

Judges 5:1 ¶ Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

This chapter is often called the “Song of Deborah,” but it quickly identifies the song as sung by Deborah and Barak. “On that day” seems to reference the death of Jabin as recorded in the last verse of the previous chapter.

Gill offers this note from Ben Gersom on the authorship of Deborah: “...and the verb is singular: ‘then sang Deborah’; and after her, and in her words, sung also Barak; he joined with her, not in making the song, but in singing it; and so likewise the people of Israel joined with her in singing it, as they did with Moses at the Red sea; and this song was sung.”

The NIV Commentary offers the following introduction to this chapter: “The victory over the Canaanites was also commemorated in a poem of rare beauty. Called the ‘Song of Deborah,’ this masterpiece expresses heartfelt praise to God for leading his people in triumph. It is a hymn of thanksgiving, a song of victory like Ex 15 or Ps 68. The poetry itself is magnificent, featuring many examples of climactic parallelism (vv. 7, 19-20, 27) and onomatopoeia (v. 22). Deborah is usually considered the author; the connection between prophetess and music is a natural one (cf. Ex 15:20-21).”

The New Bible Commentary declares this song to be one of the oldest pieces of poetry in the Old Testament.

Judges 5:2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

Judges 5:3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, *even* I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing *praise* to the LORD God of Israel.

The song begins with words of praise to the LORD. It credits Him with avenging Israel of the harsh treatment they had received from Jabin for 20 years. He gave them the victory because they willingly followed His command in faith to face a much more powerful enemy.

The singers call for the surrounding kings and leaders of the nations to pay attention as they sing their praise to “the LORD God of Israel.” Only Israel’s God had been able to prove Himself against all other false gods on behalf of His people.

Judges 5:4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.

Judges 5:5 The mountains melted from before the LORD, *even* that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

These verses seem to be a reference for the words of King David.

Psalms 68:7–9 “O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst

march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary."

Edom and Seir are interchangeable terms for the land possessed by the descendants of Esau. Israel had to go around Edom after leaving Sinai en route to the land of promise. Point being, that all along the way, the LORD manifested Himself supernaturally on behalf of the children of Israel for protection and provision.

Judges 5:6 ¶ In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.

Judges 5:7 *The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.*

The poet identifies Shamgar and Jael as contemporaries that represent a time when travel on the highways of the land was very dangerous, and people tended to travel on side paths that were deemed safer. In fact, the smaller villages were disappearing because people felt safer in bigger cities I assume. It was during this time that the LORD raised up Deborah as a "mother in Israel." I think this has reference to her position as a spiritual caretaker, a spiritual parent, since it was a time when men of strong faith were either scarce or nonexistent.

Judges 5:8 *They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?*

Judges 5:9 *My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.*

The people had turned to false gods. They weren't willing to fight for their land because they were not willing to submit to the LORD. Some commentators note that verse 8 is a reference to the fact that they had been disarmed so that they could not fight.

Deborah's heart resonated with those that were willing to volunteer to fight in defense of the nation. I assume this to be a reference to those that fought against Jabin despite the odds against them. It indicated that hearts were once again turning to the LORD in faith—especially since they were facing the enemy without shield or spear.

Judges 5:10 *Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.*

Judges 5:11 *They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.*

Deborah is basically calling for all the people of Israel, the wealthy and influential as well as the general public, to talk about what the LORD has done

for them. In other words, because of the victory over the Canaanites, the people were free and safe to fellowship and talk about the LORD as they went about daily life. The gates of a village or city were recognized as the place of judgment where one could seek justice.

JFB offers this insight on “the places of drawing water” (v11): “The wells which are at a little distance from towns in the East, are, in unsettled times, places of danger. But in peace they are scenes of pleasant and joyous resort.”

Research revealed that white donkeys were of great value and only the wealthy and powerful could afford them.

Judges 5:12 ¶ Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Judges 5:13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

Deborah urges herself to boldly sing the glory of their God-given victory and calls for Barak to bring out his prisoners for all to see. I assume these prisoners were taken after the battle with Sisera in the fighting that followed until they destroyed Jabin.

John Gill helped me on verse 13. He indicated the possibility that Deborah was saying that those remaining, the victorious Israelites, now had dominion or authority over the nobles among the people, the Canaanite nobility that lived and ruled among them. She emphasizes once again that it was the LORD that had given the Israelites that authority.

Judges 5:14 Out of Ephraim *was there* a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

Judges 5:15 And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great thoughts of heart.

Judges 5:16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great searchings of heart.

It seems that Deborah is identifying those that took part in the fight against Jabin and his armies. I can only surmise that some of them sent reinforcements after the initial victory over Sisera. Those identified included the men of Ephraim that lived near the Amalekites, Benjamin, Machir (a reference to the tribe of Manasseh that inherited west of Jordan), Zebulun, and Issachar.

Gill provides some additional insight regarding the reference to Zebulun: “...being a maritime tribe, and employed in trade and navigation, had many clerks famous for their readiness in handling the pen; but these through a zeal for the common cause dropped their pens, and took to the sword, in vindication of the rights and liberties of themselves and their brethren; for which they are justly commended.”

Deborah gives special recognition to the leaders from Issachar that joined Barak in leading the charge on foot against Sisera and his chariots.

The poet rebukes the tribe of Reuben for opting to take care of their own interests instead of joining to help their brethren fight the enemy. She notes that they reached that decision after careful consideration.

Thought: When it comes to providing help as needed in the family of God, the church, I do not want to be a "Reuben."

Judges 5:17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

Judges 5:18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

Reuben wasn't the only tribe to be rebuked. Gilead (a reference to Gad), Dan and Asher all chose to remain home rather than help defeat the Canaanites.

Zebulun and Naphtali were the tribes at the forefront that put their lives on the line against the forces of Sisera. It should be noted that this was at the specific direction of the LORD (cf 4:6), but the men of those tribes were quick to follow the lead of Deborah and Barak.

Judges 5:19 The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

Judges 5:20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

Though the kings of Canaan, allies of Jabin, came as reinforcements to meet the Israelites in battle by the waters of Megiddo, they did not profit. Israel was aided by the powers of heaven, "the stars in their courses." As I stated in the previous chapter, I believe this to be a reference to angelic armies, similar to those that stood ready to defend Elisha.

2 Kings 6:15–17 "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Judges 5:21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

Judges 5:22 Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.

It seems that many of Sisera's troops were drowned in the Kishon River. Verse

22 paints a picture of soldiers on horseback running hard in attack toward the Israelites. Commentators note that horses were not shod in those days, so their hooves were broken as they were driven to run over the rough terrain.

Judges 5:23 *Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.*

All I could find about the city of Meroz reiterated the fact that Deborah rebuked those living there for not helping their brethren in battle against the Canaanites.

Scripture is clear in declaring that the LORD views one's actions for or against His people as for or against Him.

Matthew 25:34–40 “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.... Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**”

Acts 9:1–5 “And Saul...went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, **why persecutest thou me?** And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest....”

Judges 5:24 ¶ **Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.**

Judges 5:25 **He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.**

Judges 5:26 **She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.**

Judges 5:27 **At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.**

Deborah sings the praises of Jael, the woman who killed Sisera. She describes how she made him believe he would be safe in her tent so that she could kill him. The Hebrew for “smote off” supports the fact that she “crushed” his head when nailing it to the ground instead of cutting it off.

Deborah calls for God's blessing upon Jael because she honored Him and disregarded the culture of her day. This is a principle that is going to be tested more and more by true Christians in America and throughout the world as Satan's rule grows stronger and stronger and governments continue to pass laws that are contrary to the word of God that require believers to follow such laws

and disobey God.

JFB provides the following insight regarding “butter” (v25): It is “curdled milk; a favorite beverage in the East.”

The New Bible Commentary notes that Jael gave Sisera milk because of its sleep-inducing properties.

Judges 5:28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

Judges 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, **Judges 5:30** Have they not sped? have they *not* divided the prey; to every man a damsel *or* two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, *meet* for the necks of *them that take the spoil*?

As the song begins to close, Deborah pictures the mother of Sisera looking out the window wondering what is taking her son so long to return home. She reasons that he must have had chariot problems, and her friends agree hoping to comfort her. She goes on to reason that it must be taking a long time to divide the spoils of war among the soldiers.

Of course, we know that he never returned home.

Judges 5:31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but *let* them that love him *be* as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Deborah expresses the hope that all the enemies of the LORD are destroyed just as surely as Sisera and his armies. Again the poet identifies the enemies of Israel as enemies of the LORD.

In contrast, Deborah calls for God’s blessing upon those that love the LORD. Thus ends the Song of Deborah.

The chapter closes with a note that the land had rest for 40 years after this.