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

The triumphant song of Deborah and Barak, after the defeat of Sisera, captain of the armies of Jabin, king of Canaan.

Verse 1

Then sang Deborah, and Barak - There are many difficulties in this very sublime song; and learned men have toiled much to remove them. That there are several gross mistakes in our version will be instantly acknowledged by all who can critically examine the original. Dr. Kennicott has distributed it into parts, assigned to Deborah and Barak alternately. But his division is by far too artificial. Dr. Hales has also given a version of it which, perhaps, comes nearer to the simplicity of the original; but it also leaves several difficulties behind. As these are the two best versions I have met with, I shall lay them both in parallel columns before the reader, after introducing the general description of this song, given by each of these learned men. These the reader will find at the conclusion of the chapter.

JUDGES 5:2 "Because the leaders took the lead in Israel, because the people offered themselves willingly, be blessed, the LORD!

Verse 2

For the avenging of Israel - See the notes, etc., at the end of the chapter, Jdg 5:28 (note).

JUDGES 5:3 "Hear, you kings! Give ear, you princes! I, even I, will sing to the LORD. I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.

JUDGES 5:4 "LORD, when you went out of Seir, when you marched out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the sky also dropped. Yes, the clouds dropped water.

Verse 4

When thou wentest out of Seir - Here is an allusion to the giving of the law, and the manifestation of God's power and glory at that time; and as this was the most signal display of his majesty and mercy in behalf of their forefathers, Deborah very properly begins her song with a commemoration of this transaction.

JUDGES 5:5 The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, even Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

JUDGES 5:6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied. The travellers walked through byways.

Verse 6

The highways were unoccupied - The land was full of anarchy and confusion, being everywhere infested with banditti. No public road was safe; and in going from place to place, the people were obliged to use unfrequented paths.

JUDGES 5:7 The rulers ceased in Israel. They ceased until I, Deborah, arose; Until I arose a mother in Israel.

Verse 7

The villages ceased - The people were obliged to live together in fortified places; or in great numbers, to protect each other against the incursions of bands of spoilers.

JUDGES 5:8 They chose new gods. Then war was in the gates. Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

Verse 8

They chose new gods - This was the cause of all their calamities; they forsook Jehovah, and served other gods; and then was war in their gates - they were hemmed up in every place, and besieged in all their fortified cities; and they were defenseless, they had no means of resisting their adversaries; for even among forty thousand men, there was neither spear nor shield to be seen. The Vulgate gives a strange and curious turn to this verse: *Nova bella elegit Dominus, et portas hostium ipse subvertit*; "The Lord chose a new species of war, and himself subverted the gates of the enemy." Now, what was this new species of war? A woman signifies her orders to Barak; he takes 10,000 men, wholly unarmed, and retires to Mount Tabor, where they are immediately besieged by a powerful and well-appointed army. On a sudden Barak and his men rush upon them, terror and dismay are spread through the whole Cannanitish army, and the rout is instantaneous and complete. The Israelites immediately arm themselves with the arms of their enemies, and slay all before them; they run, and are pursued in all directions. Sisera, their general, is no longer safe in his chariot; either his horses fail, or the unevenness of the road obliges him to desert it, and fly away on foot; in the end, the whole army is destroyed, and the leader ingloriously slain. This was a new species of war, and was most evidently the Lord's doings. Whatever may be said of the version of the Vulgate, (and the Syriac and Arabic are something like it), the above are all facts, and show the wondrous working of the Lord.

JUDGES 5:9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD!

JUDGES 5:10 "Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets, and you who walk by the way.

Verse 10

Ye that ride on white asses - Perhaps אתנות צחרות athonoth tsechoroth should be rendered sleek or well-fed asses; rendered asinos nitentes, shining asses, by the Vulgate.

Ye that sit in judgment - ישבי על מדין yoshebey al middin; some have rendered this, ye who dwell in Middin. This was a place in the tribe of Judah, and is mentioned Jos 15:61.

And walk by the way - Persons who go from place to place for the purposes of traffic.

JUDGES 5:11 Far from the noise of archers, in the places of drawing water, there they will rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his rule in Israel. "Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates.

Verse 11

In the places of drawing water - As wells were very scarce in every part of the East, and travelers in such hot countries must have water, robbers and banditti generally took their stations near tanks, pools, and springs, in order that they might suddenly fall upon those who came to drink; and when the country was badly governed, annoyances of this kind were very frequent. The victory gained now by the Israelites put the whole country under their own government, and the land was cleansed from such marauders. Dr. Shaw, in his account of the sea-coast of the Mauritania Caesariensis, page 20, mentions a beautiful rill of water that runs into a basin of Roman workmanship, called shrub we krub, "drink and be off," because of the danger of meeting with assassins in the place. Instead of such danger and insecurity, Deborah intimates that they may sit down at the place of drawing water, and there rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord; the land being now everywhere in peace, order and good government being restored.

Go down to the gates - They may go down to the gates to receive judgment and justice as usual. It is well known that the gate was the place of judgment in the East.

JUDGES 5:12 'Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song! Arise, Barak, and lead away your captives, you son of Abinoam.'

Verse 12

Lead thy captivity captive - Make those captives who have formerly captivated us.

JUDGES 5:13 "Then a remnant of the nobles and the people came down. The LORD came down for me against the mighty.

Verse 13

Make him that remaineth - This appears to be spoken of Barak, who is represented as being only a remnant of the people.

JUDGES 5:14 Those whose root is in Amalek came out of Ephraim, after you, Benjamin, among your peoples. Governors come down out of Machir. Those who handle the marshal's staff came out of Zebulun.

Verse 14

Out of Ephraim - a root of them - Deborah probably means that out of Ephraim and Benjamin came eminent warriors. Joshua, who was of the tribe of Ephraim, routed the Amalekites a short time after the Israelites came out of Egypt, Exo 17:10. Ehud, who was of the tribe of Benjamin, slew Eglon, and defeated the Moabites, the friends and allies of the Ammonites and Amalekites. Machir, in the land of Gilead, produced eminent warriors; and Zebulun produced eminent statesmen, and men of literature. Probably Deborah speaks here of the past wars, and not of any thing that was done on this occasion; for we know that no persons from Gilead were present in the war between Jabin and Israel. See Jdg 5:17. Gilead abode beyond Jordan.

JUDGES 5:15 The princes of Issachar were with Deborah. As was Issachar, so was Barak. They rushed into the valley at his feet. By the watercourses of Reuben, there were great resolves of heart.

Verse 15

The princes of Issachar - They were at hand and came willingly forth, at the call of Deborah, to this important war. Barak - was sent on foot - I have no doubt that ברגלין, without regarding the points, should be translated with his footmen or infantry. Thus the Alexandrian Septuagint understood it, rendering the clause thus: Οὕτω Βαράκ εξαπεστειλεν πεζους αυτου εις την κοιλαδα, "Barak also sent forth his footmen into the valley." Luther has perfectly hit the meaning, Barak mit seinen fussvoleke, "Barak with his footmen."

For the divisions of Reuben - Either the Reubenites were divided among themselves into factions, which prevented their co-operation with their brethren, or they were divided in their judgment concerning the measures now to be pursued, which prevented them from joining with the other tribes till the business was entirely settled. The thoughts of heart, and searchings of heart, might refer to the doubts and uneasiness felt by the other tribes, when they found the Reubenites did not join them; for they might have conjectured that they were either unconcerned about their liberty, or were meditating a coalition with the Canaanites.

JUDGES 5:16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the whistling for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben There were great searchings of heart.

JUDGES 5:17 Gilead lived beyond the Jordan. Why did Dan remain in ships? Asher sat still at the haven of the sea, and lived by his creeks.

 Verse 17

Gilead abode beyond Jordan - That is, the Gadites, who had their lot in those parts, and could not well come to the aid of their brethren at a short summons. But the words of Deborah imply a criminal neglect on the part of the Danites; they were intent upon their traffic, and trusted in their ships. Joppa was one of their sea-ports.

Asher continued on the seashore - The lot of Asher extended along the Mediterranean Sea; and being contiguous to Zebulun and Naphtali, they might have easily succoured their brethren; but they had the pretense that their posts were unguarded, and they abode in their breaches, in order to defend them.

JUDGES 5:18 Zebulun was a people that jeopardised their lives to the deaths; Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.

Verse 18

Zebulun and Naphtali - jeoparded their lives - The original is very emphatic, **חרף נפשו למות** chereph naphsho lamuth, they desolated their lives to death - they were determined to conquer or die, and therefore plunged into the thickest of the battle. The word jeoparded is a silly French term, and comes from the exclamation of a disappointed gamester: Jeu perdu! The game is lost; or J'ai perdue! I have lost.

JUDGES 5:19 “The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo. They took no plunder of silver.

Verse 19

The kings came and fought - It is conjectured that Jabin and his confederates had invaded Manasseh, as both Taanach and Megiddo were in that tribe: and that they were discomfited by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali at Taanach and Megiddo; while Barak defeated Sisera at Mount Tabor.

They took no gain of money - They expected much booty in the total rout of the Israelites; but they were defeated, and got no prey; or, if applied to the Israelites, They fought for liberty, not for plunder.

JUDGES 5:20 From the sky the stars fought. From their courses, they fought against Sisera.

Verse 20

They fought from heaven - The angels of God came to the assistance of Israel: and the stars in their orbits fought against Sisera; probably some thunder storm, or great inundation from the river Kishon, took place at that time, which in poetic language was attributed to the stars. So our poet sung relative to the storms which dispersed the Spanish armada in 1588: - "Both winds and waves at once conspire

To aid old England - frustrate Spain's desire."

Perhaps it means no more than this: the time which was measured and ruled by the heavenly bodies seemed only to exist for the destruction of the Canaanites. There may be also a reference to the sun and moon standing still in the days of Joshua.

JUDGES 5:21 The river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. My soul, march on with strength.

Verse 21

The river of Kishon swept them away - This gives plausibility to the above conjecture, that there was a storm at this time which produced an inundation in the river Kishon, which the routed Canaanites attempting to ford were swept away.

JUDGES 5:22 Then the horse hoofs stamped because of the prancings, the prancings of their strong ones.

Verse 22

Then were the horsehoofs broken - In very ancient times horses were not shod; nor are they to the present day in several parts of the East. Sisera had iron chariots when his hosts were routed; the horses that drew these, being strongly urged on by those who drove them, had their hoofs broken by the roughness of the roads; in consequence of which they became lame, and could not carry off their riders. This is marked as one cause of their disaster.

JUDGES 5:23 'Curse Meroz,' said the LORD's angel. 'Curse bitterly its inhabitants, because they didn't come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.'

Verse 23

Curse ye Meroz - Where Meroz was is not known; some suppose it was the same as Merom, nigh to Dotham. The Syriac and Arabic have Merod; but where this was is equally uncertain. It was certainly some city or district, the inhabitants of which would not assist in this war.

Curse ye bitterly - ארו ארו oru aror, curse with cursing - use the most awful execrations.

Said the angel of the Lord - That is, Barak, who was Jehovah's angel or messenger in this war; the person sent by God to deliver his people.

To the help of the Lord - That is, to the help of the people of the Lord.

Against the mighty - בגבורים baggibborim, "with the heroes;" that is, Barak and his men, together with Zebulun and Naphtali: these were the mighty men, or heroes, with whom the inhabitants of Meroz would not join.

JUDGES 5:24 "Jael shall be blessed above women, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

Verse 24

Blessed above women shall Jael - be - She shall be highly celebrated as a most heroic woman; all the Israelitish women shall glory in her. I do not understand these words as expressive of the Divine approbation towards Jael. See the observations at the end of Jdg 4:24 (note). The word bless, both in Hebrew and Greek, often signifies to praise, to speak well of, to celebrate. This is most probably its sense here.

JUDGES 5:25 He asked for water. She gave him milk. She brought him butter in a lordly dish.

Verse 25

She brought forth butter - As the word חמאה chemah, here translated butter, signifies disturbed, agitated, etc., it is probable that buttermilk is intended. The Arabs form their buttermilk by agitating the milk in a leathery bag, and the buttermilk is highly esteemed because of its refreshing and cooling quality; but there is no reason why we may not suppose that Jael gave him cream: Sisera was not only thirsty, but was also exhausted with fatigue; and nothing could be better calculated to quench his thirst, and restore his exhausted strength, than a bowl of cream. I am surprised that Mr. Harmer should see any difficulty in this. It is evident that Deborah wishes to convey the idea that Jael was more liberal and kind than Sisera had requested. He asked for water, and she brought him cream; and she brought it to him, not in an ordinary pitcher, but in the most superb dish or bowl which she possessed. See at the end of Jdg 4:24 (note).

JUDGES 5:26 She put her hand to the tent peg, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer. With the hammer she struck Sisera. She struck through his head. Yes, she pierced and struck through his temples.

Verse 26

She smote off his head - The original does not warrant this translation; nor is it supported by fact. She smote his head, and transfixed him through the temples. It was his head that received the death

wound, and the place where this wound was inflicted was the temples. The manner in which Jael despatched Sisera seems to have been this:

1. Observing him to be in a profound sleep she took a workman's hammer, probably a joiner's mallet, and with one blow on the head deprived him of all sense.
2. She then took a tent nail and drove it through his temples, and thus pinned him to the earth; which she could not have done had she not previously stunned him with the blow on the head. Thus she first smote his head, and secondly pierced his temples.

JUDGES 5:27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay. At her feet he bowed, he fell. Where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

Verse 27

At her feet he bowed - בין רגליה bein ragleyha, "between her feet." After having stunned him she probably sat down, for the greater convenience of driving the nail through his temples.

He bowed - he fell - He probably made some struggles after he received the blow on the head, but could not recover his feet. Aeschylus represents Agamemnon rising, staggering, and finally falling, under the blows of Clytemnestra. - Agam. v. 1384.

JUDGES 5:28 "Through the window she looked out, and cried: Sisera's mother looked through the lattice. 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do the wheels of his chariots wait?'

Verse 28

Cried through the lattice - This is very natural: in the women's apartments in the East the windows are latticed, to prevent them from sending or receiving letters, etc. The latticing is the effect of the jealousy which universally prevails in those countries.

Why is his chariot so long in coming? - Literally, Why is his chariot ashamed to come? Dr. Lowth has very justly observed, that this is a striking image of maternal solicitude, and of a mind divided between hope and fear. "The mother of Sisera looked out at a window;

She cried through the lattice, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming?'

Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' "Immediately, impatient of delay, she prevents the comfort of her companions; elate in mind, and bursting forth into female levity and jactation, impotent to hope for any thing, and drunk with her good fortune, "Her wise ladies earnestly answered her;

Yea, she immediately returned answer to herself; 'Have they not sped? have they not divided the spoil?' "We see how consonant to the person speaking is every idea, every word. She dwells not upon the slaughter of the enemies, the number of the captives, the valor and great exploits of the victor, but, burning with the female love of spoils, on those things rather which captivate the light mind of the vainest woman; damsels, gold, garments. Nor does she dwell upon them only; but she

repeats, she accumulates, she augments every thing. She seems, as it were, to handle the spoils. dwelling as she does on every particular. 'Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey?

A damsel, yea, two damsels to every man:

To Sisera, a prey of divers colors;

A prey of divers colors of needlework,

Finely coloured of needlework on both sides,

A spoil for adorning the neck.'

To enhance the beauty of this passage, there is, in the poetic conformation of the sentences, an admirable neatness in the diction, great force, splendor, accuracy; in the very redundance of the repetitions the utmost brevity; and, lastly, the most striking disappointment of the woman's hope, tacitly insinuated by that sudden and unexpected apostrophe, 'So let all thine enemies perish, O Jehovah!' is expressed more fully and strongly by this silence than could have been painted by any colouring of words." See Dr. Lowth, 13th Prelection, Pro 4:18, Pro 4:19. "We cannot do better," says Dr. Dodd, "than conclude this chapter with the words of Pelicanus: 'Let a Homer, or a Virgil, go and compare his poetry, if he be able, with the song of this woman; and, if there be anyone who excels in eloquence and learning, let him celebrate the praises and learning of this panegyric, more copiously than I am able.'"

For other matters relative to this song I must refer to the two translations which immediately follow; and their authors' notes on them.

Dr. Kennicott says, "This celebrated song of triumph is most deservedly admired; though some parts of it are at present very obscure, and others unintelligible in our English version. Besides particular difficulties, there is a general one that pervades the whole; arising as I humbly apprehend, from its being considered as entirely the song of Deborah. It is certain, though very little attended to, that it is said to have been sung by Deborah and By Barak. It is also certain there are in it parts which Deborah could not sing, as well as parts which Barak could not sing; and therefore it seems necessary, in order to form a better judgment of this song, that some probable distribution should be made of it; whilst those words which seem most likely to have been sung by either party should be assigned to their proper name; either to that of Deborah the prophetess, or to that of Barak the captain. "For example: Deborah could not call upon Deborah, exhorting herself to awake, etc., as in Jdg 5:12; neither could Barak exhort himself to arise, etc., in the same verse. Again, Barak could not sing, Till I, Deborah, arose a mother in Israel, Jdg 5:7; nor could Deborah sing about a damsel or two for every soldier, Jdg 5:30; though, indeed, as to this last article, the words are probably misunderstood. There are other parts also which seem to require a different rendering. Jdg 5:2, For the avenging of Israel, where the address is probably to those who took the lead in Israel on this great occasion, for the address in the next words is to those among the people who were volunteers; as again, Jdg 5:9. Jdg 5:11, Jdg 5:13-15, have many great difficulties. It seems impossible that (Jdg 5:23) any person should be cursed for not coming to the help of Jehovah; to the help of Jehovah against the mighty. Nor does it seem more probable that Jael should, in a sacred song, be styled blessed above women for the death of Sisera. Jdg 5:26 mentions butter, of which nothing is said in the history in Jdg 4:19; nor does the history say that Jael smote off Sisera's head with a hammer, or indeed that she smote it off at all, as here, Jdg 5:26. Lastly, as to Jdg 5:30, there being no authority for rendering the words a damsel or two damsels, and the words in Hebrew being very much like two other words in this same verse, which make excellent sense here, it seems highly probable that

they were originally the same. And at the end of this verse, which contains an excellent compliment paid to the needlework of the daughters of Israel, and which is here put with great art in the mouth of Sisera's Mother, the true sense seems to be, the hopes She had of some very rich prize to adorn Her Own Neck." - Kennicott's Remarks, p. 94.

Dr. Hales observes, "That the design of this beautiful ode, which breathes the characteristic softness and luxuriance of female composition, seems to be twofold, religious and political; first, to thank God for the recent victory and deliverance of Israel from Canaanitish bondage and oppression; and next, to celebrate the zeal and alacrity with which some of the rulers volunteered their services against the common enemy, and to censure the lukewarmness and apathy of others who stayed at home, and thus betrayed the public cause; and, by this contrast and exposure, to heal those fatal divisions among the tribes, so injurious to the commonwealth. The first verse, as a title, briefly recites the design or subject of the poem, which consists of eight stanzas. "The first opens with a devout thanksgiving, to which she calls the attention of all, friends and foes. "The second describes, in the sublime imagery of Moses, the magnificent scenes at Mount Sinai, Seir, etc., in the deserts of Arabia, while they were led by the Divine power and presence from Egypt to Canaan. "The third states their offending afterwards by their apostasies in serving new gods, as foretold by Moses, Deu 32:16, Deu 32:17, and their consequent oppression by their enemies; the insecurity of travelling, and desertion of the villages, during the twenty years that intervened from the death of Shamgar till Jael's exploit, and till Deborah became judge. By this time they were disarmed by the Philistines and Canaanites, and scarcely a sword or a spear was to be seen in Israel. This policy was adopted by the Philistines in Saul's time, 1Sam 13:19, and was probably introduced before, when Shamgar, for want of other weapons, had recourse to an ox-goad, which was only left with them for the purpose of agriculture, 1Sam 13:21. "The fourth contrasts their present happy state of security from the incursions and depredations of their foes, especially at the watering places, which were most exposed to attacks; owing to the Divine protection which crowned the victory, the zeal and exertions of 'a remnant of the people,' or a part of the tribes, against the enemy, under her conduct; these were the midland tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, including, perhaps, Judah and Simeon, which bordered on Amalek southward, and Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali, northward. "The fifth censures the recreant tribes Reuben and Gad, beyond Jordan eastward; and Dan and Asher, on the Mediterranean Sea westward, who deserted the common cause in consequence of their divisions, and their paltry attachment to their own concerns. "The sixth records the miraculous defeat of the confederate kings of Canaan, who were swept away by the torrents issuing from the different springs of the river Kishon, swollen by uncommon rains. Meroz was probably a place in the neighborhood. "The seventh contains a panegyric on Jael, who is here 'blessed above women,' for attempting an exploit above her sex to perform; and a picturesque description of her giving Sisera buttermilk to drink, which is considered as a great treat at present among the Arabs. Then follows a minute and circumstantial description of her mode of slaying him. "The eighth affords an admirable representation of the impatience of the mother of Sisera at his delay in returning; her sanguine anticipation of his success; in which she dwells, not upon the greatness of his exploits, or the slaughter of his enemies, but upon the circumstances most likely to engage a light female mind, such as captive damsels, and embroidered garments, or the spoils of victory, which she repeats and exemplifies with much grace and elegance. "The unexpected and abrupt apostrophe which concludes the poem, So perish all thine enemies, O Lord! tacitly insinuates the utter disappointment of their vain hopes of conquest and spoil more fully and forcibly than any express declaration in words; while it marks the author's piety, and sole reliance upon the Divine protection of His people, and the glorious prospect of a future and greater deliverance, perhaps, by the Sun of righteousness." - New Anal. Chron. p. 324.

JUDGES 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, Yes, she returned answer to herself,

JUDGES 5:30 'Have they not found, have they not divided the plunder? A lady, two ladies to every man; to Sisera a plunder of dyed garments, a plunder of dyed garments embroidered, of dyed garments embroidered on both sides, on the necks of the plunder?'

JUDGES 5:31 "So let all your enemies perish, LORD, but let those who love him be as the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had rest forty years.
