



Judges - Chapter Five

II Judges 3:7-16:31 - The Downward Spiral of Israel's Apostasy (continues)

II.d Judges 4:1-5:31 - Deborah (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Five

The victory song of Deborah and Barak praises God for his triumph over the Canaanites on Israel's behalf and reviews the events of the victory, as did the songs of Moses and Miriam after God had allowed them to cross the Red Sea to safety and had defeated the Egyptian army in doing so (Exodus 15:1-21).

II.d.ii. Judges 5:1-31 - The Song of Deborah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

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

Judges 5:1

Then Deborah and Barak sang on that day. The verb sang is a feminine singular form, i.e. 'she sang', which emphasises Deborah's role and her prominence over Barak as first noted in Judges 4:8-9.

² 'When locks are long in Israel,
when the people offer themselves willingly –
bless the Lord!

Judges 5:2

When locks are long in Israel. The Hebrew is difficult. While the ESV translation, 'leaders took the lead,' or similar in other translations, is the most likely sense,

an alternative proposal is that the word translated locks or leaders may literally mean, 'the long-haired ones' or 'the hairy ones,' with the verb translated 'are long,' or 'took the lead' being 'to let (the hair) hang loose.' Leadership is important in any endeavour and especially in the work of God. God expects leaders among his people to actually lead, showing there is a genuine need for leaders and their leadership.

The people offer themselves willingly. Leaders are nothing without followers, and it is the job of the people to willingly offer themselves to their leaders in the service of God: <<*Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you*>> (Psalm 110:3). All the people gladly cooperated (v.9). The verb willingly, Hebrew *nadab*, is related to the noun for freewill-offerings, Hebrew *nedabah*, which were one of three types of offerings making up the peace-offerings; refer to Leviticus 7:16 and 22:23. It is spiritual willingness that Paul probably had in mind: <<*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*>> (Romans 12:1).

Bless the Lord! This is an offering of praise and worship that is repeated in v.9.

- ³ 'Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the Lord I will sing,
I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.
- ⁴ 'Lord, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled,
and the heavens poured,
the clouds indeed poured water.
- ⁵ The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai,
before the Lord, the God of Israel.

Judges 5:3-5

Seir and Edom are the same place: <<*Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom*>> (Genesis 32:3); and these two expressions note the same thing - God marching in the head of his people from Seir or Edom towards the land of Canaan The Lord's going from Seir and Edom likely refers to God's transferring his 'abode' from the wilderness to Canaan by way of the land of Edom; refer to Numbers 10:12 and 20:22. That is,

from one mountain, Sinai to another, Zion: <<*I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill*>> (Psalm 2:6).

That the earth trembled, whether literally or metaphorically, is a sure sign of God's presence: <<*Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts on the day of his fierce anger*>> (Isaiah 13:13), <<*The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel*>> (Joel 3:16), <<*The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it*>> (Nahum 1:5), and: <<*He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low*>> (Habakkuk 3:6).

The clouds indeed poured water. God won the victory for Israel over Sisera by sending a great rain storm. In this song Deborah recalled a time when God did the same thing on behalf of Israel in the days of the Exodus: <<*He said: The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own*>> (Deuteronomy 33:2).

⁶ 'In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
and travellers kept to the byways.

⁷ The peasantry prospered in Israel,
they grew fat on plunder,
because you arose, Deborah,
arose as a mother in Israel.

⁸ When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?

Judges 5:6-8

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath. Shamgar was only briefly mentioned yet clearly a significant judge in Israel: <<*After him came Shamgar son of Anath,*

who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an ox-goad. He too delivered Israel>> (Judges 3:31).

The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder is a reference to the Canaanites. Not only was life hard under Israel's oppressors, but they also confiscated all weapons so the Israelites could not fight: Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?

By spiritual analogy, it can be said that Satan does not only want to oppress the Christian; he also wants to disarm the believer. He wants the believer to lay down the full armour of God that belongs to them in Jesus Christ; refer to Ephesians 6:12-18.

Before Deborah arose as a deliverer, life as it had been known ceased when Israel silently submitted to its enemies. This was not necessarily pride on Deborah's part to sing of her exploits. She understood that God works through willing individuals, and she was the willing one in this crisis. Queen Esther would come into this category as well: *<<For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this>>* (Esther 4:14).

A mother in Israel is a title of honour and respect.

When new gods were chosen. The gods were those of the Canaanites and they were not imposed on the Israelites by were chosen by them: *<<Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress>>* (Judges 10:14). This was a direct violation of the laws of God and therefore they were in breach of their covenant agreement with him: *<<I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me>>* (Exodus 20:2-3).

⁹ My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless the Lord.

Judges 5:9

My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel. Deborah did not only care about her job of leadership. She also had a heart for other leaders and their work. Her vision was bigger than just getting her job done. She wanted to see the Kingdom of God advanced.

Who offered themselves willingly among the people. In v.2, Deborah spoke of the people offering themselves willingly. Here she notes that the sacrifices should also be borne by the leaders. They also must offer themselves willingly.

- ¹⁰ 'Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets,
and you who walk by the way.
- ¹¹ To the sound of musicians at the watering-places,
there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord,
the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel.
'Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord.
- ¹² 'Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, utter a song!
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
O son of Abinoam.

Judges 5:10-12

All classes of society were to bear witness to the mighty acts of God, from the ruling classes and civic leaders, i.e. those who ride on white donkeys, to the lower classes, that is, those who walk by the way, or along the road.

To the sound of musicians at the watering-places, there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord. The people of God are called to sing his praises at every opportunity and not just in church on a Sunday morning! Jesus said: <<*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*>> (Matthew 5:14-16), and Paul states: <<*So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

The watering places were public wells or fresh water courses where the entire community gathered. Such public gatherings are ideal places to share the Gospel.

Awake, awake, is a cry that goes out to the church in every generation. It needs to constantly rise up if it is to build the Kingdom of God in this world. This was the Lord's message to Sardis: <<*And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven*>>

stars: 'I know your works; you have a name for being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is at the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you>> (Revelation 3:1-3).

- 13 Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
the people of the Lord marched down for him against the mighty.
- 14 From Ephraim they set out into the valley,
following you, Benjamin, with your kin;
from Machir marched down the commanders,
and from Zebulun those who bear the marshal's staff;
- 15 the chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah,
and Issachar faithful to Barak;
into the valley they rushed out at his heels.
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
- 16 Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flocks?
Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
- 17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;
and Dan, why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,
settling down by his landings.
- 18 Zebulun is a people that scorned death;
Naphtali too, on the heights of the field.

Judges 5:13-18

The people of the Lord marched down for him against the mighty. As she remembered God's help, Deborah knew that his help came from the tribes of Israel, stirred to join in the battle.

After the call to worship (vv.10-12), the text offers a general battle overview (v.13) and then describes the tribes' participation (vv.14-18). Ten of the twelve tribes are mentioned here. Five of them and part of a sixth are mentioned favourably because they responded to Deborah's and Barak's call to arms: Ephraim, Benjamin, western Manasseh (Machir), Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali.

Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds? Four tribes and the other half tribe of Manasseh did not respond to the summons: Reuben, Gad and eastern Manasseh (Gilead), Dan, and Asher. Judah and Simeon are not mentioned at all in Chapters Four and Five.

Dan, why did he abide with the ships? Dan's connection with ships probably reflects the tribe's original inheritance along the south-central coastal plain, with access to the sea; refer to Joshua 19:40-46. Later, the tribe migrated northward, forced out of its territory: <<*When the territory of the Danites was lost to them, the Danites went up and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and putting it to the sword, they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after their ancestor Dan*>> (Joshua 19:47).

- 19 'The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver.
- 20 The stars fought from heaven,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.
- 21 The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!
- 22 'Then loud beat the horses' hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.
- 23 'Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord,
curse bitterly its inhabitants,

because they did not come to the help of the Lord,
to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Judges 5:19-23

The kings came, they fought. The victory proper is now described in vivid, impressionistic terms. Kings will once again assemble against God for one last final battle: <<*These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ('See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.')* And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon>> (Revelation 16:14-16). The Lord will overcome them once again!

The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera was a way of saying it was the Lord's victory as confirmed earlier: <<*And the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak*>> (Judges 4:15a). The imagery suggests that the forces of nature fought on God's side and thus Canaanite deities, who supposedly ruled over these forces, were powerless to help against the true God.

Then loud beat the horses' hoofs suggests the disarray caused by the waters of the Kishon.

Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord. Apparently the city of Meroz was of no help. God still accomplished his work, but the city of Meroz was cursed because they had no part in it. Meroz is not recorded elsewhere in Scripture.

- 24 'Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
- 25 He asked water and she gave him milk,
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.
- 26 She put her hand to the tent-peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
- 27 He sank, he fell,

he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead.

Judges 5:24-27

Most blessed of women. Jael is a heroine for killing Sisera as recorded in Judges 4:17-22. What Jael did would be condemned by many in the days of the Judges. The responsibility to protect and bless a guest was an almost absolute command, and Jael had killed her guest. Yet she was blessed here because her obedience to the cause of God was greater than her obedience to tradition and custom.

He sank, he fell, he lay still at her feet. The account in the previous chapter (Judges 4:21) records that Sisera already was lying down, asleep, when Jael struck him. The poem is probably speaking metaphorically, repeating graphic, emotive language to make its point, namely, that a woman triumphed over this great warrior. This sense of shame of a fighting man being killed by a woman will be seen again in the account of Abimelech: <<*But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, and crushed his skull. Immediately he called to the young man who carried his armour and said to him, 'Draw your sword and kill me, so people will not say about me, "A woman killed him."*>> So the young man thrust him through, and he died>> (Judges 9:53-54).

28 'Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice:
"Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?"

29 Her wisest ladies make answer,
indeed, she answers the question herself:

30 "Are they not finding and dividing the spoil? —
A girl or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?"

Judges 5:28-30

The mother of Sisera is a pitiable figure, and shows that each death has its consequences. However, these verses highlight Jael's achievement: rather than

bringing great plunder to impress his mother and the other women, Sisera lay dead at another woman's feet.

A girl or two for every man is a reference to the Israelite women that were expected to be taken into slavery and used by the men as they wished. The word translated girl is literally womb.

Spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered refers to the highly decorated and much prized garments worn by priests, the nobility and the wealthy. Such spoil was always sought after and it was the way God described his lavish outpourings on his people Israel in later times: <<*I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric*>> (Ezekiel 16:10).

³¹ 'So perish all your enemies, O Lord!

But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might.'

And the land had rest for forty years.

Judges 5:31

So perish all your enemies, O Lord! But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might. The hymn concludes with more praise of the Lord, as many psalms do, and are reminiscent of David's final words: <<*The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land*>> (2 Samuel 23:3-4). To love God is to hate his enemies. A man or woman is defined as much by who their enemies are as by who their friends are.

That the land had rest for forty years after a judge had fulfilled Gods work is also seen in Judges 3:11, 3:30 and 8:28. In Judges 18:7, some foreigners were also <<*living securely*>>, the same Hebrew word as 'had rest'. For more periods of forty years in Scripture, refer to the comments made on Judges 3:11.