), armies, and warriors” (lines 20–22), indicate that she is acting partially in accordance with the guidelines of *jus in bello*, which call for attack to only be directed at combatants. However, the required distinctions of a combatant (distinctive emblem, openly bearing arms, and obeying the rules of *jus in bello*)<sup>202</sup> are not explicitly described. Thus, whether her actions against these individuals are just, is difficult to determine.

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<sup>200</sup> Walls, “The Goddess Anat,” 136, 228.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. n. 74.

<sup>202</sup> Fowles, *The Ethics of War*, 105-108.

The lack of certainty regarding this precludes the designation of these individuals as legitimate targets.

Moreover, an observation of the way that she wages war considering the *jus in bello* standard for legitimate tactics and humane treatment of prisoners reveals more pressing concerns. Anat observes military necessity regarding its allowance for the killing and capture of combatant enemies when she takes captive combatant survivors and kills them in her palace (lines 16–30). However, if her capture of them during war indicates they have become prisoners of war, she violates the stipulations for humane treatment of prisoners according to *jus in bello*, which calls for the adherence to the prisoner's "benevolent quarantine." *Jus in bello* bans any act of killing, torture, or "inhuman treatment" by their overseers.<sup>203</sup> Thus, in this case, Anat violates these just acts of war. Likewise, military necessity does not apply to noncombatants. If her opponents in the first battle are to be understood as noncombatants, then slaughter and humiliation of their bodies through their mutilation and public display around her neck and waste violate the stipulations of just warfare tactics against noncombatants as is outlined in the Geneva Convention, which state:

the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons [non-combatants]: (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture... (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Weiner, "Just Warfare Theory, 60

<sup>204</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 75 UNTS 287, 1949, Article 3.

The ambiguity of this battle makes it difficult to determine certain aspects of alliance or aversion to the stipulations of just war. Yet, considering observations from the text and Anat's own reputation suggest a lesser alignment with such considerations of just warfare.

### **Conclusion**

An evaluation of these two texts in Judges 4–5 and the Baal Cycle reveal many details about the just nature of war enacted by the Israelite God Yahweh, and war waged by the Ugaritic goddess, Anat. Both accounts depict these deities as divine warriors fighting against human opponents, resulting in the annihilation of a people group (i.e. *herem* warfare). By analyzing their actions in accordance with the present-day understanding of just warfare, the reality of ancient warfare is highlighted in the ways that Yahweh's adherence to just warfare contrasts Anat's infringement to it. While plenty of inquiries into this matter remain, an analysis of both Yahweh's and Anat's actions in battle evidently depict Yahweh as supremely just and genuinely benevolent.

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