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## Judges 5

(2020)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

# Judges 5

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## THE SONG OF DEBORAH

### Topic.

- The Song of Deborah.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

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## THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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After Ehud died, Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave Israel into the hand of Jabin the king of Canaan, and Israel cried out to the LORD for help. Deborah told Barak the LORD will give Sisera into the hand of a woman, Sisera with 900 iron chariots and a vast army goes up against Israel. Barak with 10,000 men descend from Mount Tabor and defeat Sisera's armies. Jael the wife of Heber drives a tent peg into Sisera's temple and he died, after which Israel utterly destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan, and took all his cities.

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## THE SONG OF DEBORAH

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### JUDGES 5:5-1-3

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- **Judges 5:1:** Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day.

Deborah was a renowned prophetess of Israel, who prophesied the destruction of Jabin's kingdom (see previous chapter).

**On that day:** referring to the day that Israel destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan (Judges 4:24), for such a massive triumph would have brought great joy throughout the land for all of Israel. Based upon the following verse some say that Deborah was the sole author of the song:

- Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. (Judges 5:3).

But here Deborah is only saying she will sing the song, there is no reason why we cannot think that Deborah, Barak and maybe others who had a clear understanding of Israel's history sat down together and wrote the lyrics.

Because only Deborah and Barak are mentioned, some suppose they sang alternate verses of the song, answering each other accordingly, however, it does not necessarily mean that only these two sang the song, for it is possible, a choir of singers and the people of Israel joined them in singing it and that only Deborah and Barak are mentioned because they are the main characters of the story. Rather than state who I think sang the song, I feel it better left to the reader to judge for themselves, who sang this most noble triumphal poetic song of praise, of which there is no other sacred song of the Bible that matches the quality of its style and the beautiful elegant and noble thoughts, sentiments and expressions that surpasses the beauty and style of its lyrics.

Israel lost no time in offering thanks to the LORD for His mercy and their great victory. Their praises as are ours are a delight to God's heart when they flow from honest gratitude. By this, song their great triumph would be deeply fixed in the hearts of the people, and the events would be remembered as it was sung in future generations.

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## SING PRAISES TO THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL

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### JUDGES 5:5-2-3

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- **Judges 5:2-3:** "That the leaders took the lead in Israel (praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel in KJV), that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD!  
<sup>3</sup> "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody (sing praises in KJV) to the LORD, the God of Israel.

The focus here is praise and thanking the LORD for what He has done, which is also the primary focus of the song through to the end.

#### **They firstly praise the LORD:**

- For the leaders of Israel leading their armies in battle,
- For the vengeance God took on the Canaanites for holding Israel in oppression and slavery for twenty years
- For the people's willingness to risk their own lives (particularly those of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali) (Judges 5:18), though others willingly joined to go up to battle.
- For God's divine influence in drawing men of Israel out to support their brethren in the battle against Jabin the king of the Canaanites and his commander Sisera.
- For the LORD setting them free in the land and delivering them of from Canaanite bondage.

**Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD:** (v3): there were no kings or princes in Israel at this time, Deborah desired two things here, firstly, that all kings, monarchs, princes and rulers of all the earth would hear of the wonderful works that God had done for His people, so they might know that there is one who is higher than all sovereigns on earth who is superior to all in power. Secondly, that the world would learn from their great victory that the same destruction that had fallen upon Jabin the king of Canaan and Sisera his commander would be inflicted upon all who came against Israel.

**I, even I, will sing unto the LORD:** (v3) these words of Deborah are repeated twice to express and magnify how abundantly joyful and earnest she was in her heartfelt praise and thankfulness to God.

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## SEIR, EDOM AND SINAI

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### JUDGES 5:4-5

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- **Judges 5:4-5:** “LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom (field of Edom in KJV), the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. <sup>5</sup> The mountains quaked (melted in KJV) before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.

**The earth:** in this context embraces all the inhabitants of the territory and cities, towns and villages that were destroyed when Israel went out From Seir and Edom.

**The earth trembled:** when this expression is used in the context of battles, it can refer to two things, firstly, literal earthquakes and other signs, and secondly, the dread, panic and terror the LORD struck into the hearts of Israel’s enemies as He went before His people.

**The heavens dropped:** means that storms and tempests, thunder and lightning covered the land (or the battle field) and, hail stones poured down from the heavens, and such heavy rain fell that rivers flooded and solid earth turned to mud.

**The mountains melted (in KJV):** (v5) thunderous rain poured out of the clouds causing mighty torrents of water flowing down the mountain washing great parts of it down to the ground below. Figuratively, it carries the idea of the hearts of Israel’s enemies failing them, because of fear that Israel’s God is going before them and by His mighty hand delivering powerful kings and their kingdoms into Israel’s hand.

**The mountains quaked:** can refer to mountains literally shaking, or used as a hyperbole (i.e., exaggeration) to highlight the fierceness, violence and ferocity of a battle and of God’s presence in the battle.

**In Psalms we read:** the earth quaked (shook in KJV), the heavens dropped (poured down rain in KJV) at God’s presence and of Sinai being moved at His presence when Israel was in the wilderness. (Psalm 68:7-8).

**In Isaiah it is written:** when Israel was not looking for God, He did awesome things (terrible things in KJV) and came down, and the mountains quaked (flowed down in KJV) at His presence. (Isaiah 64:3).

**In Habakkuk it is written:** when God stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook (drove asunder in KJV) the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low (did bow in KJV). (Hab. 3:6).

Psalms, Isaiah and Habakkuk show us that the following words can be used literally or figuratively.

- Trembled, earthquakes and the earth.
- Mountains quaked (shook in KJV).
- Mountains quaked (flowed down in KJV).
- Mountains moved and were scattered.
- The heavens dropped (poured down rain in KJV).
- The everlasting hills sank low (did bow in KJV).

**LORD, when you went out from Seir:** (v4), Deborah, now sifts her focus from hers and Baraks great victory over Jabin and takes her song higher, by giving God the honour for exerting His miraculous power to bring ancient Israel into the Promised Land. She most likely does this, so all hearing the song and those of future Generations would know that it was the same power that bought them into the Land of Canaan that had now subdued the Canaanites and had restored freedom to them.

**Seir and Edom** are the same place, and the two expressions mean the same thing. The picture is of Israel marching out to battle with God marching at the head of the army from Seir or Edom, toward the land of Canaan, striking fear, terror and panic into the hearts of their enemies, and at various times using His mighty hand to give them victory.

The books of Moses do not mention any earthquake during Israel's march from Seir in Edom, to war against Sihon and Og, and take possession of their land, nevertheless, the words, the earth trembled, the heavens dropped, the clouds dropped water, the mountains quaked before the LORD, do not need to be taken literally, since they are often used to symbolise the universal terror, fear and panic instilled in the hearts of Israel's enemies, when the LORD was with them.

**Even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel:** (v5) it's as though Deborah here is actually seeing the sacred mountain before her. The symbolism and idea carried here is that no one should be surprised that the hearts of the Amorites and Canaanites (symbolised as mountains) melted (i.e., failed) and trembled, when they saw God's people marching toward them, for even Mount Sinai itself shook at the LORD'S presence. (Exod. 19:16-18).

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## SHAMGAR AND Jael AND A MOTHER IN ISRAEL

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### JUDGES 5:6-9

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- **Judges 5:6-9:** "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways. <sup>7</sup> The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. <sup>8</sup> When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel? <sup>9</sup> My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD.

**Shamgar** (the son of Anath), succeeded Ehud as a judge. He slew six hundred Philistines with an ox goad and delivered Israel (Judges 3:31), this is all that is said of Shamgar in the Bible. It should be mentioned, that this deliverance was not a full deliverance of all the tribes of Israel, but only a part deliverance.

**In the days of Jael:** Jael was the wife of Heber, the Kenite (Judges 4:17), she drove a tent peg through the head of Jabin, the king of the Canaanites and he died. (Judges 4:21).

**Shamgar and Jael:** the fact Shamgar is alluded to as a contemporary of Jael has an important bearing on the chronology; for it shows that simultaneous struggles may have been going on against the Philistines in the south and the Canaanites in the north.

In verse six and seven the song proceeds to describe the sad condition of Israel. For twenty years' the Canaanites had reduced them to the following miseries and oppressions:

- Their public high-ways and roads were deserted for fear of robbers and violence.
- The populations of their villages and farmlands were greatly reduced, their cities and country were overrun with their enemy's soldiers.
- They were stripped of weapons, helpless, disheartened and depressed.

Until it pleased God to look down upon them with compassion, and raise up a deliverer. The origin and cause of all Israel's national distress and misery stemmed from their apostasy and idolatry and the nations inability to resist it.

**Highways were abandoned, and travellers kept to villagers:** (v6) this was foretold in Leviticus:

- I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted. (Lev. 26:22).

**Israel's highways and public roads** were abandoned for the following reasons, certain ruthless Canaanites saw an opportunity to rob them or take advantage of their woman. Due to Canaanite oppression, ungodly Israelite thieves and robbers laid wait and robbed their own people, which (though extremely wrong), is understandable when the following three things are taken into account.

1. There was no king or central government in Israel to punish crime
2. Fear of God had been cast aside
3. Due to the people's oppression, it may have been the only means of survival for some.

**Travellers kept to villagers:** (v6) not only travellers but also merchants with their wagons and goods to trade remained in their villagers rather than risk travelling to cities for fear of being robbed and harmed, especially since they were stripped of weapons and unable to protect themselves.

**I arose a mother in Israel: the expression:** (v7) "Mother of Israel," carries the idea that, Deborah had and overwhelming affection for the people of Israel and would do all that was in her power to do to protect and save them, as a mother does for her own children. When Israel repented and cried to God, it pleased Him to raise her up, and gift her in a wonderful and extraordinary manner with prophetic gifts and wisdom that qualified her to be:

- A mother to Israel.
- To teach Israel God's will and His ways.
- To administer judgement and justice to them.
- To instruct, protect and defend them.
- To be a judge and ruler of a people.

Naturally, Deborah had been a man she would be referred to as a Father of Israel, but being a woman, is given the title, "The Mother in Israel," due to her deep affection and concern for the people of Israel as her children. For a woman of Israel to be honoured with such a title, is an enormous accolade and mark of renown and commendation, not only by the people, but also by the LORD Himself.

**When new gods were chosen then was war in the gates:** (v8) meaning, every-time Israel turned from the Lord their God and freely chose other gods, such as Baalim, Ashtaroth, Baals and the gods of the Canaanites and Phoenicians etc., and submitted to all kinds of idolatry, then war was in their gates, referring to the gates of their fortified cities, but not limited to them, for in this context the gates by extension embrace their cities, their towns, villages and countryside, because by turning to other god's they had broken the covenant they had made with the Lord their God. When they chose other gods and idolatry, they brought God's judgement upon themselves, for He brought war to their cities, their tribes and their nation as the curses of the covenant bound Him to do, for if He allowed them to continue in idolatry, not only would He be breaking the covenant Israel entered into with Him, but foreign nations would have no motivation to turn from their false gods to the true God.

**Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?** (v8), by extension shields and spears embrace all weapons of war, especially weapons of steel that need a blacksmith to craft them.

- Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.” (1 Sam. 13:19).

Should this be the case it would mean that Israel was not only greatly disarmed, but also at a great disadvantage when war came to their door, for such weapons of steel gave an army a great advantage. It was common practise, for the victors of war to disarm those they defeated and held in subjection to them. This maybe one of the reasons men amongst the Israelites who were highly skilled with slingshots were given such honour, for these types of weapons, including bows and arrows could easily be made and hidden.

It may also explain why Shamgar fought with an oxgoad rather than a sword and shield.

- After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel. (Judges 3:31).

The words, “was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel,” could mean one of the following two things:

1. Many thousands of Israelites had been disarmed of shields and spears by the Canaanites and Philistines.
2. Though the number of the Israelites were several hundred thousand, yet there were not to be seen among them shields and spears sufficient for 40,000.

**My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel:** (v9) Deborah's heart was filled with admiration as she thought of the noble and patriotic devotion, the bravery and courage of those who willingly offered themselves from among the people to go to war against their powerful oppressors and face any danger to rescue their people from oppression, such selfless courage fills Deborah's heart with gratitude, especially since they were at a significant disadvantage, having being vastly disarmed. Obviously, with God's favour on their side and going before them, this disadvantage was easily overcome. As Deborah rightly gives the commanders of Israel honour, she with the words, “bless the LORD,” is at the same time careful to give the LORD who is sovereign over all, the glory due to Him, for their triumphant victory.

**SNAPSHOT:** in these lyrics, Deborah the prophetess describes the distressed and miserable state of Israel under the tyranny and oppression of Jabin the king of the Canaanites, and shows that what brought this misery upon them was their continual idolatry. Deborah is exalted as a mother to Israel, for it was because of her courage and godly wisdom, her deep affection for the people, and her great faith and communion with God that Israel was inspired to go up against their powerful oppressors.

She calls on those who shared in the advantages of this great deliverance, to offer up praise and thanks to God for their triumphant victory, as all who are delivered from death to eternal life should always speak God's praises, for it is all His doing, that none of us should boast. For it is only by His grace and our faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, that we can draw near to the heavenly throne.

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## WHITE DONKEYS AND RICH CARPETS

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### JUDGES 5:10-11

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- **Judges 5:10:** “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets (sit in judgment in KJV) and you who walk by the way.

**White donkeys:** the most common coat colour of a donkey is grey, followed by brown, then black, then roan (i.e., a mixture of white and grey) and broken coloured donkeys (i.e., a combination of brown or black

with white markings), while the rarest colour is pure white. Prestigious large white donkeys, were bred in parts of the Middle East and north-western India and the breeding of large, white riding donkeys made Damascus famous. Those that are purely white are were extremely rare in Judea, and highly prized and therefore very costly, which meant that only the richest and greatest of persons could afford to bring white horses into Judea from other countries.

**Men who ride on white donkeys:** (v10) refers to governors, nobles, magistrates, princes and the wealthy of Israel, however, since white donkeys were so rare it was also customary for them to ride common donkeys as the following verses show:

- After him (Tola a Judge of Israel) arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup> And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. (Judges 10:3-4).
- He (Abdon a judge of Israel) had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys, and he judged Israel eight years. (Judges 12:14).

One of the greatest reasons Israel used donkeys rather than horses was because the LORD had forbidden horses saying:

- He (Israel's king) must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' (Deut. 17:16).

Two reasons God forbid Israel to own horses:

1. God was against Israel owning horses was because Egypt was the world's number one source of breeding farms to produce war-horses, and God knew that to acquire horses for their army Israel would be tempted to enter into alliances with Egypt, to prevent this and ensure that Israel would not depend on an alliance with Egypt to obtain war-horses God prohibited them from owning horses.
2. Had Israel remained faithful they would not need to trust in horses and chariots for the LORD would have fought with them, and given them the victory, as He did many times, when they trusted in Him and walked faithfully in His commandments.

It's interesting to note, during Israel's forty years in wilderness, they had no horses and when Joshua's army crossed the Jordan River, his army had no horses, only foot soldiers. Israel was a nation of valiant soldiers who won battles against overwhelming armies by the supernatural power of God. When they won such battles (especially without horses) against far more powerful armies they knew that it was only through the favour and power of the Lord their God. When Joshua fought against the northern confederacy of nations that attacked him with a numerous number of horses and chariots, the LORD said to Joshua:

- Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire. (Joshua 11:6).

In the book of Samuel, we read:

- And David took from him (Hadadezer) 1,700 horsemen, and 20,000-foot soldiers. And David hamstrung all the chariot horses but left enough for 100 chariots. (2 Samuel 8:4).

The most successful soldier in the Bible was David. The Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, Zobahites, Ammonites, Amalekites, all fell before his army and we never read of him or his armies riding horses. Those who study archaeology and historians have shown that horses were commonly used in the armies and societies of all of the ancient nations of the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, until the reign of King Solomon approximately 970 B.C. The Bible tells us that Solomon disobeyed God's command when he became a trader in Egyptian horses and chariots, this

maybe one of the reasons why he married Pharaoh's daughter. Today Solomon's stables under the Temple Mount, is a Muslim Mosque accommodating 7,000 worshippers.

**You who sit in judgment (KJV):** (v10) refers to judges sitting at their bench to hear and try the peoples causes, and pass their godly judgment. Deborah is exhorting them to give thanks to the LORD, that they are now restored to their seats of judgment, from which they had been driven, and can now without fear peaceably exercise their office.

**You who sit on rich carpets:** (v10) refers to those who sit on carpets laid out on the ground. This was a common custom for people living in Eastern countries, but only the wealthy enjoyed the luxury of costly carpets. The symbolism is of the wealthy enjoying the luxury and leisure of life.

**You who walk by the way:** (v10) refers to the common people going about everyday life without any fear of attack, it embraces merchants, traders, and others, who could now walk and ride safely about their business on public pathways, roads and the highways, which they were afraid to do prior to their deliverance from their enemies.

**Praise and thanksgiving:** Deborah, is calling all these classes of people, those who ride on the choicest of donkeys, the nobles, princes, the wealthy, judges, merchants and the common people to praise the LORD and offer Him thanksgiving for their freedom from Canaanite dromion and the overthrow of Jabin the king of the Canaanites.

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## MUSICIANS AT THE WATERING PLACES AND THE GATES

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### JUDGES 5:11

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The English Standard Bible translates this verse in the following way:

- **Judges 5:11:** To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. "Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD.

The King James Bible translates it:

- **Judges 5:11:** *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.

Since each of these translations present similar and valid views we will look at them both.

1. **The English Standard Bible:** the people dwelling in villages and towns of Israel could now sing and play musical instruments as they travelled to the gates of the city and walked to their wells, springs and fountains to draw water, and while there they could sing praises to the LORD without any fear of being attacked.
2. **The King James Bible:** during the time of Israel's oppression, shepherds, women and all others could not go to the wells, springs and fountains of water, which were scarce in these hot countries, to draw water without fear of the enemy's archers lurking in the woods or bushes waiting to shoot arrows at them, but now all people can go down to their wells and places of drawing water without any fear of their oppressors shooting arrows at them.
3. The statement, "they that are delivered from the noise of archers," means they are now set free from the sound of arrows being fired at them and from the triumphant shouts of archers, rejoicing when their arrows hit their prey.

Though the English Standard Bible, and the King James Bible have translated the verse in different ways, they are both saying the same thing.

**There they shall rehearse:** (v11) meaning at their wells, springs and fountains of water and the gate of the city (a common meeting place), princes, judges, merchants, shepherds and the common people could gather together and declare the righteous acts of the LORD in delivering them, without any sense of fear of an enemy attacking them.

**The righteous acts of the LORD:** (v11) in this context embraces the LORD taking vengeance on their oppressors and delivering them from their tyranny

**OVERVIEW: Deborah,** the great prophetess is calling the whole country to praise the LORD, for the freedom and safety they now have to travel throughout their land.

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## ARISE BARAK LEAD AWAY YOUR CAPTIVES

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### JUDGES 5:12

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- **Judges 5:12-13:** “Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

**Awake, awake, Deborah:** (v12) After having called upon all others to exalt the LORD, Deborah, now arouses herself, with the highest affection (expressed by the repetition of the words, “Awake,” four times) to celebrate the wonderful works of God. With these words, she stirs up her soul with all that is within her heart and mind, to thank and praise the LORD with the utmost zeal.

**NOTE:** the modesty and politeness that Deborah the prophetess shows when speaking of herself. Even though she went along with Barak to gather his forces, accompanied him to the field of battle, and gave him the word of command when to charge the enemy (Judges 4:9-14), she only speaks of uttering a song of praise, while she assigns to Barak the glory of the victory and the honour of the triumph.

**Arise, Barak, lead away your captives:** (v12) some may wonder what captives Barak could have to lead when the whole army of Sisera was cut off? (Judges 4:16).

The answer is simple, for the following two reasons

1. Though it is true that the whole army of Sisera was destroyed, that not a man was left, afterward, Barak pursued those who fled to Harosheth of the Gentiles, which he would have taken captive, and brought them and no doubt their cattle and sheep out of their country and back to Judah, and though the Canaanites were to be slain, they may have first been led captive in triumph.
2. After Barak defeated the armies of Sisera, he then went on to destroy many Canaanite cities from which there is no doubt he would have taken many, captive.

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## THE LORD MADE ME HAVE DOMINION OVER THE MIGHTY

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### JUDGES 5:13

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- **Judges 5:12-13:** Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty.

The King James Bible translates verse thirteen in the following way:

- **Judges 5:13:** Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

Following are the two-common interpretation of these verses:

1. The LORD gave the Israelites who had survived the fury of their oppressors, and the destruction of Sisera dominion over the nobles and princes of Canaan who previously, had dominion over them.
2. The LORD gave Deborah dominion over the mighty ones of Israel and over the mighty Canaanites in the following ways:
  - He raised her up to be their judge.
  - He gave her wisdom how to set out a battle plan that would deceive and draw Jabin the king of the Canaanites and his mighty armies out and into a trap which ultimately led to their defeat.
  - He gave her prophecies that inspired Israel to go up against the Canaanites.
3. The LORD gave Deborah dominion over the mighty ones of Canaan, in the following ways:
  - Through her direction, advice, command, and presence.
  - Despite the fact she was a woman, she went with Barak to the 10,000 soldiers he had gathered and inspired them to go up against the Canaanites
  - She accompanied Barak and his forces, to the field of battle, and gave him the word of command when to charge the enemy (Judges 4:9-14)

**SNAPSHOT:** Deborah stirred up her own mind and heart to express every thought of praise and gratitude that dwelt within her, to outwardly express with all power what was unseen in her innermost spirit, that the hearts of others would be set on fire to offer up the same expressions of praise to the Lord their God.

For Christians today, when the fire of Christ's love that burns in the heart, is outwardly expressed in praise and gratitude with honesty and sincerity, it will set the burning hearts of other faithful believers on fire to praise and glorify Christ.

Deborah gives praise and honour to those who willingly went up to battle, from this we learn a valuable principle, though God is to be praised and glorified above all, it is not wrong to encourage those who willingly and faithfully serve the Lord by giving them due praise and honour, for those who do what is in their power to do, to improve their talents to better be able to advance His Kingdom and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, should be encouraged in their service.

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## BENJAMIN, ZEBULUN AND ISSACHAR CAME WITH DEBORAH

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### JUDGES 5:14-16

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- **Judges 5:14-16:** From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff (they that handle the pen of the writer in the KJV); <sup>15</sup> the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. <sup>16</sup> Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.

After calling all to direct their praises to the LORD of their deliverance, Deborah now proceeds to speak with commendation of the tribes that freely offered themselves to battle, she assigns:

1. The first place to the tribe of Benjamin.
2. The second to those of her own tribe (Ephraim) who were settled in Amalek.
3. The third to the Manassites beyond Jordan.
4. The fourth to the tribe of Zebulun.
5. The fifth to the tribe of Issachar.

**From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley:** (v14) the root of them refers to the men of Ephraim who dwelt near Mount Tabor (Judges 4:12) in the hill country of the Amalekites who came down to the battle.

- Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites. (Judges 12:15).

**Following you Benjamin, with your kinsmen:** (v14), the pre-eminence is here given to Benjamin in the following way, Benjamin was the first in this expedition, perhaps because they were nearest to the Amalekites, and by their example encouraged the Ephraimites for though small at this time their whole tribe came up to this war, whereas the numerous tribe of Ephraim, sent only a handful to it.

**With your kinsmen,** refers to Benjamin and the few Ephraimites that united themselves to them in this expedition, or to the people of the tribes who joined them in this war.

**From Machir marched down the commanders:** (v14) Machir was the only son of Manasseh (Joshua 13:31), and therefore this must refer to that tribe, of which half settled within Jordan and half on the other side of the Jordan river. Verse seventeen shows that the half that abode beyond the Jordan gave no assistance at all, which means Machir here refers only to the men from the half tribe that dwelt within Jordan who came out to join Barak in his battle against the Canaanites.

**From Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff (they that handle the pen of the writer in KJV):** (v14) following are two thoughts amongst scholars concerning this verse:

1. Some reason, a penman coming down to a battle does not make sense, and point out that the Hebrew word which is here translated "pen," never signifies a pen throughout Scripture, but always a sceptre, or staff of command, and therefore state that the better translation is that, "From Zebulun came out those who lead with the sceptre," which makes the verse better harmonise with the context.
2. Others suppose that the words, "they that handle the pen of the writer," refers to scribes who were famous for handling a pen (i.e., writing and recording proceedings and actions), whose duty it was to record the events of the battle.

**The princes of Issachar came with Deborah:** (v15) came down to battle with Deborah. Deborah did not take part in the battle, but she was close at hand to encourage Barak and his army. The princes here refer to the chief men and leaders of the tribe of Issachar. By using the word princes, Deborah is paying them the honour due to them.

**Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels:** (v15) at the word of Deborah the judge and prophetess of Israel, Barak at the head of his 10,000 men, with the chiefs of the army and the tribes of Issachar, Zebulun and Naphtali, fearless of danger rushed down on foot from Mount Tabor into the valley of Jezreel to attack Sisera with his horses, iron chariots and his numerous host.

**Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings (thoughts in KJV) of heart:** (v15), though Reuben was separated from Barak by the river Jordan, they (or at least some) would have felt a patriotic duty to go up to help their brethren in the battle. The searchings and thoughts of heart seems to refer to the tensions of mind amongst the tribe of Reuben and perplexities of heart during the hard, tough and difficult discussions concerning whether they should go up to help Barak, or remain home with their families and sheep. Verse sixteen shows us two things:

1. They chose to remain in their land.
2. There were divisions amongst the tribe, which may mean that there were some that did not agree with the decision to remain in the land.

The words, "Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart," (v15-16), is repeated to show how much Deborah, Barak the chiefs of the army and the people were affected by the refusal of the tribe of Reuben to go up to the battle, for it would not only have only caused them grief to have a tribe refuse to help, but also cause negative conversations throughout the tribes concerning why they would refuse to help.

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## ZEBULUN AND NAPHTALI RISKED THEIR LIVES TO DEATH

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### JUDGES 5:17-18

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- **Judges 5:17-18:** Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings.<sup>18</sup> Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.

The country of Gilead lay on the other side of the Jordan river. Moses gave half of the land to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the other half to the half tribe of Manasseh. (Deut. 3:12) (Joshua 13:24-31). This means the focus here is the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the eastern half tribe of Manasseh. These all chose to dwell at ease in their villages of tents attending to their flocks and herds.

**NOTE:** verse 14 states commanders marched down from Machir (Manasseh) to join the battle, yet verse sixteen says Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan, Gilead we know includes the half tribe of Manasseh (Deut. 3:12) (Joshua 13:24-31). This means that the half tribe of Manasseh that dwelt in the land of Jordan went up to the battle, while the half tribe that dwelt beyond the Jordan river remained in their land.

**Why did Dan remain in ships?** (v17) the coasts of Dan bordered on the Mediterranean Sea. They did not join in the battle, but rather remained with their ships, perhaps to protect their merchandise and riches, and for safety, since they could quickly sail away, should Israel lose the battle and Jabin's armies turned on them.

**Asher continued on the seashore:** (v17), Asher was another great maritime tribe on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. They chose to remain in their towns and cities and attend to their ships than Join Deborah and help Barak in the battle.

**Zebulun and Naphtali:** (v18), Barak, by God's order, gathered ten thousand men, from these two tribes (Judge 4:6) who rushed down from Mount Tabor to attack the vast army of Sisera, the military commander of Jabin king of the Canaanites. Deborah with great enthusiasm, here in this song is celebrating the heroic bravery of Zebulun and Naphtali's gallant behaviour and undaunting courage.

**Who risked their lives to death:** (v18), in contrast to the selfishness of the tribes just named, the 10,000 men of Zebulun and Naphtali regardless of the great risk of danger, injury and death willingly followed Barak into battle to recover Israel's liberty.

**The tribes of Reuben, Dan and Asher:** did not care to risk anything for the national good. Having mentioned with honour the tribes that willingly offered themselves, Deborah admonishes those who, when summoned to the assistance of their brethren, refused to rise in the common cause for all. The first two that she upbraids are Reuben and Gad, who were more concerned about their cattle than their brethren. The next two are Dan and Asher, who were more concerned with their ships and merchandise.

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## KINGS FOUGHT AT TAANACH AND MEGIDDO

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### JUDGES 5:19-21

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- **Judges 5:19-21:** “The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver.<sup>20</sup> From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.<sup>21</sup> The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might! (O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength in KJV).

**The kings came:** (v19) Jabin was reinforced by lesser Canaanite kings and their troops in those parts who were in confederacy with him.

- When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph. (Josh. 11:1).

**Taanach and Megiddo:** (v19) the battlefield was near these two prominent cities belonging to Manasseh (Judges 1:27) but were in region of the tribe of Issachar, not far from Mount Tabor and near the river Kishon. It appears by the villages and country around about them that they were some distance from each other. From these two Canaanite cities the largest part of Jabins army came, led by their kings. According to some Jabins army reached from Taanach to Megiddo.

**They got no spoils of silver:** (v19) the kings of Canaan no doubt hoped to enrich themselves and came with big expectations of defeating Israel and returning to their own land with rich spoils and booty of all kinds, but instead, not only did they flee, but were killed in battle.

**From heaven the stars fought against Sisera:** (v20), this poetic expression carries the following two ideas:

1. God favour was with the armies of Israel, and that He was fighting with them against their enemies and gave them the victory.
  - I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand’?” (Judges 4:7).
  - The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. (Judges 4:15).
2. To a great downfall of rain, causing the river Kishon to flood and its waters to rapidly swell over its banks and turn the plain of Jezreel (also known as the Valley of Megiddo) into a muddy quagmire, rendering Sisera’s horses and nine hundred chariots of steel useless. Thunder, lightning and heavy rainfalls are used in poetical Scriptures as symbols of the artillery of heaven.

**The ancient torrent of Kishon swept them away:** (v21) though the Kishon river was not a great river in itself, when it was in flood it not only swelled its banks and turned the Megiddo plain into a quagmire, but its rapid flowing waters had the power and force to swept away anything in its path. It appears that by the hand of God the Canaanites were fleeing toward the river with Israel’s army pursuing after them. Thinking they could escape the victorious army of Israel, it seems they attempted to cross the river to escape to their own land, but instead were swept away.

- I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?" (Judges 4:7).

Asaph asked the LORD to:

- Do to them (God's enemies) as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon. (Psalm 83:9).

Those that fled had to cross the deep and marshy bed of the river Kishon and in their confusion, endeavoured to make their escape by fording or swimming over the river, but the LORD sent a heavy rain and the waters suddenly rose and drowned them or washed them out to sea.

**The ancient river:** (v21) the river Kishon and the waters of Megiddo are all the same, it is here poetically called an ancient river for one of the following reasons or perhaps both:

1. It was a river from the beginning of creation, and not one cut out at a much later date by the hand of man as some rivers were.
2. It was considered an anciently famous river by historians' poets and writers for various remarkable exploits, for which it was celebrated from ancient times on account of the battles fought on its banks.

**March on, my soul, with might:** (v21) (O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength in KJV), these types of sudden exclamations, that break the flow of the poem, add greatly to its spontaneity. The meaning is that Deborah, though but a weak woman, has, through her prayers, wisdom, prophetic gift, advice and God's direction and blessing subdued an enormously vast and might enemy. Deborah with this sudden interruption, turns the focus to herself, as if to congratulate her soul on the success of the calling that she had received from God to stir up Barak, and on the great effectiveness of her prayers, for it is certain that while on Mount Tabor she prayed for God's help from Heaven, while Barak fought with Sisera on the plain below.

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## CURSE MEROZ FOR THEY DID NOT HELP THE LORD

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### JUDGES 5:22-23

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- **Judges 5:22-23:** "Then loud beat the horses' hoofs (then were the horsehoofs broken in KJV) with the galloping, galloping of his steeds (pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones in KJV).<sup>23</sup> "Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Some suppose that the words, "the mighty ones," (v22) refers to the horse's rider, while others say it refers to the mighty horses, for me personally, I feel it is best to accept that the words, "the mighty ones," applies to the horse and the rider. Following are the most common thoughts to what the words, "loud beat the horses' hoofs (then were the horsehoofs broken in KJV)" mean:

- After heavy rains and the overflowing waters of the river had turned its banks and the plain of Megiddo into a muddy quagmire, Sisera's fleeing horses broke their hoofs as they galloped through the muddy plain and while crossing the fast-flowing Kishon river.
- In the horses' panic and frantic efforts to break loose from their chariots booged down in the muddy plain they broke their hoofs. During this ancient era horse hoofs were not shod in many parts of the East.
- The horse's rider in terror and panic drove their horse at such speed to escape God and the pursuing army of Israel through the thick muddy grounds, that the horses' hoofs twisted and broke.

This verse gives us a very vivid image of, the panic, confusion and speed of the flight of Sisera's captains and his great warriors.

**Meroz:** there is no other mention of Meroz in Scripture, however it was no doubt a place that then had eminent renown even though there is no remembrance of it left. The fact that it exists no longer, may well be the effect of this curse placed upon it, so that all remembrance of it would be utterly blotted out. Many have identified it with various cities, but these can only be taken as speculations, all we can know for certain is that it was located in some region near Mount Tabor and the plain where the battle was fought.

**The angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly:** (v23), the guilt of Meroz was greater than that of the tribes on the other side of the Jordan river who did not come up to the battle, because, wherever Meroz exact location may have been it was much nearer the place of the battle and therefore they had the greatest opportunity and obligation to assist Deborah and Barak regain freedom for Israel, which is why the Angel of the LORD pronounced the curse. The words, "because they did not come to help the LORD," means, they did not come to the help the LORD'S people, which is why the curse is repeated.

**The angel of the LORD:** (v23) some suppose that Deborah is the angel or messenger of the angel, whether this is so or not there can be no doubt that she is speaking as the messenger and voice of the LORD. Being a prophetess Deborah may have been speaking under a spirit of prophecy, or from the Spirit of the angel or of God.

**To the help of the LORD against the mighty:** (v23) against the mighty Canaanites, their mighty kings and their mighty armies. The words, "to help the LORD," mean, to help God's people, for God takes what is done for or against His people as if it were done to Himself. Those who did not come to their assistance, are only rebuked, for they were some distance away, whereas, those who were cursed, were not only very near, but also saw the threat and danger their brethren were in, and yet would not come out to give a helping hand.

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## Jael Kills Sisera

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### Judges 5:24-27

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- **Judges 5:24-27:** "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed.<sup>25</sup> He asked for water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds (butter in the KJV) in a noble's bowl (a lordly dish in KJV).<sup>26</sup> She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head (smote off his head in KJV); she shattered and pierced his temple.<sup>27</sup> Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell (bowed in KJV); where he sank, there he fell—dead.

Jael would have been regarded as a patriotic heroine, whose daring had secured to Israel their complete victory. Deborah now shifts her focus from the curse pronounced by the command of the angel on the city of Meroz to the blessing of Jael, who she gives the highest praise, for even though Jael was only a sojourner in Israel, she had done them a great service in killing Sisera, their strongest and fiercest enemy.

The honour paid to Jael would raise her far above the common mass of nomad women. Instead of a lowly Kenite woman, she would be celebrated and honoured as a heroine of Israel.

**Blessed shall she be above the women in the tent:** the Kenites did not live, in houses, but in tents, which were the common dwelling place and home for families of nomad tribes. Amongst all woman dwelling in tents, Jael would be seen as the most blessed of all. One of the reasons for this is because all Israel would show her great honour and favour.

**She gave him milk; she brought him curds (butter in KJV) in a noble's bowl:** (v25), butter in this context refers to curdled milk, which was a favourite drink in the East. Curd is obtained by coagulating milk, in a certain order called curdling. It can be eaten as a dried snack or reconstituted as a hot beverage. The addition of an acid, such as lemon juice or vinegar causes milk to coagulate, thicken and inhibits the growth of harmful bacteria which improves its shelf life. Traditionally, curd (i.e., soured milk) was simply fresh milk that was left to ferment and sour by keeping it in a warm place for a day, often near a stove.

It is commonly made at home to be consumed or sold. Sisera asked for water, but she gave him something better, milk and curds, which may signify milk with cream on it, or having first taken off the cream, she gave him milk to drink, and then brought the cream in a dish fit for any lord or nobleman to eat out of. It is almost certain, she showed him this kindness so that he would have no suspicion of her having any ill thoughts against him and to lure him into a false sense of friendship and security.

**She sent her hand to the tent peg:** (v26), Jael, knowing that the temples of the head were the softest part of the head and would bring about instant death, quietly and very deliberately drove the nail through Sisera's temples, shattering his head and instantly pinning him securely to the ground (Judges 4:21).

There is no doubt after seeing years of Sisera's cruel brutal and violent oppression afflicted upon the people of Israel, Deborah would have delighted when she heard the news, Sisera the mighty commander of Jabin's army had been killed by a woman. Especially since Deborah was a mother in Israel, and having a mother's love for the people of Israel would have greatly mourned upon seeing the lives of her beloved people jeopardised and cruelly oppressed by Sisera.

**NOTE:** the King James Bible says, "she smote off his head," (v26) while the English Standard Bible translates it, "she crushed his head," this is the better translation for there is not even a hint in the story, that she cut off his head, but rather pinned his head to the ground with a tent peg.

**Between her feet he sank and fell (bowed in KJV) dead):** (v27), because of the word bowed (in the KJV) some suppose that after Sisera was wounded he rose and struggled after which he bowed and fell, but the story gives no grounds for such speculations, for it clearly states, that Jael drove the tent peg through his temples, and fastened it into the ground (Judges 4:21), such a blow as this would bring about instantaneous death. The phrase, "he bowed," simply means, "he fell down dead."

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## SISERA'S MOTHER WAILES FOR HER SON'S RETURN

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### JUDGES 5:28-31

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- **Judges 5:28-31:** "Out of the window she (Jael) (v24) peered, the mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice: 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?'<sup>29</sup> Her wisest princesses (ladies in KJV) answer, indeed, she answers herself,<sup>30</sup> 'Have they not found and divided the spoil?— A womb or two (a damsel or two) for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?'<sup>31</sup> "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends (them that love him in KJV) be like the sun as he rises in his might." And the land had rest for forty years.

The mother of Sisera is pictured filled with great stress and sorrow standing at a window, for the battle was long over and her son and the 900 chariots that went to battle with him should have returned by now. Her wisest and no doubt closest princesses (ladies in KJV), either to comfort Sisera's mother or because they could not possibly comprehend that Sisera with his 900 chariots and vast host of warriors would be

defeated, tells Sisera's mother that they have probably stopped to divide the spoil amongst the soldiers accordingly, and that each man has taken one or two women for themselves and are having their way with them (i.e., raping them as it was common for men to do with captive woman).

**Sisera, spoil of dyed embroidered materials:** (v30), to cheer Sisera's mother up, her wise ladies appeal to her vanity, saying that her son will return with an abundance of dyed garments and robes fit for the most noble to wear, made of silk and materials of different colours, with needlework of gold thread on both sides and richly and skilfully embroidered webs around the neckline. Garments such as these were of great worth and held in high esteem for only the rich and wealthy could afford them.

**So may all your enemies perish, O LORD:** (v30), as Sisera and his vast army did perish. We may be tempted to think this is the end of the story, but Deborah's following words, "let your friends (them that love him in KJV) be like the sun as he rises in his might," may be taken as a future prophecy, especially since she was a prophetess of Israel.

The enemies of the LORD will perish like the vast host of Sisera did, and all their worldly hopes will end in great disappointment and sorrow like those of Sisera's mother, but all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and who he counts as his friends, shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

- Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matt. 13:43).

**The land had rest forty years:** (v31) these are not the words of Deborah, for her song ends with the beautiful words, "O LORD, let those who love you be like the sun as he rises in his might." Rather the statement, "The land had rest forty years," are the words of the writer of this book.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*