

# CHAPTER 5

This chapter contains the triumphal song which was composed and sung upon occasion of that glorious victory which Israel obtained over the forces of Jabin king of Canaan and the happy consequences of that victory. Probably it was usual then to publish poems upon such occasions, as now; but this only is preserved of all the poems of that age of the judges, because dictated by Deborah a prophetess, designed for a psalm of praise then, and a pattern of praise to after-ages, and it gives a great deal of light to the history of these times.

**I.** It begins with praise to God (v. 2, 3).

**II.** The substance of this song transmits the memory of this great achievement.

- 1.** Comparing God's appearances for them on this occasion with his appearances to them on Mount Sinai (v. 4, 5).
- 2.** Magnifying their deliverance from the consideration of the calamitous condition they had been in (v. 6-8).
- 3.** Calling those to join in praise that shared in the benefits of the success (v. 9-13).
- 4.** Reflecting honour upon those tribes that were forward and active in that war, and disgrace on those that declined the service (v. 14-19, 23).
- 5.** Taking notice how God himself fought for them (v. 20-22).
- 6.** Celebrating particularly the honour of Jael, that slew Sisera, on which head the song is very large (v. 24-30). It concludes with a prayer to God (v. 31).

## <OR> JUDGES 5:1-5

### THE SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

The former chapter let us know what great things God had done for Israel; in this we have the thankful returns they made to God, that all ages of the church might learn that work of heaven to praise God.

**I.** God is praised by a song, which is,

**1.** A very natural expression of rejoicing. *Is any merry? Let him sing;* and holy joy is the very soul and root of praise and thanksgiving. God is pleased to reckon himself glorified by our joy in him, and in his wondrous works. His servants' joy is his delight, and their sons are melody to him.

**2.** A very proper expedient for spreading the knowledge and perpetuating the remembrance of great events. Neighbours would learn this song one of another and children of their parents; and by that means those who had not books, or could not read, yet would be made acquainted with these works of God; and *one generation would thus praise God's works to another, and declare his mighty acts,* <sup><4530></sup>Psalm 145:4, etc.

**II.** Deborah herself penned this song, as appears by v. 7: *Till I Deborah arose.* And the first words should be rendered, *Then she sang, even Deborah.*

**1.** She used her gifts as a prophetess in composing the song, and the strain throughout is very fine and lofty, the images are lively, the expressions elegant, and an admirable mixture there is in it of sweetness and majesty. No poetry is comparable to the sacred poetry. And,

**2.** We may suppose she used her power as a princess, in obliging the conquering army of Israel to learn and sing this song. She expects not that they should, by their poems, celebrate her praises and magnify her, but requires that in this poem they should join with her in celebrating God's praises and magnifying him. She had been the first wheel in the action, and now is so in the thanksgiving.

**III.** It was sung on that day, not the very day that the fight was, but on that occasion, and soon after, as soon as a thanksgiving day could conveniently be appointed. When we have received mercy from God, we ought to be speedy in our returns of praise, while the impressions of the mercy are fresh. It is rent to be paid at the day.

**1.** She begins with a general Hallelujah: *Praise* (or *bless*, for that is the word) *you the Lord*, v. 2. The design of the song is to give glory to God; this therefore is put first, to explain and direct all that follows, like the first petition of the Lord's prayer, *Hallowed be thy name.* Two things God is here praised for: —

**(1.)** The vengeance he took on Israel's enemies, for the avenging of Israel upon their proud and cruel oppressors, recompensing into their bosoms all

the injuries they had done to his people. *The Lord is known* as a righteous God, and the God to whom vengeance belongs *by the judgments which he executeth.*

(2.) The grace he gave to Israel's friends, *when the people willingly offered themselves* to serve in this war. God is to have the glory of all the good offices that are at any time done us; and the more willingly they are done the more is to be observed of that grace which gives both to will and to do. For these two things she resolves to leave this song upon record, to the honour of the everlasting God (v. 3): *I, even I, will sing unto the Lord, Jehovah, that God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power, even to the Lord God of Israel, who governs all for the good of the church.*

2. She calls to the great ones of the world, that sit at the upper end of its table, to attend to her song, and take notice of the subject of it: *Hear, O you kings! give ear, O you princes!*

(1.) She would have them know that as great and as high as they were there was one above them with whom it is folly to contend, and to whom it was their interest to submit, that horses and chariots are vain things for safety.

(2.) She would have them to join with her in praising the God of Israel, and no longer to praise their counterfeit deities, as Belshazzar did. <sup><2704></sup>Daniel 5:4, *He praised the gods of gold and silver.* She bespeaks them as the psalmist (<sup><1920></sup>Psalm 2:10, 11), *Be wise now therefore, O you kings! serve the Lord with fear.*

(3.) She would have them take warning by Sisera's fate, and not dare to offer any injury to the people of God, whose cause, sooner or later, God will plead with jealousy.

3. She looks back upon God's former appearances, and compares this with them, the more to magnify the glorious author of this great salvation. What God is doing should bring to our mind what he has done; for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever (v. 4): *Lord, when thou wentest our of Seir.* This may be understood either,

(1.) Of the appearances of God's power and justice against the enemies of Israel to subdue and conquer them; and so <sup><388></sup>Habakkuk 3:3, 4, etc., is parallel to it, where the destruction of the church's enemies is thus described. When God had led his people Israel from the country of Edom

he brought down under their feet Sihom and Og, striking them and their armies with such terror and amazement that they seemed apprehensive heaven and earth were coming together. Their hearts melted, as if all the world had been melting round about them. Or it notes the glorious displays of the divine majesty; and the surprising effects of the divine power, enough to make the earth tremble, the heavens drop like snow before the sun, and the mountains to melt. Compare ~~<BIB>~~ Psalm 18:7. God's counsels are so far from being hindered by any creature that, when the time of their accomplishment comes, that which seemed to stand in their way will not only yield before them, but be made to serve them. See ~~<BIB>~~ Isaiah 64:1, 2. Or,

(2.) It is meant of the appearances of God's glory and majesty to Israel, when he gave them his law at Mount Sinai. It was then literally true, *the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped*, etc. Compare ~~<BIB>~~ Deuteronomy 33:2; ~~<BIB>~~ Psalm 68:7, 8. Let all the kings and princes know that this is the God whom Deborah praises, and not such mean and impotent deities as they paid their homage to. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the giving of the law, but has a strange descant on those words, *the mountains melted. Tabor, Hermon, and Carmel, contended among themselves: one said, Let the divine majesty dwell upon me; the other said, Let it dwell upon me; but God made it to dwell upon Mount Sinai, the meanest and least of all the mountains*. I suppose it means the least valuable, because barren and rocky.

## ~~<BIB>~~ JUDGES 5:6-11

### THE SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

Here,

**I.** Deborah describes the distressed state of Israel under the tyranny of Jabin, that the greatness of their trouble might make their salvation appear the more illustrious and the more gracious (v. 6): *From the days of Shamgar, who did something towards the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, to the days of Jael, the present day, in which Jael has so signalized herself, the country has been in a manner desolate.*

**1.** No trade. For want of soldiers to protect men of business in their business from the incursions of the enemy, and for want of magistrates to restrain and punish thieves and robbers among them (men of broken fortunes and desperate spirits, that, having no employment, took to rob on the highroad), all commerce ceased, and the highways were unoccupied; no caravans of merchants, as formerly.

**2.** No travelling. Whereas in times when there was some order and government the travellers might be safe in the open roads, and the robbers were forced to lurk in the by-ways, no, on the contrary, the robbers insulted on the open roads without check, and the honest travellers were obliged to sculk and walk through by-ways, in continual frights.

**3.** No tillage. The fields must needs be laid waste and unoccupied when the inhabitants of the villages, the country farmers, ceased from their employment, quitted their houses which were continually alarmed and plundered by the banditti, and were obliged to take shelter for themselves and their families in walled and fenced cities.

**4.** No administration of justice. There was war in the gates where their courts were kept, v. 8. So that it was not till this salvation was wrought that *the people of the Lord durst go down to the gates*, v. 11. The continual incursions of the enemy deprived the magistrates of the dignity, and the people of the benefit, of their government.

**5.** No peace to him that went out nor to him that came in. The gates through which they passed and repassed were infested by the enemy; nay, the places of drawing water were alarmed by the archers — a mighty achievement to terrify the drawers of water.

**6.** Neither arms nor spirit to help themselves with, not a *shield nor spear seen among forty thousand*, v. 8. Either they were disarmed by their oppressors, or they themselves neglected the art of war; so that, though they had spears and shields, they were not to be seen, but were thrown by and suffered to rust, they having neither skill nor will to use them.

**II.** She shows in one word what it was that brought all this misery upon them: *They chose new gods*, v. 8. It was their idolatry that provoked God to give them up thus into the hands of their enemies. The Lord their God was one Lord, but this would not content them: they must have more, many more, still more. Their God was the Ancient of days, still the same,

and therefore they grew weary of him, and must have new gods, which they were as fond of as children of new clothes, names newly invented, heroes newly canonized. Their fathers, when put to their choice, chose the Lord for their God (<sup><1321></sup>Joshua 24:21), but they would not abide by that choice, they must have gods of their own choosing.

**III.** She takes notice of God's great goodness to Israel in raising up such as should redress these grievances. Herself first (v. 7): *Till that I Deborah arose*, to restrain and punish those who disturbed the public peace, and protect men in their business, and then the face of things was changed for the better quickly; those beasts of prey retired upon the breaking forth of this joyful light, and *man went forth again to his work and labour*, <sup><1442></sup>Psalm 104:22, 23. Thus she became a mother in Israel, a nursing mother, such was the affection she bore to her people, and such the care and pains she took for the public welfare. Under her there were other governors of Israel (v. 9), who, like her, had done their part as governors to reform the people, and then, like her, offered themselves willingly to serve in the war, not insisting upon the exemption which their dignity and office entitled them to, when they had so fair an opportunity of appearing in their country's cause; and no doubt the example of the governors influenced the people in like manner *willingly to offer themselves*, v. 2. Of these governors she says, *My heart is towards them*, that is, "I truly love and honour them; they have won my heart for ever; I shall never forget them." Note, Those are worthy of double honour that recede voluntarily from the demands of their honour to serve God and his church.

**IV.** She calls upon those who had a particular share in the advantages of this great salvation to offer up particular thanks to God for it, v. 10, 11. Let every man speak as he found of the goodness of God in this happy change of the posture of public affairs.

**1.** *You that ride on white asses*, that is, the nobility and gentry. Horses were little used in that county; they had, it is probable, a much better breed of asses than we have; but persons of quality, it seems, were distinguished by the colour of the asses they rode on; the white being more rare were therefore more valued. Notice is taken of Abdon's sons and grandsons riding on ass-colts, as indicating them to be men of distinction, <sup><1724></sup>Judges 12:14. Let such as are by this salvation restored, not only to their liberty as other Israelites, but to their dignity, speak God's praises.

2. Let those that *sit in judgment* be sensible of it, and thankful for it as a very great mercy, that they may sit safely there, that the sword of justice is not struck out of their hand by the sword of war.

3. Let those that *walk by the way*, and meet with none there to make them afraid, speak to themselves in pious meditations, and to their fellow-travellers in religious discourses, of the goodness of God in ridding the roads of those banditti that had so long infested them.

4. Let those that draw in peace, and have not their wells taken from them, or stopped up, nor are in danger of being caught by the enemy when they go forth to draw, there, where they find themselves so much more safe and easy than they have been, *there let them rehearse the acts of the Lord*, not Deborah's acts, nor Barak's, but the Lord's, taking notice of his hand making peace in their borders, and creating a defence upon all the glory. This is *the Lord's doing*. Observe in these acts of his,

(1.) Justice executed on his daring enemies. They are the righteous acts of the Lord. See him pleading a righteous cause, and sitting in the throne judging aright, and give him glory as the Judge of all the earth.

(2.) Kindness shown to his trembling people, *the inhabitants of the villages*, who lay most open to the enemy, had suffered most, and were most in danger, <sup><4881></sup>Ezekiel 38:11. It is the glory of God to protect those that are most exposed, and to help the weakest. Let us all take notice of the share we in particular have in the public peace and tranquility, the inhabitants of the villages especially, and give God the praise of it.

## <0512> JUDGES 5:12-23

### THE SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

Here,

I. Deborah stirs up herself and Barak to celebrate this victory in the most solemn manner, to the glory of God and the honour of Israel, for the encouragement of their friends and the greater confusion of their enemies, v. 12.

**1.** Deborah, as a prophetess, must do it by a song, to compose and sing which she excites herself: *Awake, awake*, and again, *awake, awake*, which intimates the sense she had of the excellency and difficulty of the work; it needed and well deserved the utmost liveliness and vigour of soul in the performance of it; all the powers and faculties of the soul in their closest intensity and application ought to be employed in it. Thus too she expresses the sense she had of her own infirmity, and aptness to flag and remit in her zeal in this work. Note, Praising God is work that we should awake to, and awake ourselves to, ~~19482~~ Psalm 108:2.

**2.** Barak, as a general, must do it by a triumph: *Lead thy captivity captive*. Though the army of Sisera was cut off in the field, and no quarter given, yet we may suppose in the prosecution of the victory, when the war was carried into the enemy's country, many not found in arms were seized and made prisoners of war. These she would have led in chains after Barak, when he made his public entry into his own city, to grace his triumphs; not as if it should be any pleasure to him to trample upon his fellow-creatures, but thus he must give glory to God, and serve that great purpose of his government which is to *look upon those that are proud and to abase them*.

**II.** She gives good reason for this praise and triumph, v. 13. This glorious victory had made the remnant of Israel, and Deborah in particular, look very great, a circumstance which they owed entirely to God.

**1.** The Israelites had become few and inconsiderable, and yet to them God gave dominion over nobles. Many of them were cut off by the enemy, many died of grief, and perhaps some had removed their families and effects into foreign parts; yet those few that remained, by divine assistance, with one brave and generous effort, not only shook off the yoke of oppression from their own neck, but got power over their oppressors. As long as any of God's Israel remain (and a remnant God will have in the worst of times) there is hope, be it ever so small a remnant, for God can make him that remains, though it should be but one single person, triumph over the most proud and potent.

**2.** Deborah was herself of the weaker sex, and the sex that from the fall had been sentenced to subjection, and yet the Lord that is himself higher than the highest authorized her to rule over the mighty men of Israel, who willingly submitted to her direction, and enabled her to triumph over the mighty men of Canaan, who fell before the army she commanded; so



wonderfully did he *advance the low estate of his handmaid*. “The Lord made me, a woman, to have dominion over mighty men.” A despised stone is made *head of the corner*. *This is indeed the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes.*

**III.** She makes particular remarks on the several parties concerned in this great action, taking notice who fought against them, who fought for them, and who stood neuter.

**1.** Who fought against them. The power of the enemy must be taken notice of, that the victory may appear the more glorious. Jabin and Sisera had been mentioned in the history, but here it appears further,

**(1.)** That Amalek was in league with Jabin, and sent him in assistance, or endeavoured to do it. Ephraim is here said to act against Amalek (v. 14), probably intercepting and cutting off some forces of the Amalekites that were upon their march to join Sisera. Amalek had helped Moab to oppress Israel (<sup><0083></sup>Judges 3:13) and now had helped Jabin; they were inveterate enemies to God's people — their hand had always *been against the throne of the Lord* (<sup><0176></sup>Exodus 17:16); and therefore they were the more dangerous.

**(2.)** That others of the kings of Canaan, who had somewhat recovered themselves since their defeat by Joshua, joined with Jabin, and strengthened his army with their forces, having the same implacable enmity to Israel that he had, and those kingdoms, when they were in their strength, having been subject to that of Habor, <sup><0110></sup>Joshua 11:10. These kings *came and fought*, v. 19. Israel had no king; their enemies had many, whose power and influence, especially acting in confederacy, made them very formidable; and yet Israel, having the Lord for their King, was too hard for them all. It is said of these kings that *they took no gain of money*, they were not mercenary troops hired into the service of Jabin (such often fail in an extremity), but they were volunteers and hearty in the cause against Israel: they *desired not the riches of silver*, so the Chaldee, but only the satisfaction of helping to ruin Israel. Acting upon this principle, they were the more formidable, and would be the more cruel.

**2.** Who fought for them. The several tribes that assisted in this great exploit are here spoken of with honour; for, though God is chiefly to be glorified, instruments must have their due praise, for the encouragement of others: but, after all, it was heaven that turned the scale.

**(1.)** Ephraim and Benjamin, those tribes among whom Deborah herself lived, bestirred themselves, and did bravely, by her influence upon them; for her palm-tree was in the tribe of Ephraim, and very near to that of Benjamin (v. 14): *Out of Ephraim was there a root*, and life in the root, against Amalek. There was in Ephraim a mountain called *the mount of Amalek*, mentioned, <sup><07125></sup>Judges 12:15, which, some think, is here meant, and some read it, *there was a root in Amalek*, that is, in that mountain, a strong resolution in the minds of that people to make head against the oppressors, which was the root of the matter. Herein Benjamin had set them a good example among his people. “Ephraim moved *after thee, Benjamin;*” though Benjamin was the junior tribe, and much inferior, especially at this time, to Ephraim, both in number and wealth, yet when they led Ephraim followed in appearing for the common cause. If we be not so bold as to lead, yet we must not be so proud and sullen as not to follow even our inferiors in a good work. Ephraim was at a distance from the place of action, and therefore could not send forth many of its boughs to the service; but Deborah, who was one of them, knew there was a root of them, that they were hearty well-wishers to the cause. Dr. Lightfoot gives quite another sense of this. Joshua, of Ephraim, had been a root of such victories against Amalek (Exodus 17), and Ehud of Benjamin lately against Amalek and Moab.

**(2.)** The ice being broken by Ephraim and Benjamin, Machir (the half-tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan) and Zebulun sent in men that were very serviceable to this great design. When an army is to be raised, especially under such disadvantages as Barak now experienced from the long disuse of arms and the dispiritedness of the people, it is of great consequence to be furnished,

**[1.]** With men of courage for officers, and such the family of Machir furnished them with, for thence came down *governors*. The children of Machir were particularly famous for their valour in Moses' time (<sup><06329></sup>Numbers 32:39), and it seems it continued in their family, the more because they were seated in the frontiers.

**[2.]** With men of learning and ingenuity for secretaries of war, and with such they were supplied out of Zebulun: thence came men *that handle the pen of the writer*, clerks that issued out orders, wrote circular letters, drew commissions, mustered their men, and kept their accounts. Thus must every man, *according as he has received the gift, minister the same*, for

the public good (~~1~~ 1 Peter 4:10); the eyes see, and the ears hear, for the whole body. I know it is generally understood of the forwardness even of the scholars of this tribe, who studied the law and expounded it, to take up arms in this cause, though they were better skilled in books than in the art of war. So Sir Richard Blackmore paraphrases it: —

*The scribes of Zebulun and learned men,  
To wield the sword, laid down the pen.*

(3.) Issachar did good service too; though he *saw that rest was good*, and therefore *bowed his shoulder to bear*, which is the character of that tribe (~~15~~ Genesis 49:15), yet they disdained to bear the yoke of Jabin's tribute, and now preferred the generous toils of war to a servile rest. Though it should seem there were not many common soldiers enlisted out of that tribe, yet *the princes of Issachar were with Deborah and Barak* (v. 15), probably, as a great council of war to advise upon emergencies. And, it should seem, these princes of Issachar did in person accompany Barak into the field of battle. Did he go on foot? They footed it with him, not consulting their honour or ease. Did he go into the valley, the place of most danger? They exposed themselves with him, and were still at his right hand to advise him: for the men of Issachar were men that *had understanding of the times*, ~~32~~ 1 Chronicles 12:32.

(4.) Zebulun and Naphtali were the most bold and active of all the tribes, not only out of a particular affection to Barak their countryman, but because, they lying nearest to Jabin, the yoke of oppression lay heavier on their necks than on those of any other tribe. Better die in honour than live in bondage; and therefore, in a pious zeal for God and their country, they *jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field*, v. 18. With what heroic bravery did they charge and push on even upon the chariots of iron, despising danger, and setting death itself at defiance in so good a cause!

(5.) The stars from heaven appeared, or acted at least, on Israel's side (v. 20): *The stars in their courses*, according to the order and direction of him who is the great Lord of their hosts, *fought against Sisera*, by their malignant influences, or by causing the storms of hail and thunder which contributed so much to the rout of Sisera's army. The Chaldee reads it, *from heaven, from the place where the stars go forth, war was waged against Sisera*, that is, the power of the God of heaven was engaged against him, making use of the ministration of the angels of heaven. Some

way or other, the heavenly bodies (not arrested, as when the sun stood still at Joshua's word, but going on in their courses) fought against Sisera. Those whom God is an enemy to the whole creation is at war with. Perhaps the flashes of lightning by which the stars fought was that which frightened the horses, so as that they pranced till their very hoofs were broken (v. 22), and probably overturned the chariots of iron which they drew or turned them back upon their owners.

**(6.)** The river of Kishon fought against their enemies. It swept away multitudes of those that hoped to make their escape through it, v. 21. Ordinarily, it was but a shallow river, and, being in their own country, we may suppose they well knew its fords and safest passages, and yet now, probably by the great rain that fell, it was so swollen, and the stream so deep and strong, that those who attempted to pass it were drowned, being feeble and faint, and unable to make their way through it. And then were the horse-hoofs broken by means of the *plungings*. So it is in the margin, v. 22. The river of Kishon is called *that ancient river* because described or celebrated by ancient historians or poets, or rather because it was designed of old, in the counsel of God, to serve his purposes against Sisera at this time, and did so, as if it had been made on purpose; thus *the water of the old pool* God is said to have fashioned long ago for that use to which it was put, <sup><22></sup>Isaiah 22:11.

**(7.)** Deborah's own soul fought against them; she speaks of it with a holy exultation (v. 21): *O, my soul, thou hast trodden down strength*. She did it by exciting others to do it, and assisting them, which she did with all her heart. Also by her prayers; as Moses conquered Amalek by lifting up his hand, so Deborah vanquished Sisera by lifting up her heart. And when the soul is employed in holy exercises, and heart-work is made of them, through the grace of God the strength of our spiritual enemies will be trodden down and will fall before us.

**3.** In this great engagement she observes who stood *neuter*, and did not side with Israel as might have been expected. It is strange to find how many, even of those who were called Israelites, basely deserted this glorious cause and declined to appear. No mention is made of Judah nor Simeon among the tribes concerned, because they, lying so very remote from the scene of action, had not an opportunity to appear, and therefore it was not expected from them; but for those that lay near, and yet would not

venture, indelible marks of disgrace are here put upon them, as they deserved.

**(1.)** Reuben basely declined the service, v. 15, 16. Justly had he long ago been deprived of the privileges of the birth-right, and still does his dying father's doom stick by him: *unstable as water, he shall not excel*. Two things hindered them from engaging: —

**[1.]** Their divisions. This jarring string she twice strikes upon to their shame: *For the divisions of Reuben* (or in these divisions) *there were great thoughts, impressions, and searchings of heart*. Not only for their division from Canaan by the river Jordan, which needed not to have hindered them had they been hearty in the cause, for Gilead abode beyond Jordan, and yet from Machir of Gilead came down governors; but it means either that they were divided among themselves, could not agree who should go or who should lead, each striving to gain the posts of honour and shun those of danger, some unhappy contests in their tribe kept them from uniting together, and with their brethren, for the common good, or that they were divided in their opinion of this war from the rest of the tribes, thought the attempt either not justifiable or not practicable, and therefore blamed those that engaged in it and did themselves decline it. This occasioned great searchings of heart among the rest, especially when they had reason to suspect that, whatever Reuben pretended, his sitting still now proceeded from a cooling of his affections to his brethren and an alienation of mind from them, which occasioned them many sad thoughts. It grieves us to see our mother's children angry with us for doing our duty and looking strange upon us when we most need their friendship and assistance.

**[2.]** Their business in the world: *Reuben abode among the sheepfolds*, a warmer and safer place than the camp, pretending they could not conveniently leave the sheep they tended; he loved to *hear the bleatings of the flocks*, or, as some read it, the *whistlings* of the flocks, the music which the shepherds made with their oaten reeds or pipes, and the pastorals which they sung; these Reuben preferred before the martial drum and trumpet. Thus many are kept from doing their duty by the fear of trouble, the love of ease, and an inordinate affection to their worldly business and advantage. Narrow selfish spirits care not what becomes of the interests of God's church, so they can but get, keep, and save money. *All seek their own*, <sup><1621></sup>Philippians 2:21.

(2.) Dan and Asher did the same, v. 17. These two lay on the sea-coast, and,

[1.] Dan pretended he could not leave his ships but they would be exposed, and therefore *I pray thee have me excused*. Those of that tribe perhaps pleaded that their sea-trade disfitted them for land-service and diverted them from it; but Zebulun also was a haven for ships, a sea-faring tribe, and yet was forward and active in this expedition. There is no excuse we make to shift off duty but what some or other have broken through and set aside, whose courage and resolution will rise up against us and shame us.

[2.] Asher pretended he must stay at home to repair the breaches which the sea had in some places made upon his land, and to fortify his works against the encroachments of it, or he abode in his creeks, or small havens, where his trading vessels lay to attend them. A little thing will serve those for a pretence to stay at home who have no mind to engage in the most necessary services because there are difficulty and danger in them.

(3.) But above all Meroz is condemned, and a curse pronounced upon the inhabitants of it, *Because they came not to the help of the Lord*, v. 23. Probably this was some city that lay near the scene of action, and therefore the inhabitants had a fair opportunity of showing their obedience to God and their concern for Israel, and of doing a good service to the common cause; but they basely declined it, for fear of Jabin's iron chariots, being willing to sleep in a whole skin. The Lord needed not their help; he made it to appear he could do his work without them; but no thanks to them: for aught they knew the attempt might have miscarried for want of their hand, and therefore they are cursed for *not coming to the help of the Lord*, when it was in effect proclaimed, *Who is on the Lord's side?* The cause between God and the mighty (the principalities and powers of the kingdom of darkness) will not admit of neutrality. God looks upon those as against him that are not with him. This curse is pronounced by the *angel of the Lord*, our Lord Jesus, the captain of the Lord's host (and *those whom he curses are cursed indeed*), and further than we have warrant and authority from him we may not curse. He that will richly reward all his good soldiers will certainly and severely punish all cowards and deserters. This city of Meroz seems to have been at this time a considerable place, since something great was expected from it; but probably, after the angel of the Lord had pronounced this curse upon it, it dwindled, and, like the fig-tree which

Christ cursed, withered away, so that we never read of it after this in scripture.

## ~~002~~ JUDGES 5:24-31

### THE SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

Deborah here concludes this triumphant song,

**I.** With the praises of Jael, her sister-heroine, whose valiant act had completed and crowned the victory. She had mentioned her before (v. 6) as one that would have served her country if it had been in her power; now she applauds her as one that did serve it admirably well when it was in her power. Her poetry is finest and most florid here in the latter end of the song. How honourably does she speak of Jael (v. 24), who preferred her peace with the God of Israel before her peace with the king of Canaan, and though not a native of Israel (for aught that appears) yet heartily espoused the cause of Israel in this critical conjuncture, jeopardized her life as truly as if she had been in the high places of the field, and bravely fought for those whom she saw God fought for! *Blessed shall she be above women in the tent.* Note, Those whose lot is cast in the tent, in a very low and narrow sphere of activity, if they serve God in that according to their capacity, shall in no wise lose their reward. Jael in the tent wins as rich a blessing as Barak in the field. Nothing is more confounding, grievous, and shameful, than disappointment, and Deborah here does most elegantly describe two great disappointments, the shame of which was typical of sinners' everlasting shame.

**1.** Sisera found a fatal enemy where he expected a firm and faithful friend.

**(1.)** Jael showed him the kindness of a friend, and perhaps at that time intended no other than kindness, until God, by an immediate impulse upon her mind (which impulses then were to be regarded, and carried so much of their own evidence with them that they might be relied upon, but cannot now be pretended to), directed her to do otherwise, v. 25. He asked only for fair water to quench his thirst, but she, not only to show her housewifery and good housekeeping, but to express her respect to him, *gave him milk and brought forth butter*, that is (say some interpreters), milk which had the butter taken from it; we call it butter-milk. No (say

others), it was milk that had the butter still in it; we call it cream. Whichsoever it was, it was probably the best her house afforded; and, to set it off, she brought it *in a lordly dish*, such as she called so, the finest she had, and better than she ordinarily used at her town table. This confirmed Sisera's opinion of her friendship, and made him sleep the faster and the more secure. But,

(2.) She proved his mortal enemy, gave him his death's stroke: it is curiously described, v. 26, 27.

[1.] How great does Jael look, *hammering Sisera*, as it is in the margin, mauling that proud man who had been so long the terror of the mighty, and sending him down slain to the pit with *his iniquities upon his bones!* ~~<4027>~~ Ezekiel 32:27. She seems to have gone about it with no more terror nor concern than if she had been going to nail one of the boards or bars of her tent, so confident was she of divine aid and protection. We read it she *smote off his head*, probably with his own sword, which, now that his head was nailed through, she durst take from his side, but not before, for fear of waking him. But because there was no occasion for cutting off his head, nor was it mentioned in the history, many think it should be read, *she struck through his head*. That head which had been proudly lifted up against God and Israel, and in which had been forged bloody designs for the destruction of God's people, Jael finds a soft place in, and into that with a good will strikes her nail.

[2.] How mean does Sisera look, fallen at Jael's feet! v. 27. At the feet of this female executioner he bowed, he fell; all his struggles for life availed not; she followed her blow until he fell down dead. There lies extended the deserted carcase of that proud man, not on the bed of honour, not in the high places of the field, not having any glorious wound to show from a glittering sword, or a bow of steel, but in the corner of a tent, at the feet of a woman, with a disgraceful wound by a sorry nail struck through his head. Thus is shame the fate of proud men. And this is a very lively representation of the ruin of those sinners whose prosperity slays them; it flatters and caresses them with milk and butter in a lordly dish, as if it would make them easy and happy, but it nails their heads and hearts too to the ground in earthly-mindedness, and pierces them through with many sorrows; its flatteries are fatal, and sink them at last into destruction and perdition, ~~<410>~~ 1 Timothy 6:9, 10.



2. Sisera's mother had the tidings brought her of her son's fall and ruin when she was big with expectation of his glorious and triumphant return, v. 28-30, where we have,

(1.) Her fond desire to see her son come back in triumph: *Why is his chariot so long in coming?* She speaks this, not so much out of a concern for his safety, or any jealousy of his having miscarried (she had no fear of that, so confident was she of his success), but out of a longing for his glory, which with a feminine weakness she was passionately impatient to see, chiding the lingering chariot, and expostulating concerning the delays of it, little thinking that her unhappy son had been, before this, forced to quit that chariot which they were so proud of, and which she thought came so slowly. *The chariots of his glory had now become the shame of his house,* <sup>22:18</sup> Isaiah 22:18. Let us take heed of indulging such desires as these towards any temporal good thing, particularly towards that which cherishes vain-glory, for this was what she here doted on. Eagerness and impatience in our desires do us a great deal of prejudice, and make it intolerable to us to be crossed. But towards the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the glories of that day, we should thus stand affected (*Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*), for here we cannot be disappointed.

(2.) Her foolish hope and confidence that he would come at last in so much the greater pomp. Her wise ladies answered her, and thought they gave a very good account of the delay; yea, she (*in her wisdom*, says the Chaldee) tauntingly made answer to herself, "*Have they not sped?* No doubt they have, and that which delays them is that they are *dividing the prey*, which is so much that it is a work of time to make a distribution of it." In the spoil they pleased themselves with the thought of, observe,

[1.] How impudently, and to the reproach and scandal of their sex, these ladies boast of the multitude of damsels which the soldiers would have the abusing of.

[2.] How childishly they pleased themselves with the hope of seeing Sisera himself in a gaudy mantle of *divers colours*; how charmingly would it look! *of divers colours of needle-work*, plundered out of the wardrobe of some Israelitish lady; it is repeated again, as that which pleased their fancy above any thing, *of divers colours of needle-work on both sides*, and therefore very rich; such pieces of embroidery they hoped Sisera would have to present his mother and the ladies with. Thus apt are we to deceive ourselves with great expectations and confident hopes of honour, and

pleasure, and wealth in this world, by which we prepare for ourselves the shame and grief of a disappointment. And thus does God often bring ruin on his enemies when they are most elevated.

## II. She concludes all with a prayer to God,

1. For the destruction of all his foes: “*So, so shamefully, so miserably, let all thy enemies perish, O Lord; let all that hope to triumph in Israel's ruin be thus disappointed and triumphed over. Do to them all as unto Sisera,*” ~~<1989>~~ Psalm 83:9. Though our enemies are to be prayed for, God's enemies, as such, are to be prayed against; and, when we see some of God's enemies remarkably humbled and brought down, this is an encouragement to us to pray for the downfall of all the rest. Deborah was a prophetess, and this prayer was a prediction that in due time all God's enemies shall perish, ~~<1989>~~ Psalm 92:9. None ever hardened his heart against God and prospered.

2. For the exaltation and comfort of all his friends. “*But let those that love him, and heartily wish well to his kingdom among men, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength; let them shine so bright, appear so glorious in the eye of the world, cast such benign influences, be as much out of the reach of their enemies, who curse the rising sun because it scorches them; let them rejoice as a strong man to run a race,*” ~~<1995>~~ Psalm 19:5. Let them, as burning and shining lights in their places, dispel the mists of darkness, and shine with more and more lustre and power *unto the perfect day.*” ~~<1088>~~ Proverbs 4:18. Such shall be the honour, and such the joy, of all that love God in sincerity, and for ever they shall *shine as the sun in the firmament of our Father.*

The victory here celebrated with this song was of such happy consequence to Israel that for the best part of one age they enjoyed the peace which it opened the way to: *The land had rest forty years*, that is, so long it was from this victory to the raising up of Gideon. And well would it have been if, when the churches and the tribes had rest, they had been edified, *and had walked in the fear of the Lord.*