

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 5

(Song of Deborah and Barak)

- Vv. 1- 7 *Deborah's recognition as a prophetess.* In the song ascribed to her and Barak, Deborah rehearses the history of the people of Israel after they came into Canaan. She went back to Sinai which was the place where the Ten Commandments were given. From that day forward God had led them until her day. She made immediate reference to the judgeship of Shamgar (verse six) and described the terrible condition which had prevailed. This deep distress into which Israel had fallen called out to Deborah for rectification.
- Vv. 8-18 *The muster of the tribes.* Deborah went on to describe how various tribes had rallied to her assistance as she saw the things which needed to be straightened out in Israel. Some of the tribes had refused to come to her aid, and she rebuked them for their hesitancy. She especially singled out Meroz for a curse (verse 23).
- Vv. 19-31 *The battle against Jabin.* With some detail this poetic recitation describes the fall of the Canaanites before the Israelites. Deborah and Barak had sung this as a paean. For the time being out of the conflict came victory and

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

moral purification. The inspiring genius of it all was a woman in Israel, the prophetess Deborah, who was assisted by Barak. The two, led by the Holy Spirit, left this ancient song as a reminder of the great victory which God wrought in Israel.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God provides the leaders.* The histories of many nations are replete with eras when national fortunes fell to great depths. Those nations which survived generally rallied behind leaders who arose seemingly just for the occasion. The hand of God's providence can be seen in many of these occurrences, but it is no more clearly seen than in the instances of great crises in the history of Israel. God infused His Spirit into great men and women at crucial times to guide the destinies of Israel. Deborah was such a leader. She asked for the assistance of Barak, and the man from Naphtali stood by her in the time of national crisis.
2. *There is a moment to decide.* The song writer has said that once to every man and nation comes a moment to decide. It is then that the strong man chooses the truth whether it be popular or not; the coward turns aside. In Deborah's days there were several tribes singled out for special recognition because they had gladly answered the call to arms. Other tribes had hesitated, and they were rebuked.
3. *Those who love God are outstanding.* The final verse of the song of Deborah and Barak is in the form of a prayer. The prayer climaxed the recitation of all that had transpired as Israel was brought to the place where she faced a strong Canaanite king in war. When the

victory was won, Deborah prayed for all of Israel's enemies to perish as the Canaanites under Jabin had perished. She also prayed for God to cause all those who loved Him to shine as the sun. Daniel said, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3) .

CHAPTER FIVE

The Song of Deborah and Barak. 5:1-31

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

- 2 Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel,
when the people willingly offered themselves.
- 3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes;
I, even I, will sing unto the Lord;
I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.
- 4 Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir,
when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,
the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped,
the clouds also dropped water.
- 5 The mountains melted from before the Lord,
even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel.
- 6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,
in the days of Jael,
the highways were unoccupied,
and the travelers walked through byways.
- 7 The inhabitants of the villages ceased,
they ceased in Israel,
until that I Deborah arose,
that I arose a mother in Israel.
- 8 They chose new gods;
then was war in the gates:

5:9-15 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

- was there a shield or spear seen
among forty thousand in Israel?
- 9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel,
that offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless ye the Lord.
- 10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses,
ye that sit in judgment,
and walk by the way.
- 11 They that are delivered from the noise of archers
in the places of drawing water,
there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the
Lord,
even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of
his villages in Israel:
then shall the people of the Lord go down to the
gates.
- 12 Awake, awake, Deborah:
awake, awake, utter a song:
arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive,
thou son of Abinoam.
- 13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion
over the nobles among the people:
the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty.
- 14 Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against
Amalek;
after thee, Benjamin, among thy people;
out of Machir came down governors.
and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the
writer.
- 15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;
even Issachar, and also Barak:
he was sent on foot into the valley.
For the divisions of Reuben
there were great thoughts of heart.

- 16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds,
to hear the bleatings of the flocks?
For the divisions of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
- 17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan:
and why did Dan remain in ships?
Asher continued on the seashore,
and abode in his breaches.
- 18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people
that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high
places of the field.
- 19 The kings came and fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan
in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo;
they took no gain of money.
- 20 They fought from heaven;
the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.
- 21 The river of Kishon swept them away,
that ancient river, the river Kishon.
O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength,
- 22 Then were the horsehoofs broken
by the means of the prancings,
the prancings of their mighty ones.
- 23 Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof ;
because they came not to the help of the Lord,
to the help of the Lord against the mighty.
- 24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber
the Kenite be;
blessed shall she be above women in the tent,
- 25 He asked water, and she gave him milk;
she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.
- 26 She put her hand to the nail,
and her right hand to the workmen's hammer;

- and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote
off his head,
when she had pierced and stricken through his
temples.
- 27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down:
at her feet he bowed, he fell:
where he bowed, there he fell down dead.
- 28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window,
and cried through the lattice,
Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?
- 29 Her wise ladies answered her,
yea, she returned answer to herself,
- 30 Have they not sped? have they not divided the
prey;
to every man a damsel or two;
to Sisera a prey of divers colors,
a prey of divers colors of needlework,
of divers colors of needlework on both sides,
meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?
- 31 So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord:
but let them that love him be as the sun when he
goeth forth in his might.
And the land had rest forty years.

1. *When had God avenged Israel?* 5:2

God had avenged Israel of her adversaries whenever they unjustly attacked His people. He gave them victory over the Amalekites under Joshua in the days immediately after they left Egypt (Exodus 17) . He had driven out the Canaanites who were in the land which had been promised to Abraham and his descendants (Joshua 12). Since the great victory over Jabin, king of Hazor, was especially recent and Deborah and Barak were connected

with this victory, reference must be made to this event. The American Standard Version translates the first half of the verse differently. This translation makes no reference of God's avenging Israel, but thanks God because the leaders took the lead in Israel.

2. *When had God marched out of the field of Edom?*

5:4

The children of Israel had come from the south into the Promised Land. They had asked for the privilege of a passage through Edom, but the king had denied their request (Numbers 20:14-21) . For this reason, Israel had been forced to march around Edom, but nevertheless her entry was made from that direction and Deborah is making reference to this part of the wilderness wandering, God had led the people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. As His people marched, it could be said that God marched out of the land of Edom.

3. *What were the dangers in the days of Shamgar?*

5:5, 6, 1/

In the days of Shamgar, the third judge of Israel (3:31) , the highways were unoccupied. Travelers were forced to walk through the byways. An alternate translation in the American Standard Version makes reference to the caravans having ceased. The people who traveled went by crooked ways. Such a condition must have been forced upon Israel by the Philistines who oppressed their land in the days of Shamgar. In verse eleven, Deborah and Barak make reference to the noise of the archers. The sounds of war must have been heard throughout the land. In verse eight, she asks if there was a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel. Such a question must have been prompted by the absence of weapons of war. During the days of the Philistine oppression, the Israelites were not allowed to own spears and swords. They had no black-

smiths among them. Whenever they wanted an agricultural tool sharpened, they were forced to go to the Philistines for this service (I Samuel 13:19-21) . We are indebted to the song of Deborah and Barak for this additional information about the conditions in Israel in the times of Shamgar, whose career is only briefly mentioned in chapter three.

4. *What was Israel's greatest sin?* 5:8

The people of Israel "chose new gods." As a result, there was "war in the gates." The first commandment was a prohibition against Israel's making any other gods. God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). He had strictly forbidden them to leave pagan altars standing in Israel after they conquered the land. They were told to cut down the groves where the pagan Canaanites worshiped. He made every effort to prevent their falling into idolatry. Time and time again, however, it is recorded that Israel served "Baalim and Ashtaroth." This sin led to many other sins, and her unfaithfulness to God brought war on the land.

5. *How had Deborah reacted to the political and social conditions in her day?* 5:9

Deborah's heart went out to the leaders of the people of Israel. She described them as those who offered themselves willingly among the people. She must have encouraged them to stand up for their convictions as she said, "Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way" (5:10). She looked forward to the time when the people would be free from the fear of war and would be able to rehearse freely how God had delivered His people. When peace prevailed, she said the people would "go down to the gates" (5:11). They would not be afraid to walk in the streets and to converse freely together.

6, *What was Barak's "captivity"? 5:12*

Deborah encouraged Barak to lead his captivity captive. The American Standard Version makes reference to his leading away his captives, Since Jabin was king of the Canaanites in Hazor and Barak was from the tribe of Naphtali, both were in the northern part of Palestine. Undoubtedly, Jabin had attacked these neighboring tribes most severely. Many of the men of Naphtali had probably been taken captive by this Canaanite king. Deborah encouraged Barak to fight valiantly in order to gain the release of his fellow tribes-people who were prisoners of war in the hands of Jabin.

7. *Whom did God raise up? 5:13*

As always in the history of God's people, there remains a few who are courageous and willing to jeopardize their lives for the truth. Deborah declared that this righteous remnant provided the leadership. She described a leader of the day as "him that remaineth." God gave such a man dominion and leadership among the nobles of the people. In the King James translation, we read, "the Lord made me have dominion over the mighty." The American Standard Version describes the Lord's coming down for Deborah against the mighty. Deborah, herself, was one of few who had the courage to stand up. She was among those who "remained."

8. *What tribes helped Deborah and Barak.? 5:14, 15*

In this song, special notice is made of the men of Ephraim, the people of Benjamin, those of Machir, and them of Zebulun. Mention is also made of the tribe of Issachar, and later reference gives praise to the tribe of Naphtali (5 :18) . Since Deborah was a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and Barak was from Zebulun, one might expect that these two tribes would be involved in this conflict, but it is significant that these other tribes from both

sides of the Jordan joined with their two leaders to drive the Canaanites out of their borders. Certainly, here is an instance where a leader had influence over nearly all Israel; and such evidence would make it extremely difficult to view the judges as ruling over small segments of the land and living all at the same time.

9. Did Reuben help Deborah? 5:15, 16

The men of Reuben evidently did not come out to battle with Deborah. Mention is made only of their great resolves of heart and their searchings of heart. Such references would indicate that the tribe was divided and in its indecision lost the opportunity to join in the victorious cause. They are chided for "abiding among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks." Probably they did not help Deborah in her campaign.

10. What tribes did not help against Jabin? 5:17

The song says Gilead abode beyond the Jordan. Such a reference would indicate that the men of Gad did not assist. The tribe of Gad was east of the Jordan and apparently joined Reuben in withholding support. Dan is also mentioned as one who remained in his ships: Dan was located on the western border and had shoreline along the Mediterranean Sea. Evidently these people did not come up from the west coast to join in the battle with Deborah and Barak. Asher, another tribe which was close to the scene of battle, is described as one who "continued on the sea shore, and abode in his creeks" (verse 17). Such divided loyalty on the part of the tribes of Israel was unthinkable to Deborah and Barak. They rebuked these tribes for their refusal to join in the battle.

11. Where was the battle fought? 5:18, 19

The battle was fought in the heights of the Carmel range which ran in a southeasterly direction from the Mediterranean seacoast. Two very important heights were

mentioned—Taanach and Megiddo. These citadels commanded a view of the valley to the north and east, They were in the mountains where Israel could set up a line of defense in an effort to stop the invasion of Jabin from the north, Solomon later had a fortress at Megiddo and Taanach, and both Megiddo and Taanach have been recently excavated,

12. How had the stars fought against Sisera? 5:20

Deborah knew God had fought for His people, She was like the psalmist who said he would lift up his eyes unto the hills, for he knew his help came from the Lord (Psalms 121:1, 2), Deborah would hardly depend upon some astrologer to tell her what the fate of God's people might be. She knew that if they were faithful to the Lord, He would bless them. In this effort, they had been victorious; and she knew that He who put the stars in place had ordered the battle against the Canaanites.

13. What was the curse of Meroz? 5:23

The people who lived in the community of Meroz were cursed. This is a place in northern Palestine, now identified with Khirbet Maxus, which is some seven and one-half miles south of Kedesh in Naphtali. Kedesh was a city of refuge and mention is made of this locality in Joshua 21:32 and again in Joshua 20:7. Since they were in the very area which lost most by Jabin's invasion and gained most by Israel's victory, they were singled out for a curse delivered by the angel of the Lord because they did not come into the battle.

14. How did Deborah describe Sisera's death? 5:27

In one of the most interesting arrangements of Hebrew words and couplets in this poem, she cried out, "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead." This is an excellent example of the parallelism which is found

in Hebrew poetry. There is no end rhyme, nor is there meter. There is a repetition of ideas in words that are similar or words that are identical. A thought is repeated for emphasis. Sisera was destroyed by Jael, and Deborah celebrated the event with this repetitive refrain.

15. Why did Sisera's mother think he was late in returning? 5:28-30

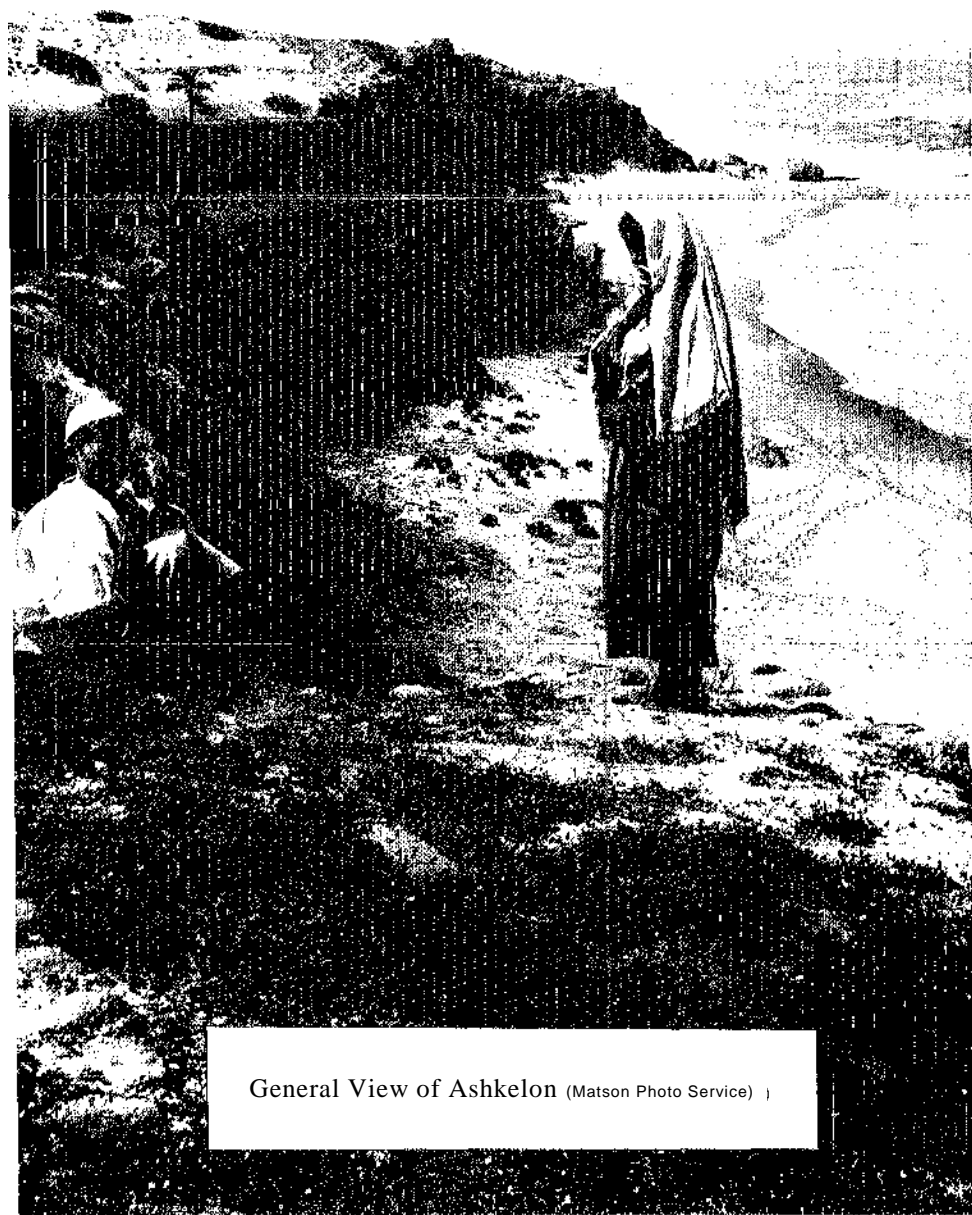
Sisera's mother is described in a very picturesque way in this song. She is viewed as having been waiting at the lattice work of her window. She misses her son's usual victorious return. She listens in vain for the sound of the wheels of his chariots as triumphant entry is made back into the Canaanite city. The ladies in waiting answered by saying they are busy dividing the spoils of war. She agreed to this answer herself, thinking it must be true that they were dividing the captive maidens among themselves, parceling out the cloaks of brightly colored needlework, and enjoying the fruits of victory.

16. How long did Deborah's influence continue? 5:31

It is said that the land had rest for forty years. This was undoubtedly a reference to the fact that under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, Jabin, king of Hazor, was defeated. Following this defeat, peace came to Israel and continued for the time mentioned. Deborah's prayer was for all great crises to turn out as well for Israel. She prayed for those who loved the Lord to shine as the sun.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 5

1. Who composed the song?
2. Who was judge when the highways were unoccupied?
3. Did Ephraim help Deborah?
4. Did Benjamin help?
5. Of what tribe was Barak a member?
6. By what river were the enemies swept away?



General View of Ashkelon (Matson Photo Service)

JUDGES

7. What community was especially cursed?
8. To whom did Deborah give credit for killing Sisera?
9. Who was waiting for Sisera's return?
10. How long did Deborah judge?