

# Judges 05 - Song of Deborah; The State of Israel Before Deborah's Judgeship

II. Failure in rescue of Israel through the seven cycles (Judges 3:7—16:31)

(4) Deborah and Barak defeat Jabin and the Canaanites (Judges 4:1—5:31)

(D) Salvation (4:4—5:31a)

(b) Song of victory (5:1-31)

(i) Past conquests (5:1-5)

(ii) Present Challenge (5:6-11)

(iii) Tribal cooperation (5:12-18)

(iv) Victory through Deborah (5:19-23)

(v) Jael's victory over Sisera (5:24-31a)

(E) Silence (5:31b)

## The Song of Deborah

The writer shifts from narrative prose to jubilant poetry. (For other examples, see Ex 15; Deut 32; 2 Sam 1:17-27; Ps 18.) From the personal pronouns (v7,9,13), it appears that this was Deborah's victory song, but just as Barak joined her in battle, so he joined her in the celebration.

## Judges 5

(b) Song of victory (5:1-31)

(i) Past conquests (5:1-5)

1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang **on that day**, saying,

1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,

1 Later that day, Deborah and Abinoam's son Barak celebrated by singing this song:

1 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,

- The song was composed by Deborah (Cf. v3,7,12) but sung by both she and Barak

- "...on that day" - links the song with the defeat of Sisera, and suggests it was composed as a spontaneous response to the victory

2 "For the leaders leading in Israel, For the people volunteering, Bless the LORD!

2 "That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD!

2 "When hair grows long in Israel, when the people give themselves willingly, bless the LORD!

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

- Verses 2,9 focus on the unity of the leaders so that Barak could assemble an army

— When leaders were willing to lead, and people were willing to follow their lead, then there was victory, along with the resulting opportunity to praise God

— This verse is a summons to praise God for the willingness and joyful rise of His people. Hence, God is to be praised because both the leaders and the common people took up weapons to fight this war, and the call to praise God is expressed in the plural imperative.

3 "Hear, you kings; listen, you dignitaries! I myself—to the LORD, I myself will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel!

3 "Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.

3 Listen, you kings! Turn your ears to me, you rulers! As for me, to the LORD I will sing! I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

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.

- A call to Gentile rulers, both kings and princes (Israel had neither at this point in history)

— This is a call to kings and princes of the earth to hear what Deborah has to proclaim to the praise of the true God

4 "LORD, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, The clouds also dripped water.

4 "LORD, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water.

4 LORD, when you left Seir, when you marched out from the grain field of Edom, the earth quaked and the heavens poured out rain; indeed, the clouds poured out water.

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

- Portrays God as a divine warrior, marching forth from Mount Seir in Edom to the aid of His people

— Verses 4b-5 picture the results of the presence of God among His people: the result on the earth (trembled); the results in the heavens (dropped); and the result in the weather (rain)

— Keeping in mind that Baal was viewed as the storm god, here the God of Israel was using what should have been Baal's strongest weapons

5 "The mountains flowed *with water* at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

5 "The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

5 Mountains tremble at the presence of the LORD — even Sinai!—at the presence of the LORD God of Israel.

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

- The same God who gave victory in the past would give them victory again

(ii) Present Challenge (5:6-11)

6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the roads were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways.

6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways.

6 During the lifetime of Anath's son Shamgar and during the lifetime of Jael highways remained deserted, while travelers kept to back roads.

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.

- Outside the walled villages, and on the roadways, life came to a standstill due to the oppression by the Canaanites...

— The total disintegration of communication and trade

7 "The peasantry came to an end, they came to an end in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, **a mother in Israel.**

7 "The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel.

7 Rural populations plummeted in Israel; until I, Deborah, arose; until I—an Israeli mother—arose.

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

- Describes a total lack of leadership in Israel, but then Deborah came along...

- "...a mother in Israel" - note: not a mother *of* Israel, a mother *in* Israel

— Indeed, always a most honorable profession

8 "New gods were chosen; Then war *was in* the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel.

8 "New gods were chosen; Then war *was* in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel.

8 New gods were chosen, then war came to the city gates, but there wasn't a shield or spear to be seen among 40,000 soldiers of Israel.

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

- The enemy had taken over because the people had turned from YHWH to worship false gods

— Israel had also lost control of the countryside, therefore agricultural production was disrupted

— There was also a total lack of weaponry among the Jewish people

### **The State of Israel Before Deborah's Judgeship**

(1) The roads were deserted, and the caravan routes that crisscrossed the country, especially across the Jezreel Valley, linking the Jews of the north with the Jews of the south, were disrupted so that the Jewish caravaners ceased to travel on their normal trade routes for fear of attack by Canaanites or to avoid the heavy tolls that they would have to pay to the Canaanites.

(2) Instead of taking direct routes to their destinations, they had to take evasive side roads that were much harder to travel.

(3) The villagers in Israel held back because they were afraid of attack by the enemy; and therefore they would not go out to the fields, with the result that trade among the tribes of Israel came to a complete standstill.

(4) With the arrival of Deborah there was a break in the crisis, for she was a mother in Israel; if this was a technical term, it refers to her status as a prophetess; if this was a non-technical term, it means that she was a Jewish mother, in contrast to the Canaanite mother of Sisera, who plays a role in this song.

(5) With the rise of new leaders, it was time to go on the offensive.

(6) Finally, Israel lacked all the necessary weapons of war; and this lack of arms was another sign of their depressed state.

9 "My heart *goes out* to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!

9 "My heart *goes out* to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!

9 My heart is for the commanders of Israel, to those who work willingly among the people. Bless the LORD!

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

- Deborah extols the response of the new leaders

— The focus is on the glorious change that took place in Israel just after Deborah appeared

— As in v2, Deborah praises the leaders and the people for their response, despite the disadvantages

10 "You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on *rich* carpets, And you who travel on the road—shout in praise!

10 "You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on *rich* carpets, And you who travel on the road—sing!

10 "Speak up, you who ride white donkeys, sitting on cloth saddles while you travel on your way!

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

- A call to all classes of Israelite society, the rich ("that ride on white asses") and the poor ("walk by the way")

— In 5:3 she called upon the Canaanite kings to hear, but now she also calls on Jewish society to hear as well

11 "At the sound of those who distribute *water* among the **watering places**, There they will recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD **went down to the gates**.

11 "At the sound of those who divide *flocks* among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.

11 From the sound of those who divide their work loads at the watering troughs, there they will retell the righteous deeds of the LORD, the righteous victories for his rural people in Israel." Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.

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.

- Now the streets were safe again...

- "...watering places" - the watering places, where travelers gather for news and information

— In each of these locations, the people would discuss the righteous acts of God

- "...went down to the gates" - initially, people were afraid to go out and travel, but now they go down to the gates

(iii) Tribal cooperation (5:12-18)

12 "Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives, son of Abinoam.

12 "Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

12 "Wake up! Wake up, Deborah! Wake up! Wake up, Deborah! Get up, Barak, and dispose of your captives, you son of Abinoam!

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

- Part 2 of the song...

13 "Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

13 "Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

13 Then the survivors approached the nobles; the people of the LORD approached me in battle array.

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

- The response of Israel, and of God, to the call to war

— The leaders did their share in recruiting soldiers

— God summoned the enemies of Israel

14 "From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek *came down*, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

14 "From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek *came down*, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

14 Some came from Ephraim who had been harassed by Amalek, followed by Benjamin with your people. Some commanders came from Machir, along with some from Zebulun who carry a badge of office.

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.

- In v14-18, Deborah describes each tribe's response to the call to war...

- Ephraim: they bravely sprang forth into the valley of Jezreel to engage the forces of Sisera

- Benjamin: Machir, Manasseh's only son; stands for the tribe on the west side of the Jordan

- Zebulun: contributed military leaders and was assigned territory in the Jezreel Valley where the battle took place

15 "And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; As *was* Issachar, so *was* Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels; Among the divisions of Reuben *There were* great determinations of heart.

15 "And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; As *was* Issachar, so *was* Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels; Among the divisions of Reuben *There were* great resolves of heart.

15 The officials of Issachar were with Deborah, as was the tribe of Issachar and Barak. They rushed out into the valley at his heels along with divisions from Reuben's army. Great was their resolve of heart!

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.  
- Issachar: the leaders of this tribe were a protective escort for Deborah  
— The soldiers of this tribe also stuck close to Barak in the attack; this tribe had been given territory in the Jezreel Valley

16 "Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben *There were* great searchings of heart.

16 "Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben *There were* great searchings of heart.

16 Why did you sit down among the sheepfolds? To hear the bleating of the flocks? Among the divisions of the army of Reuben there was great searching of heart.

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.

- Reuben: Resolute in their refusal to participate

— He is pictured as sitting around the campfire entertained by musicians, indifferent to the plight of his brethren

— Toward the end, Reuben's tribe had second thoughts, but still ended up doing nothing

17 "Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay on ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings.

17 "Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings.

17 The tribe of Gilead remained on the other side of the Jordan River. As for the tribe of Dan, why did they stay on board their ships? The tribe of Asher sat by the seashore and remained near its harbors.

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

- Manasseh east (Gilead): was on the other side of the Jordan; they also stayed home
- Dan: they were likely too involved in the shipping business with the Phoenicians (who were Canaanites) to be enticed to go to war against the Canaanites
- Asher: preferred the beaches and harbors to the battlefield

18 "Zebulun was a people who risked their lives, And Naphtali too, on the high places of the field.

18 "Zebulun was a people who despised their lives *even* to death, And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.

18 The tribe of Zebulun did not worry about their lives at the price of death; neither did the tribe of Naphtali also on high places of the field.

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

- Zebulun: mentioned twice by Deborah (Cf. v14)
- They are given a special place of honor for their bravery; they had the most to gain since their territory was in the Jezreel Valley
- Naphtali: Barak's tribe; they participated in the battle

The tribes of Judah and Simeon are not mentioned as participants in the war, or chastised for staying away. This may imply they were busy fighting the Philistines and could not send a fighting force for Barak.

When Joshua commanded Israel's armies, all the tribes participated. When Barak summoned his volunteers, only half of them went to war against Jabin.

#### (iv) Victory through Deborah (5:19-23)

**19** "The kings came *and* fought; Then the kings of Canaan fought At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver.

**19** "The kings came *and* fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver.

19 "Kings came to fight, then battled the kings of Canaan at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo. They took no silver as the spoils of war.

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.

- These were not mercenary troops, but ethnic Canaanite armies
- The cities of Taanach and Megiddo were at the western end of the Jezreel Valley
- This shows that Barak's forces crossed the whole valley from the eastern side

— At the western end flowed the Kishon River, which would prove to be an enemy to the Canaanites

20 "The stars fought from heaven, From their paths they fought against Sisera.

20 "The stars fought from heaven, From their courses they fought against Sisera.

20 The stars fought from heaven; they fought against Sisera from their orbits.

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

- Possibly simply poetic language; yet, it is hazardous to underestimate the Scriptures' literalness! — What caused the unseasonal torrents of rain? (Cf. Joshua 10:12 notes)

— If this refers literally to the heavens and to literal stars, it would mean that the weather was in Israel's favor. But, if they are being used symbolically, it would refer to angels engaged in a war on behalf of Israel in the heavenly realms. In context, both statements could be true.

21 "The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. My soul, march on with strength!

21 "The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength.

21 The current of the Kishon River swept them downstream, that ancient current, the Kishon's current! March on strongly, my soul!

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

- The Kishon River overflowed its banks, causing the battlefield to become muddy and rendering the Canaanites' 900 chariots useless

— The flood neutralized the chariot force, which was the Canaanites' main military advantage

— This flood also explains why Sisera fled on foot, when normally he could've escaped faster if he did so in a chariot (if it wasn't stuck in the mud)

22 "Then the horses' hoofs beat From the galloping, the galloping of his mighty stallions.

22 "Then the horses' hoofs beat From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.

22 Then loud was the beat of the horses' hooves— from the galloping, galloping war steeds!

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

- Describes the flight of the Canaanite calvary...

23 'Curse **Meroz**,' said the angel of the LORD, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants, Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, To the help of the LORD against the warriors.'

23 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants; Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, To the help of the Lord against the warriors.'

23 "'Meroz is cursed!' declared the angel of the LORD. 'Utterly and totally cursed are its inhabitants, because they never came to the aid of the LORD, to the aid of the LORD against the valiant warriors!'"

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.

- "...Meroz" - an Israelite town that failed to do its duty; they sided with the Canaanites and let those fleeing through Meroz escape when they should have blocked their path and killed them

— Notice that it isn't Deborah cursing Meroz, but the "Angel of the Lord." It wasn't for failing to assist Israel; they failed to help the Lord!

(v) Jael's victory over Sisera (5:24-31a)

**24** "Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent.

**24** "Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent.

24 "Blessed above all women is Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite; most blessed is she among women who live in tents!

24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

- While the Israelite city of Meroz failed to do its duty, the Gentile Jael took the side of Israel, even going against her husband

— Note that there is no Scriptural condemnation of Jael for her deception and killing of Sisera

25 "He asked for water, she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.

25 "He asked for water *and* she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.

25 Sisera asked for water— she gave him milk. In a magnificent bowl she brought him yogurt!

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

- Jael treated Sisera like royalty

26 "She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple.

26 "She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple.

26 She reached out one hand for the tent peg, and her other for the workman's mallet. Then she struck Sisera, smashing his head, shattering and piercing his temple.

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.

27 "Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead.

27 "Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead.

27 He crumpled to the ground between her feet, where he fell down and collapsed. Between her feet he crumpled, Fallen dead!

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.

**28** "Out of the window she looked and wailed, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots delay?'

**28** "Out of the window she looked and lamented, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?'

28 "Back at home, out the window Sisera's mother peered, lamenting through the lattice. 'Why is his chariot delayed in returning? 'Why do the hoof beats of his chariots wait?'

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?

- The pathos of the fallen general is amplified by an ironic description of the awaiting mother clinging to hopeful excuses of his delay...

29 "Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed **she repeats her words to herself,**

29 "Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed she repeats her words to herself,

29 Her wise attendants find an answer for her; in fact, she tells the same words to herself:

29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

- "...she repeats her words to herself" - she convinced herself that what they said was true

30 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoils? A concubine, two concubines for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed cloth, A spoil of dyed cloth embroidered, Dyed cloth of double embroidery on the neck of the plunderer?'

30 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed work, A spoil of dyed work embroidered, Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?'

30 'They're busy finding and dividing the war booty, aren't they? A girl or two for each valiant warrior, and some dyed materials for Sisera— perhaps dyed, embroidered war booty — or some detailed embroidery for my neck as the booty of war!

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?

- A pathetic picture of hope where there is no hope...

- "...a damsel or two" - a sexual expression; a reality of war for the victorious soldiers

— The women of defeated enemies were used primarily for sexual gratification—for rape or to become sex slaves

— This woman's loyalty to her son and her people overshadowed her loyalty to her gender as a group

(E) Silence (5:31b)

31 "May **all Your enemies perish** in this way, LORD; But may those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was at rest for forty years.

31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

31 "May all of your enemies perish like this, LORD! But may those who love him be like the ascending sun in its strength!" Then the land enjoyed quiet for 40 years.

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.

- "...all Your enemies perish" - this assumes that those who fight against Israel also fight against God, and is in keeping with the cursing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant

- Deborah also prays for vindication and victory for those who love God, that is, those who are covenantally committed to God in keeping with Ex 20:5-6, and who express their commitment by obedience

- The battles between the forces of darkness and the forces of light at Megiddo are not yet over...