

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 5

This chapter contains a song of praise on account of the victories obtained over Jabin, and his kingdom; after an exhortation to praise is given, and kings excited to attend to it, the majestic appearance of God at Seir, on Sinai, is observed, to raise in the mind a divine veneration of him, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:1-5); then the miserable state and condition Israel was in before these victories, and therefore had the more reason to be thankful, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:6-8); the governors, and judges, and the people that were delivered, together with Deborah and Barak, are stirred up to rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, and bless his name, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:9-13); and those who willingly engaged in the war are praised, and such who were negligent reprov'd, and some even curs'd, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:14-23); but Jael, Heber's wife, is particularly commended for her exploit in slaying Sisera, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:24-27); and the mother of Sisera, and her ladies, are represented as wondering at his long delay, and as assured of his having got the victory, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:28-30); and the song is concluded with a prayer for the destruction, of the enemies of the Lord, and for the happiness and glory of them that love him, (~~QRB~~Judges 5:31).

Ver. 1. *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam*, etc.] Deborah is first mentioned, because she was, as Kimchi says, the root or foundation of the work, the chief person in it, both in the direction of the war, and in the composition of this song; and indeed, as Ben Gersom observes, she alone composed it, (see ~~QRB~~Judges 5:7); 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

on that day; not on the precise day on which the victory was obtained over Sisera and his army, but on occasion of that memorable day, and what followed upon it:

saying; the following divine hymn or song, penned by Deborah, under divine inspiration, as the sublimity of the style, the fine and noble thoughts and sentiments that are in it, the beautiful and elegant phrases in which they are expressed, abundantly show; no Sappho, or any Grecian poetess, nor indeed any poet whatever, uninspired, being equal to the writer of this poem.

Ver. 2. *Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel*, etc.] The injuries done to Israel by any of their enemies, and particularly what wrongs had been done them by Jabin, king of Canaan, for twenty years past; though some understand it of the vengeance God took on Israel for their sins; and though praise is not given directly for that, yet inasmuch as, when that was the case, there were some whose spirits were stirred up to engage voluntarily in the deliverance of them from the oppression of their enemies, it was matter of praise:

when the people willingly offered themselves: to go and fight for Israel against their enemies, particularly those of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, (^{<OT518>}Judges 5:18); though not excluding others that joined, who could not have been forced to it, had they not freely offered themselves; and which was owing to the secret influence of divine Providence on their hearts, moving and drawing them to this service; and therefore praise was due to the Lord on this account, who works in the hearts of men both to will and to do, as in things spiritual and religious, so in things natural and civil.

Ver. 3. *Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes*, etc.] Not only the neighbouring ones, but all the kings and princes of the earth, far and near, then and in succeeding ages; Deborah desires and wishes that all potentates might hear of the wonderful works of God done for his people, that they might learn to know there is one that is higher than they, to whom all the amazing things done in the world are to be ascribed; and be cautious how they oppressed the people of God, since sooner or later he would avenge them on them. The Targum restrains this to the kings that came with Sisera and the governors with Jabin; but if there were any such, as it is not improbable there were, (see ^{<OT519>}Judges 5:19); yet it is most likely that they were slain with them: there are some, as Kimchi observes, who think this respects the people of Israel, who were all the sons of kings; but the first sense is best:

I, [even] I, will sing unto the Lord, I will sing [praise] to the Lord God of Israel: which are the words of Deborah particularly, and the repetitions serve to express how cordial, earnest, and vehement she was in her praise and thankfulness to God; thereby setting an example to others, encouraging them to the same practice, and directing persons of every rank and quality to give praise only to Jehovah, the self-existing, everlasting, and unchangeable Being; to him who is the Lord and God of Israel in a peculiar manner, and not to any of the gods of the Gentiles.

Ver. 4. *Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the fields of Edom,* etc.] Here properly begins the song, what goes before being but a preface to it; and it begins with an apostrophe to the Lord, taking notice of some ancient appearances of God for his people, which were always matter of praise and thankfulness; and the rather are they taken notice of here, because of some likeness between them and what God had now wrought; and this passage refers either to the giving of the law on Sinai, as the Targum and Jarchi; (see ^{<0631>}Deuteronomy 33:2); or rather, as Aben Ezra, Kimchi, and others, to the Lord's going before Israel, after they had encompassed the land of Edom, and marched from thence towards the land of Canaan, when they fought with Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, and conquered them; which struck terror into all the nations round about them, and the prophecies of Moses in his song began to be fulfilled, (^{<0154>}Exodus 15:14,15); and which dread and terror are expressed in the following figurative phrases:

the earth trembled; and the like figure Homer ^{f97} uses at the approach of Neptune, whom he calls the shaker of the earth, perhaps borrowed from hence; it may design the inhabitants of it, the Amorites, Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, Canaanites, and others:

and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water; which, as it may literally refer to the storm and tempest of rain that might be then as now, (see ^{<0045>}Judges 4:15), so may figuratively express the panic great personages, comparable to the heavens and the clouds in them were thrown into, when their hearts melted like water, or were like clouds dissolved into it.

Ver. 5. *The mountains melted from before the Lord,* etc.] The inhabitants of them, through fear, the Lord going before Israel in a pillar of cloud and fire, and delivering mighty kings and their kingdoms into their hand:

[even] that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel; or, “as that Sinai”, the note of similitude being wanting; and the sense is, the mountains melted, just as the famous mountain Sinai in a literal sense did, when it trembled and quaked at the presence of God on it; the tokens of it, the fire and smoke, thunders, lightnings, and tempests there seen and heard; and which being observed, would call to mind the benefit Israel then received, which required praise and thankfulness, as well as would serve to express the awe and reverence of God due unto him.

Ver. 6. *In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath*, etc.] Of whom (see ^{<ORBI>}Judges 3:31); who succeeded Ehud as a judge, but lived not long, and did not much; at least wrought not a perfect deliverance of the children of Israel; but during his time till now, quite through the twenty years of Jabin’s oppression, things were as they are after described:

in the days of Jael; the wife of Heber the Kenite, spoken of in the preceding chapter, (^{<ORHI>}Judges 4:17-22), who appears to be a woman of masculine spirit, and endeavoured to do what good she could to Israel, though not a judge among them, as Jarchi suggests; and who before this affair of Sisera had signalized herself by some deeds of hers in favour of Israel, and against their enemies; yet far from putting a stop to the outrages committed; for in the times of both these persons,

the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways; the public roads were so infested with thieves and robbers, who stopped all they met with, and robbed them of what they had, that travellers and merchants with their carriages were obliged either to quit their employments, and not travel at all; or, if they did, were obliged to go in private roads, and roundabout ways, to keep clear of those rapparees the highways and public roads abounded with.

Ver. 7. *The inhabitants of the villages ceased*, etc.] Not only did those Canaanitish robbers go upon the highway, and robbed all they met with, which made travelling difficult and dangerous; but entered into the villages and unwall’d towns, and broke into houses and plundered them; so that the inhabitants of them were obliged to quit their dwellings, and go into the fortified cities for security; by which means the villages were left empty, and in time fell to ruin, and ceased:

they ceased in Israel: for they were the villages which belonged to the Israelites that were plundered, and not those that belonged to any of the Canaanites; and these were the unhappy circumstances Israel were under

until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel; until it pleased God to raise her up, and endow her in a very wonderful and extraordinary manner with gifts qualifying her to be a nursing mother to Israel, to teach and instruct them in the mind and will of God, to administer judgement and justice to them, to protect and defend them, and in all which she discovered a maternal affection for them; and as a good judge and ruler of a people may be called the father of them, so she, being a woman, is with propriety called a mother in Israel, having an affectionate concern for them as her children: now, till she arose, there was no perfect salvation and deliverance wrought for them, since the death of Ehud, even throughout the days of Shamgar and Jael; which is observed to excite praise and thankfulness on the present occasion, which hereby became the more illustrious.

Ver. 8. *They chose new gods,* etc.] That is, Israel, as most of the Jewish commentators interpret it; for the verb is singular, and Israel agrees well with it: this they did after the death of Joshua; it refers to their first idolatry, begun by Micah, (^{<0770E>}Judges 17:1) they chose other gods than the true God; Baalim and Ashtaroth they are said to serve, (^{<0721E>}Judges 2:11,13 3:7), and besides the gods of the Canaanites and Phoenicians, they sought after and introduced new ones from other places, or the same may be meant; since all besides the true God, the eternal Jehovah, the Ancient of days, and everlasting King, are new gods that lately sprung up: the Arabic and Syriac versions are,

“God chose a new king;”

so Ben Gersom; to perfect this wonder; for not only Sisera and his army were drawn to the gates of Israel to a proper place to fall in, but the victory was not obtained by Israel by their own force and strength; for they had no weapons of war, not a shield nor a spear, but for a very few men, but it was the Lord that fought for them in a new way; the former sense seems best, and agrees with what follows:

then was war in the gates; when they fell into idolatry, then God suffered the judgment of war to come upon them, even into the gates of their fortified cities, which were the security of them, and where were their courts of judicature, but by war disturbed and made to cease:

was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? though the number of the Israelites were several hundred thousands, yet there were not to be seen among them shields and spears sufficient for 40,000; or not one among 40,000 was armed; which was owing either to their negligence and sloth in not providing themselves with arms, or not taking care of them in a time of peace; so that when war came into their gates, they had nothing to defend themselves with, or annoy their enemies; or to their cowardice, not daring to take up a shield or spear in their own defence; or to the enemy, Jabin king of Canaan, having disarmed them, that they might not be able to make a revolt, from him, and recover their liberties. Ben Gersom refers it to the times of Joshua, when there was no need of a shield and spear among the 40,000 of the children of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, that came over Jordan with them, since God fought for them; and the Targum seems to understand it of Sisera's army, that came against Israel with shields, spears, and swords; and makes the number of them to be in all 300,000, which is just the number of foot soldiers Josephus makes his army to consist of; and yet, though so numerous and so well armed, could not stand before Barak with 10,000 men only; (see Gill on "^(~~Q147~~)Judges 4:17"), the words rather refer to the civil war of the Benjamites with the Israelites, when 40,000 of the latter were killed, which was before the times of Deborah, (^(~~Q121~~)Judges 20:21,25).

Ver. 9. *My heart is towards the governors of Israel*, etc.] Most of the Jewish commentators interpret this of their wise men and Scribes, who were willing to teach the people the law and the commandments, even in times of trouble, and did not cease from doing it on that account, and therefore Deborah praises them for it; so the Targum; but Kimchi and Ben Melech understand by them the great men of the nation, their nobles and rulers, who enacted good laws and statutes; or at least took care to see that the good laws they had were put in execution; and these had a share in the affections and good wishes of Deborah, and that chiefly for the following reason:

that offered themselves willingly among the people; to go along with them, and march at the head of them, to fight Sisera and his army; thereby setting a good example, and animating the people to battle, and inspiring them with courage and intrepidity; when they saw their chiefs and the heads of them exposing their lives with them in defence of their country, and the rights of it:

bless ye the Lord; for giving them such spirits, to engage so willingly in this service, and for giving them success in it.

Ver. 10. *Speak, ye that ride on white asses*, etc.] Though in some countries, as in ours, it is reckoned disgraceful to ride on asses; so Leo Africanus^{f98} makes mention of a preacher in Africa, who was called the ass rider; because he was continually, sitting on an ass; yet in Judea, where there were no horses, or very few, it was accounted honourable; so it was in the time of our Lord; for his riding on an ass to Jerusalem was not mean and disgraceful, but honourable and glorious: and so it certainly was in those early times of the judges; for we read of the sons of two of them, which were very numerous, that rode on asses' colts, (~~f7104~~Judges 10:4 ~~f7124~~Judges 12:14), and it seems that white asses were the most valuable, and chiefly used by great personages. The ass in the Hebrew language has its name from redness, that being the usual colour of them in those parts; and hence they were hateful to the Egyptians, because that their Typhon was of that colour^{f99}; but there were some that were white, as there are wild ones now of that colour. A traveller^{f100} in those parts in the beginning of the last century tells us, that on the banks of the Euphrates they beheld every day great droves of wild beasts, as wild asses "all white", etc. The word we translate "white" is "zechorot", and perhaps may describe the same animal the Ethiopians call "zecora", and some "zebra"; said to excel in beauty all four footed creatures in the whole world. It is an animal of the size of a mule, found in the woods beyond Abyssinia, is easily tamed, and is the frequent and chief present of the kings of that country; about its loins is a circle of a black colour, in the form of a girdle, which is followed with more on each side, according to the part of the body, some broader, others narrower, both black and white, or of an ash colour, so neat that they seem to exceed the art of the most eminent painter; its only deformity are its ears, which are long; hence it is called by the Portuguese the wild ass, though wrongly; of what value and esteem it was appears from the large price it has been sold for; one, that was the gift of a king to a Turkish governor, was sold to an Indian for 2,000 pieces of Venetian money, to make a present of to the great Mogor, king of the Indians^{f101}, which was the value of nine hundred pounds. Those that rode on these creatures were the princes and nobles of Israel; though they are generally interpreted by the Jewish commentators of merchants that rode from place to place about business; and these are called upon to speak of the wonderful things God had done for Israel, in freeing them from the bondage of the Canaanites, so

that these nobles or merchants might ride about the country without any fear; and to discourse of them to others, and in their meditations give praise to God on account of them:

ye that sit in judgment; which seems to describe judges upon the bench, sitting to hear and try causes, and pass righteous judgment; these are also exhorted to give thanks to the Lord, that they were now restored to their seats of judgment, from which they were driven; or where they could not peaceably exercise their office, which they now might and did: Cocceius renders the word “on measures”, as if these were persons that presided over measures, and took care that they were just and right. Though Kimchi and Ben Melech say, that Middin, which we render “in judgment”, is either the name of a city in the book of Joshua, (see Gill on “~~1651~~ Joshua 15:61”), or the name of a way ^{f102} well known, in which they were afraid to go because of the enemy, but now went in it with safety, and therefore had reason to speak well of God, and praise his name; but this is rather intended in the next clause:

and walk by the way; the common people that travelled from place to place on business, who before were obliged to leave the public roads, and go in byways, (~~1086~~ Judges 5:6) but now could travel in the common road without fear, and therefore ought to be thankful.

Ver. 11. *They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the place of drawing water*, etc.] Meaning either the army of the Israelites, delivered from the archers of Sisera’s host at the river Kishon; or such persons, as maidens and others, that went out of the cities to fountains and wells of water, to fetch water from thence for their necessities, but were frightened by the noise of archers that shot at them; or shepherds who led their flocks to water them there, but were repulsed or slain by archers that lay in wait in woods or lurking places thereabout; but now the country being cleared of them, they could without fear have recourse to these places of drawing water for their flocks or other uses, which laid them under obligation to do as directed in the next clause. The words are by some rendered,

“because of the voice of those that number (sheep and other cattle) at the places of drawing water ^{f103} :”

which now they could do, being a time of peace; and for which the persons before described ought to be thankful:

there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord ; coming to those places again, it would put them in mind to what hazards and dangers they had been exposed formerly by the enemy, but now were freed from; and this would lead them to discourse of and repeat the righteous dealings of God in taking vengeance on their enemies and delivering them from them:

even the righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel ; they being now in no danger of having their houses broke open, and their substance plundered as before, ^{<0007>}Judges 5:7 then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates; either of their enemies, pursuing them unto them, as they did, ^{<0016>}Judges 4:16 or rather to the gates of their own cities, where they had now free egress and regress; and those that were in the fortified cities, who had fled thither from the villages because of the rapine of the enemy, now would go down to the gates, and pass through them, and return to their villages again; or else the meaning is, that the people would now frequent as formerly the courts of judicature held in the gates of their cities, to have justice done them, and be in no fear of being disturbed by the enemy, as before.

Ver. 12. *Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake, utter a song* , etc.] Either perceiving some languor and remissness in her spirits, while she was delivering this song, and therefore arouses herself to attend to this service with more ardour and zeal; or rather finding herself more impressed with a sense of the great and good things the Lord had done for Israel, calls upon her soul to exert all its powers in celebrating the praises of the Lord, and therefore repeats the word awake so often as she does:

arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam ; for though the whole army of Sisera was destroyed, that not a man was left, ^{<0016>}Judges 4:16 yet as Barak pursued to Harosheth of the Gentiles, many there and in other places which fell into his hands, that belonged to Jabin, might be taken captive by him; and though the Canaanites were to be slain, yet they might first be led captive in triumph; and besides, there might be some of other nations that were taken by him in this war; see ^{<0018>}Psalms 68:18 .

Ver. 13. *Then he made him that remaineth* , etc.] The people of Israel that remained, who had been under the yoke of Jabin king of Canaan, under which many of the Israelites very probably died; but now the few mean and miserable that remained were raised to an high estate, and made to

have dominion over the nobles among the people ; that is, over the Canaanitish nobility, that were among the people under Jabin; but he being conquered by the Israelites, his people and even his nobles became subject to them; and this was the Lord's doing, as the following words show:

the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty ; that is, Deborah, to whom God gave dominion either over the mighty ones of Israel, being raised up to be their judge; or over the mighty Canaanites, she having a concern in the conquest of them and triumph over them, through her direction, advice, command, and presence, though a woman.

Ver. 14. *Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek* , etc.] In this and some following verses, Deborah makes mention of the tribes that were siding and assisting in this war, and of those that were not; and begins with Ephraim, where she herself dwelt, ^{<0045>}Judges 4:5 who was the root, foundation, and source of this expedition, that under a divine influence directed, animated, and encouraged to it; and by whom, and from whence, a detachment was sent against the Amalekites, who upon all occasions were ready to assist the Canaanites, and now were about to do it; and to prevent their junction, a party was sent from Ephraim, and by the Ephraimites; though the Targum, and the Jewish commentators in general, refer this to a past action, which Deborah here commemorates and celebrates; and understand by "root", Joshua, who was of that tribe, and who discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword, ^{<0273>}Exodus 17:13

after thee, Benjamin, among thy people ; which the same Targum and the same writers interpret of a future fact, and as spoken of by way of prophecy; and suppose that Saul of the tribe of Benjamin is meant, and the people of Benjamin, the two hundred thousand footmen he took with him, and fought against Amalek, and destroyed them, ^{<0950>}1 Samuel 15:1-9 but it is rather to be understood of the tribe of Benjamin in general, which at this time went out against Amalek, to prevent their giving any assistance to Jabin king of Canaan, and who were followed in it by a party of the Ephraimites; so that Benjamin has the greatest honour given it, partly as it was first in this affair, and partly as it was general, the whole tribe engaged, whereas only a few in Ephraim, and those stimulated by the example of Benjamin:

out of Machir came down governors ; Machir was the only son of Manasseh, and therefore this must respect that tribe, half of which was

settled on the other side Jordan, and to which Jarchi and other Jewish writers ascribe this, and suppose it refers to the princes and great men of it, who subdued the Amorites, and took the sixty cities of Argob in the time of Moses; though Kimchi and Ben Gersom understand it of some of them that came from thence to assist in this war; but it is clearly suggested in ^{<0157>}Judges 5:17 that they abode beyond Jordan, and gave no assistance at all; it therefore must be understood of the half tribe of Manasseh, within Jordan, from whence came great personages, with a number of men no doubt along with them, to lend an helping hand against the Canaanites, or to be employed as assistants under Barak in this expedition:

and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer ; which 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.

Ver. 15. *And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah* , etc.] On Mount Tabor, whither they came to offer themselves to join in the war against Jabin; or to assist with their counsels, the men of this tribe being understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, ^{<3123>}1 Chronicles 12:32

even Issachar : not the princes only, but the whole tribe also; so the Targum paraphrases it,

“the rest of the tribe of Issachar:”

and also Barak, he was sent on foot into the valley ; which was at the bottom of Mount Tabor, from whence he was sent down by Deborah, when Sisera’s army was come thither; and where he went cheerfully on foot at the head of his 10,000 men, to engage Sisera with his horse and chariots; and which latter were capable of doing great execution in the valley, by running among the foot, and cutting them in pieces with the scythes at the side of them; but Barak, fearless of danger, readily obeyed the command of the judge and prophetess, believing it was of God: or the words may be rendered, as by Noldius ^{f104}

as Issachar, so Barak; he was sent , etc. the one as the other, with equal readiness and cheerfulness, courage and intrepidity, descended the

mountain, at the order of Deborah, and took the field in the open plain, to engage with Sisera and his numerous host:

for the division of Reuben [there were] great thoughts of heart ; either for their divisions among themselves in their own councils, some being for going over Jordan to assist their brethren the Israelites against Jabin, and free them from his yoke, pitying their distressed state and condition; and others were for keeping at home, and taking care of their flocks, and not intermeddle in the quarrel; judging it to be most for their worldly peace and profit to observe a neutrality: by reason of which divisions no assistance was given. Or for their divisions and separations from their brethren the Israelites, from whom they were not only separated by the river Jordan, but in their affections to them, and regards for them; keeping at a distance from them, when their help was required: and this conduct of theirs caused many thoughts of heart in Deborah and Barak, in the princes and people of Israel, who could not well understand the reason of it; and which caused much grief and uneasiness of mind, that so powerful a tribe, and who had been assisting to them in the conquest of the land, and lay convenient to help them, yet should be so very indifferent to them.

Ver. 16. *Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks* ? etc.] This tribe abounded with flocks and herds, and therefore chose the country on the other side Jordan, as suitable for them; and now, at this critical juncture, they judged it wisest, and their best policy, to abide by them, and the care of them; lest by intermeddling, should Jabin prevail, he might be provoked to fall upon them, and take them from them; wherefore the bleatings of their flocks, and the whistlings of the shepherds that kept them, sounded louder in their ears, and more engrossed their attention, than the groans and cries of Israel under oppression; or than the soundings of the trumpet, the alarm of war, or the loud calls of Deborah and Barak; being under the influence of a carnal worldly spirit, and wanting affection and sympathy towards their brethren, about which Deborah here expostulates with them:

for the divisions of Reuben [there were] great searchings of heart; this is repeated to show how much the prophetess, the general of the army, the princes and people, were affected with this conduct of the tribe of Reuben; it gave them much pain and uneasiness, occasioned many inquiries, caused much discourse and conversation, and put them upon thinking, and greatly exercised their minds, what should be the meaning of their behaving after

this manner. Cocceius takes these words to be spoken ironically, and renders them,

“at the rivers of Reuben were great men in searchings of heart;”

there were wisdom, prudence, counsel, searching, and discerning of spirits, preferring their flocks to the people of God.

Ver. 17. *Gilead abode beyond Jordan*, etc.] A country which lay on the other side Jordan, and was given by Moses, half of it to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the other half to the half tribe of Manasseh, ^{<RB12>}Deuteronomy 3:12,13 and being here distinguished from Reuben, it seems that not only that tribe, but also the tribe of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, on that side Jordan, came not to the help of Israel; but abode where they were, attending their flocks and herds, and preferring their own private profit to the public good; yet as Gilead was given to Machir, ^{<RB15>}Deuteronomy 3:15 and some are said to come out from thence to serve in this expedition, ^{<RB14>}Judges 5:14 some read the words, as Kimchi observes, with an interrogation, “did Gilead abide beyond Jordan?” no, he did not; though his situation was beyond it, as well as Reuben’s, yet he did not continue there, but came over to help his brethren; and so this is introduced to upbraid Reuben, and leave him without excuse, since he could as well have left his flocks as Gilead did, and come over to the help of his brethren as well as he:

and why did Dan remain in ships ? the Danites inhabiting Joppa, and other places bordering on the Mediterranean sea, attended their navigation and merchandise; and which they chose rather to do, than to appear in the field of battle in the behalf of their brethren; judging this to be a sufficient excuse, though the question put implies the contrary; according to the Targum, they were meditating a flight, and put their goods into ships to flee with them, should Sisera get the day:

Asher continued on the sea shore ; on the shore of the Mediterranean sea, attending traffic and business, and did not concern themselves at all in this war:

and abode in his trenches ; in his towns and cities, the walls of which had been broken down by the Canaanites, and remained unrepaired, nor were they suffered to repair them; and therefore excused themselves on this account from engaging in the war, being obliged to stay at home to keep and defend their cities; which were in such a ruinous and weak condition,

that the enemy might enter at any time: some render it, “in their creeks” ^{f105} bays and havens where they had much shipping, and which required their attendance.

Ver. 18. *Zebulun and Naphtali were a people*, etc.] These two tribes were chiefly concerned in this war; out of them were the 10,000 men that followed Barak, who willingly offered themselves, and were the most active and vigorous:

[that] jeoparded themselves unto the death; exposed them to the utmost danger, fearless of death itself: or reproached ^{f106} their lives; were careless of them, valued them not; they were not dear to them, but were ready to part with them freely, in the cause of liberty in which they were engaged:

in the high places of the field; on the top of Mount Tabor, where they were mustered, and from whence they beheld the vast host of Sisera surrounding them; and yet, with an undaunted bravery and courage, descended the hill to fight with them. The Vulgate Latin version reads, “in the country of Merome”; in the plains and fields of it, near which were the waters of Merom, where Joshua fought Jabin, a former king of Canaan, and supposed by some to be the same with Kishon here, ^{<6105>}Joshua 11:5 ^{<6819>}Psalm 83:9.

Ver. 19. *The kings came*, etc.] Who were with Sisera, as the Targum adds; unless Deborah can be thought to refer to the battle, supposed to be fought about the same place, between Joshua and the kings in confederacy with Jabin, ^{<6101>}Joshua 10:1,7

then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; the other kings of Canaan, which came into the assistance of Jabin, either in the times of Joshua; or rather which now joined Sisera’s army, in those places, which both belonged to Manasseh, but were in the tribe of Issachar, of which (see Gill on ^{<6171>}Joshua 17:11”) and were at some distance from each other, as appears by the villages and country around, and belonging to each; and such was the largeness of Sisera’s army, reinforced by those kings, that according to the Targum it reached from Taanach to Megiddo; the same is observed by the Jewish commentators; the waters of Megiddo are the same with the river Kishon, which ran near the city:

they took no gain of money; that is, either of Jabin king of Canaan, whom they came to serve; but freely engaged with him, and maintained their own troops, which they brought into the field, and had raised at their own

expense; but according to Kimchi the sense is, they took no money of the Israelites that fell into their hands, but slew them, would not save their lives, though they offered them money, being like the merciless Medes, ²³¹⁷Isaiah 13:17,18 but rather the meaning is, that whereas they came big with expectation of a large booty among the Israelites, they were disappointed, and obliged to flee without any.

Ver. 20. *They fought from heaven*, etc.] Either the angels of heaven, afterwards called stars; or the heavens, the elements, fought for Israel, and against Sisera; a violent storm of rain and hail falling at this time, which discomfited Sisera's army; (see Gill on "⁴⁰⁴⁵Judges 4:15") , or this victory was obtained in such a manner as plainly showed it was not of man, but of God from heaven; so the Targum,

“from heaven war was made with them;”

with the kings before mentioned; God fought against them, and no wonder they were conquered:

the stars in their courses fought against Sisera it seems as if it was in the night that this battle was fought, at least that the pursuit lasted till night, when the stars by their brightness and clear shining favoured the Israelites, and were greatly to the disadvantage of the Canaanites; unless it can be thought, as is by some, that the stars had an influence to cause a tempest of rain, hail, thunder, and lightnings, by which the army of Sisera was discomfited in the daytime, as before observed.

Ver. 21. *The river of Kishon swept them away*, etc.] To which Sisera's army was drawn, and where it was discomfited; and very probably many of them, in their confusion, endeavoured to make their escape by fording or swimming over the river, by which they were swept away and drowned, the waters of it at this time swelling in a miraculous manner, as Ben Gersom thinks; or were increased by the large showers of rain that fell, as some note from Josephus, though I find it not in him; however it is not improbable it might be the case; for our countryman Mr. Maundrell ^{f107} thus observed when he was at it;

“in the condition we saw it, its waters were low and inconsiderable; but passing along the side of the plain, we discovered the track of many lesser torrents falling down into it from the mountains, which must needs make it swell exceedingly upon sudden rains, as

doubtless it actually did at the destruction of Sisera's host,
 Judges 5:21

that ancient river, the river Kishon ; called ancient, either because it was from the beginning of the creation, and not cut by the art of men, as some rivers are; or because it was spoken of by poets and historians in ancient times; or because of famous exploits done here of old; so the Targum,

“the river where signs and mighty works were done for Israel of old.”

Some take the word Kedumim to be another name of the river, so called from its windings and turnings, and, as it were, meeting itself. So some travellers tell us ^{f108} the river Kedumim, the same with Kishon, is so called, because it meets itself, being by its meanders formed like a sling or noose, as Kishon signifies; it rises at Mount Tabor, and discharges itself into the Mediterranean sea, at the foot of Mount Carmel; so Hillerus ^{f109} says, Kishon signifies bending in manner of a snare, or net, or meander, and takes it to be the same with the Pagida of Pliny ^{f110}, which in the Greek tongue signifies the same:

O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength ; a strong and mighty army, through her prayers and supplication, advice and direction; or thou hast trodden with strength, that is, the river Kishon, as some Jewish interpreters understand it, who suppose that another miracle was wrought; that as the waters of the river swelled when the Canaanites attempted to escape over it, so it sunk and became fordable for Deborah and the Israelites; a miracle, as they suppose, somewhat similar to that at the Red sea.

Ver. 22. *Then were the horse hoofs broken by means of the pransings* , etc.] Either through the force of the waters of the river, where they pranced and plunged, and could have no standing; or through the swift haste they made to run away, striking the earth so quick, and with such force and vehemence, that their hoofs were broken thereby, especially on stony ground, and so their speed retarded:

the pransings of the mighty ones ; either their riders, princes, and great personages, who made them prance, leap, and run with great speed and force; or horses strong and mighty, being such as were selected for this purpose, and trained to war.

Ver. 23. *Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord*, etc.] Not Barak, as the Targum and Jarchi, but Deborah herself said this under a spirit of prophecy, not from her own spirit in a revengeful way, but from the Spirit of God; or this was suggested to her by an angel, not a created, but the uncreated one, the Angel of the covenant, by whom she was inspired, and an impulse made by him on her to denounce a curse on Meroz; which some say was a star, Sisera's star; others the name of a mighty man ^{f111}, so Jarchi; but rather it is some name of a city or place near where the battle was fought, so Kimchi, Ben Gersom, and Ben Melech: some take Meroz to be the same with Merom, at the waters of which Joshua fought with Jabin, ^{<6105>}Joshua 11:5 and supposed to be the same with the waters of Megiddo, and the river Kishon, where this battle was fought; and Jerom ^{f112}, under the word Merom, observes, that there was in his time a village called Merrus, twelve miles from the city Sebaste near Dothaim, and that Meroz here is the name of a place is clear from what follows:

curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; or “curse cursing” ^{f113}; repeat it, give them curse upon curse, curse them most vehemently: the reason of which follows:

because they came not to the help of the Lord; that is, of the people of the Lord, whose cause was the Lord's; for though he stood in no need of their help, yet their negligence and neutrality were highly resented by him, and therefore repeated:

to the help of the Lord against the mighty; the mighty Canaanites, and their mighty kings, and mighty hosts; or “with the mighty” ^{f114}, Barak and his 10,000: now though others, who did not come into their assistance, are only discommended, being at a distance, yet those are cursed, being very near, and saw the peril their brethren were in, and yet would not lend an helping hand.

Ver. 24. *Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be*, etc.] Under the same influence that Meroz was cursed, Jael is blessed, the one for not helping Israel in a public way, the other for doing it in a private manner; this blessing is pronounced, either in a way of prayer that it might be, or in a way of prophecy that it should be, and indeed in both:

blessed shall she be above the women in the tent; above all women that dwell in tents: this being a proper description of a woman, whose character it is to abide in her tent, dwell at home, and mind the business of her

family; and may have respect to the manly action she performed in her tent, equal, if not superior, to what was done in the field.

Ver. 25. *He asked water, and she gave him milk*, etc.] That is, Sisera asked it of her, as the Targum expresses it, when he turned into her tent:

she brought him fresh butter in a lordly dish; which signifies either the same, the milk with cream on it, for that is meant by butter; or having first taken off the cream, she gave him milk to drink, and then brought the cream in a dish for him to eat, and thereby the more incline him to sleep; and this she brought in a dish fit for any lord or nobleman to eat out of; in such a polite and courteous manner did she use him, so that he could have no suspicion of her having any ill design against him. R. Jonah, as Kimchi notes, interprets this of a dish of the mighty or lordly ones, of the shepherds, the principal of the flock, as they are called in ~~צֶמֶח~~ Jeremiah 25:34,35, out of which they had used to drink their milk, or eat their cream, and such an one was likely enough to be Jael's tent; from this Hebrew word "sepel", here used, seems to come the Latin word "simpucium" or "simpulum", used in things sacred, and which, according to Pliny^{f15}, was an earthen vessel; and so some of the Rabbins, as Kimchi observes, say, this was a new earthen vial; it is very probable it was a broad platter or dish fit for such an use.

Ver. 26. *She put her hand to the nail*, etc.] Her left hand, as the Septuagint, Arabic, and Vulgate Latin versions express it, and as appears by what follows; she having taken up a pin from her tent, with which it was fastened to the ground, she clapped it to the temples of Sisera:

and her right hand to the workman's hammer; in her right hand she took a hammer, such as carpenters, and such like workmen, make use of, and workman like went about her business she had devised, and was determined upon, being under a divine impulse, and so had no fear or dread upon her:

and with the hammer she smote Sisera; not that with the hammer she struck him on the head, and stunned him, but smote the nail she had put to his temples and drove it into them:

she smote off his head; after she had driven the nail through his temples, she took his sword perhaps and cut off his head, as David cut off Goliath's, after he had slung a stone into his forehead; though as this seems needless, nor is there any hint of it in the history of this affair, the meaning may only

be, that she struck the nail through his head, as the Septuagint, or broke his head, as the Targum:

when she had pierced and stricken through his temples ; that being the softest and tenderest part of the head, she drove the nail quite through them to the ground, ⁽⁰⁰²⁾Judges 4:21 .

Ver. 27 *At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down* , etc.] Perhaps at her first approach to him, and attempt to drive the nail, or at the blow she gave, he rose up, but she had done the business so effectually at the first stroke, that he dropped at once, and laid down his head again:

at her feet he bowed, he fell ; when she redoubled her blow:

where he bowed, there he fell down dead; and struggled and stirred no more; thus ingloriously did this general of a vast army die. This action is not otherwise to be justified, but by its being done through an impulse of the Spirit of God upon her, to take away the life of an implacable enemy of God's people; otherwise it might seem to be a breach of hospitality towards her guest she had invited in, and of the peace which subsisted between this general's prince and her husband; and therefore is not to be drawn into an example where there is no appearance of a divine warrant.

Ver. 28. *The mother of Sisera looked out at a window* , etc.] Which perhaps looked towards the high road, in which she expected Sisera to return in his chariot with his victorious army; and she was looking out for him, not through fear of any ill that had befallen him, or suspicion of misfortune, but through impatience to see him in triumph return, wreathed with laurels:

and cried through the lattice ; which is but another word for a window, which was not of glass, that being of a later invention, but made in lattice form, in a sort of network, full of little holes to let in air and light, and look out at; here she stood and cried with a very loud uneasy tone; the word signifies a sort of a groaning howling noise, discovering impatience and uneasiness; and so the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions render it, "she howled"; saying in a whining way,

why is his chariot so long in coming ? she did not doubt at all of victory, and concluded it would soon be obtained, and there would be very little trouble and difficulty in getting it, and therefore wondered his chariot was not in sight:

why tarry the wheels of his chariots ? the nine hundred he took with him, of the return of which she made no doubt, only was uneasy until they appeared, that she might be delighted with the glory of the triumph; the Targum is,

“why are the runners hindered, who should bring me a letter of the victories?”

Ver. 29. *Her wise ladies answered her* , etc.] Every one in their turn endeavouring to comfort her and make her easy. The Vulgate Latin version is,

“one that was wiser than the rest of his wives;”

but they seem rather to be her maids of honour, or ladies of her acquaintance, who were come to pay her a visit, and share in the pleasing sight they expected to have of Sisera:

yea, she returned answer to herself ; before they could well give theirs, she soon recollected herself what might be, and must be, the occasion of this delay; and this, according to the Targum, she made in her wisdom, what her great wisdom quickly suggested to her was certainly the case, and with which she comforted and quieted herself.

Ver. 30. *Have they not sped* ? etc.] Or “found” ^{f116} the enemy, Barak and his army, or the spoil of them? no doubt they have:

have they not divided the prey ? doubtless they have, which being large, and the captives many, has taken up much of their time to look over, and make an equal and proper division of, and that most certainly is the cause of the delay:

to every man a damsel or two ? or “a womb or two” ^{f117}, using both unchaste and contemptuous language ^{f118}, and pleasing themselves with the virgins of Israel being abused by the common soldiers, which was too frequently the case with the Heathens at gaining a victory:

to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides ; suits of clothes of different colours, such as were the works of the women of Sidon ^{f119}, and those curiously interwoven or wrought with a needle, and that on both sides of the silk or material of which they were made; and so such as were of great worth and esteem, and such it was expected, and with confidence and

assurance of it, Sisera would bring with him, and make presents of to his mother and her ladies, or which he would have for his own wear and use, or both:

meet for the necks of them that take the spoil ? the general of the army, and the chief men to whom the spoil was brought, and then divided suitably to the rank and quality of every soldier. Pliny ^{f120} says, the Phrygians first invented the art of needlework; hence the garments wrought, and those that made them, were called after their name; but it is certain it was known by the ancient Hebrews and Canaanites, see ^{<1276}Exodus 26:36 .

Ver. 31. *So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord !* etc.] As Sisera and his army did, and be disappointed as his mother and her ladies were; which is not only a wish or prayer that it might be, but a prophecy that so it would be:

but let them that love him ; that love the Lord superlatively and sincerely, with all their heart and soul, and from love serve and fear him:

[be] as the sun when he goeth forth in his might ; in the middle of the day, when its heat and light are the greatest, and in the summer solstice, in the month of June, when the sun is in Cancer, as Ben Gersom and Abarbinel observe, and it is hottest: the sense is, let the true friends of God be as bright and as glorious, and increase in light, lustre, and splendour, as that glorious luminary in midday, and be no more liable to be resisted and stopped by their enemies, and as much out of the reach of them as that is:

and the land had rest forty years ; these are not the words of Deborah, whose song ends with the last clause, but of the writer of this book; which years, according to most, are to be reckoned from the death of Ehud, including the twenty years' bondage under Jabin, as Ben Gersom and Abarbinel; so that strictly speaking the rest was but twenty years; one would think they should be reckoned from the victory obtained over Jabin king of Canaan.