

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

Overview

Deborah comes from the border between Ephraim and Benjamin (Figure 1, chart), but Barak is from Naphthali, where the oppressor was active. So the action in this cycle takes us from the southern part of the country to the north.

4:1-3, Rebellion, Retribution, Repentance

4:1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. **2** And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.—So far, the enemies have been foreign, but coming closer: Chushan Double Wickedness from Mesopotamia, Moab invading Jericho, and the Philistines from Crete seeking to settle the land. Now local Canaanites arise in Hazor, in the far north of the land and assigned to Naphthali (Jos 19:36-39).

Hazor recalls Jerusalem and Hebron in Judges 1. Joshua conquered all three cities. In fact, Hazor was the only city that Joshua burned to the ground (chart).

Jos 11:10 And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. 11 And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. . . . 13 But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn.

Like Jerusalem and Hebron, in Hazor the children of Israel failed to possess what they had won.

The king of Hazor when Joshua destroyed the city was named Jabin:

Jos 11:1 And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph,

Joshua slew Jabin, but when the Canaanites rebuilt Hazor, the new king was also named Jabin. The repetition of the name does not mean that Judges is repeating the story of Joshua's conquest. Jabin is probably a title rather than a personal name, like "Pharaoh" in Egypt or "Abimelech" among the Philistines,¹ held by successive monarchs. In Hebrew, the name means "He understands," a fitting title for one whom the population entrusts with their rule.

Israel's need to reconquer Hazor (and Hebron, and Jerusalem) is a sober reminder that the forces of evil are persistent. A victory won needs to be held diligently, or the enemy may retake it. The

¹ "My father is king," the king of Gerar in the days of Abraham (Genesis 20-21), but also of his son (Genesis 26). Gideon's son took the title in seeking kingship (Judg 9:1), and Psa 34:1 applies it to Achish the king of Gath (1 Sam 21:13-15).

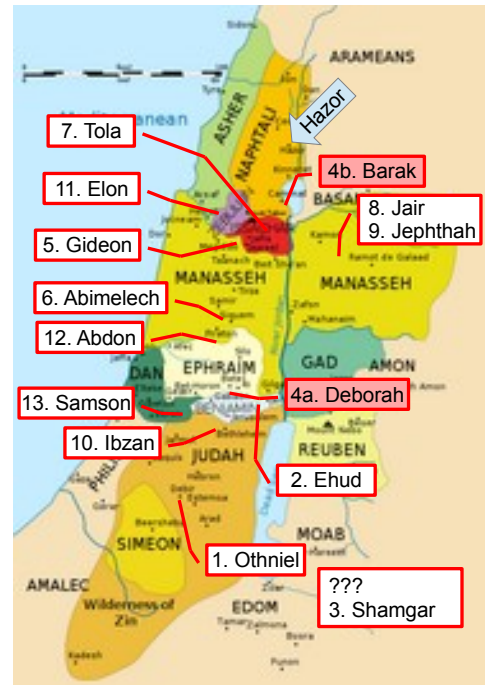


Figure 1: Origins of the Judges

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:12_Tribes_of_Israel_Map.svg

Lord may deliver us from a besetting sin, but we need to be careful not to let down our guard and slip back into it. Peter warns of this dynamic when speaking of false teachers:

2 Pet 2:18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, **they allure** through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, **those that were clean escaped from** them who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. 20 For if **after they have escaped** the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled therein**, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. 21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. 22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.—It took Israel eight years of punishment before they responded and God sent Othniel; 18 years before Ehud was raised up. This time it takes 20 years. In spite of God’s gracious deliverance, they are becoming more and more hardened.²

The writer notes that Sisera’s primary military advantage is his force of chariots. These were the superweapon of the iron age, but were particularly suited to level terrain, and could not operate in mountainous areas. We have already seen this characteristic in chapter 1,

Judg. 1:19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

4:4-24, Restoration: The History

The pattern of ch. 2 leads us to expect that in each cycle, God will “raise up” a deliverer. But in this cycle, the identity of this deliverer is not clear. Who delivers Israel? Is it Deborah? Or Barak? or even Jael? Each scene in the story leaves us in doubt, until the end.³

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.—Deborah is a prophetess, one of five women identified in this way in the OT. The others are Miriam the sister of Moses (Ex 15:20), Huldah of Jerusalem in the days of Josiah (2 Ki 22:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isa 8:3), and a false prophetess who opposed the work of Nehemiah (Neh 6:14). The New Testament also names prophetesses, Anna (Lk 2:36) and Philip’s daughters Acts 21:9.⁴

It is striking that Deborah is already a judge. The pattern in chapter 2 is that God raises up judges in response to the cry of the children of Israel:

Judg. 2:16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

But Deborah comes toward the end of the period of Judges (Figure 2, chart). By this time the nation has institutionalized the role of the judge. Judges are no longer raised up by God in

2 The sequence starts again with Gideon (7 years, then 18 for Jephthah, and then 40 for Samson). If Gideon and Othniel start about the same time, as Chisholm suggests, this makes excellent sense.

3 Y. Amit, JSOT 39 (1987) 89-111 suggests this insight.

4 Notably, when Paul was visiting the family and the Lord had a message for him, he sent Agabus from Jerusalem, rather than speaking through the daughters.

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response to specific needs, but are a persistent feature of the society, as the people long for a king.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.—

Deborah's involvement is unusual in two ways.

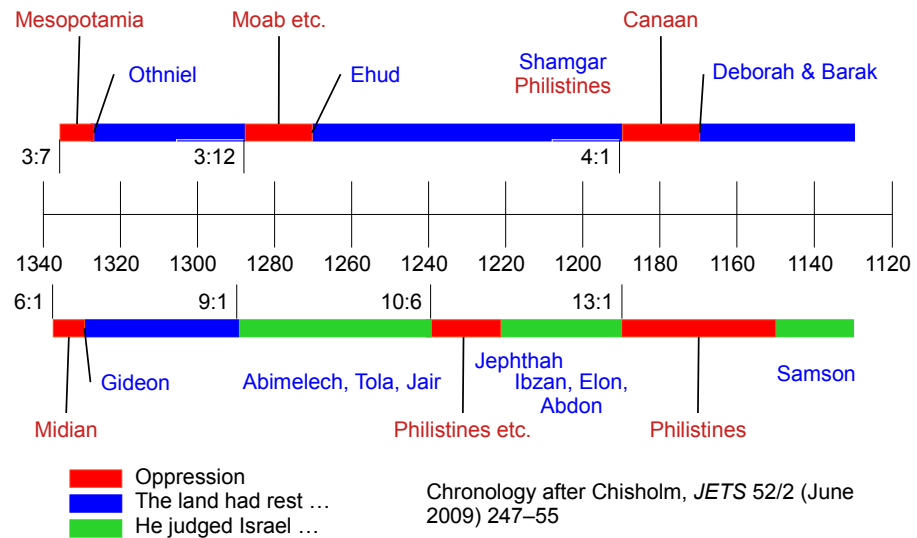


Figure 2: Chronology of Judges

First, she is not raised up to meet the threat, but is already functioning.⁵ Unlike the other judges, whose focus is on the enemy and who go out to confront the enemy, she functions as a local magistrate with an established office from which she administers regional affairs.

Second, she is not local to the threat. Hazor is in Naphthali, far to the north, while she is along the border between Benjamin and Ephraim (Figure 3, chart). It looks as though the people of Benjamin, after Ehad's great success, wanted to continue having a judge, and settled on Deborah.

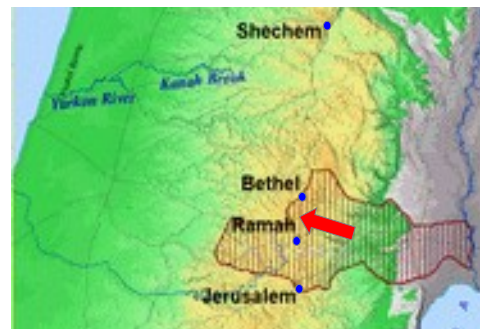


Figure 3: Location of Deborah's Palm Tree. Shaded area is Benjamin.

Deborah is the only woman among the judges. She has been cited as an example that women should be accepted as leaders of God's people, but note the context in which the writer places her. After Ehad, when the Philistines posed a threat, a stranger (Shamgar) arose, suggesting that few other Israelites showed the bravery of Ehad. Now we find Barak reluctant to undertake the work that God has for him. The anomaly of Deborah lies not in her willingness to serve the Lord—that is commendable—but in the unwillingness of the men to do their duty.

Five hundred years later, Isaiah comments on the dynamic involved. He begins with the lack of competent male leadership as an act of judgment from the Lord.

Isa 3:1 For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, 2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, 3 The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. 4 And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. ...

He goes on to make clear that there are men, but they are unwilling to step up to the task.

⁵ Her judgeship is introduced in v. 4 with a disjunctive clause, not with a *waw consecutive* construction as would be expected if she arose in response to the cry of the people in v. 3.

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Isa 3:6 When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, saying, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand: 7 In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people. ...

The result is that children and women must take their place:

12 As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.

So at this point in the story, we are left wondering: Is Deborah the one who will deliver the people? She is a judge, but her function is civil, not military; an institution, not someone raised up by God in response to the threat.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam—The name “Barak” means “lightning,” but we soon learn that he is less like a bolt of lightning and more like a lightning bug.

out of Kedeshnaphtali,—Cities named “Kedesh” (קִדְשׁ, from the Hebrew root meaning “holy”) were likely ancient Canaanite sanctuaries. It became one of the Levitical cities (Jos 21:32) and a city of refuge (20:7), so Barak is probably a Levite of the tribe of Gershon. But given the deterioration of Israelite piety attested in chapter 2 and the behavior that Barak exhibits in this chapter, the pagan influence may have persisted. He recognizes Deborah’s authority as a prophetess, and comes when she calls (cf. v. 9).

and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded,—The question presumes that Barak already knows the answer. He is conscious of the Lord’s call, but is ignoring it. So perhaps Barak is the one whom God is calling to deliver Israel.

saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?—As Barak’s home suggests, he is from Naphthali, the tribe that includes Hazor (Figure 4, chart). Zebulun is the next tribe south, and would also have felt Jabin’s oppression.

As a prophetess, she delivers a message from the Lord. He is to muster members of his own tribe and the next tribe to the south on Mount Tabor, an isolated hill in the plain of Jezreel just south of Zebulun (Figure 5).

Strategically, Tabor would give Barak a great view over the Valley of Jezreel, through which Sisera must maneuver on his chariots.

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.—The Kishon drains the Valley of Jezreel into the Mediterranean. It plays a critical role as the battle unfolds.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.—If Barak is the deliverer, what a contrast he presents presents to the courage of the first



Figure 4: The Scene of Barak’s Battle with Sisera. Orange hatching is Naphtali, and blue hatching is Zebulun.

three judges! He is unsure of himself and of the Lord's direction. He wants to keep his prophet(ess) right there with him. This hesitation shows that he is not confident in his ability to discern the Lord's guidance.

There's a balance here. On the one hand, it's wise to seek counsel and be open to suggestions from others. But on the other hand, we need a relation with the Lord that gives us the confidence to recognize his voice and follow it. The Levites were dispersed throughout Israel



Figure 5: Mount Tabor, looking east from Nazareth
(Van and Anita Parunak, January 1975)

precisely so that they could be spiritual guides to the people, yet he is timid about his own conduct. Has his tolerance of Canaanite worship in the ancient sanctuary city of Kedesh deadened his own sensitivity to the Lord's voice? He must rely on Deborah to tell him where to muster his troops (v. 6), what tactics to expect from the enemy (v. 7), and when to attack (v. 14).

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.—Deborah is clearly critical of Barak's reticence. She is committed to helping the nation. The Lord has designated Barak as the one who should lead the attack, and if he will not step up to the task himself, she will do what she can to help him. But far from grabbing power as modern feminists often do, she condemns Barak's unwillingness.

This verse adds a new twist to the question of who the deliverer is. Deborah is called a judge, but she isn't raised up. Barak looked promising, but he is a wimp. Now we're told that a woman will do the job. Is Deborah the deliverer after all?

And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.—Deborah accompanies Barak to Kedesh to muster the troops, and then to Tabor.

“At his feet” ברגליו may mean “following him,” as in 2 Sam 2:16-17. But the phrase appears several more times in this episode, in the sense of “on foot” (4:15, 17; 5:15), and in this sense contrasts Barak's weakness in the flesh with the chariots of Sisera (4:3, 13). In the ordinary calculus of war, infantry had no chance against chariots.

11 Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.—The writer now interrupts the narrative to provide background knowledge that will be important in the sequel. In ch. 1, we learned that Moses' inlaws had come with the nation to the land of promise, and as Judah extended its influence south, they moved to the vicinity of Arad to support them:

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Judg. 1:16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

But one member of the clan migrated north, close to the home of Barak in Kedesh-Naphthali, a move that will prove critical for the outcome of the story.

12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. 13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.—The mustering and movement of 10,000 troops attracts the attention of Sisera, who moves to confront the rising rebellion. Now Barak, Deborah, and the Israelite militia are on top of Tabor, and Sisera is in the valley below. Who will be the deliverer?

14 And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?—The first subject in this scene is Deborah, giving commands like a military general. Is she the deliverer after all?

So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.—Or perhaps the deliverer is Barak, and here he is moving into action. We emphasized his timidity earlier in the chapter, but here he appears to have gotten his act together. He is safe on top of Tabor, inaccessible to the chariots. But now he descends to the plain, where they have the clear advantage. This obedience to the word of the Lord by his prophet may be why Hebrews names him as one of the heroes of faith (Heb 11:32).

15 And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak;—But now a new actor enters the scene. As in the other cycles, the Lord is the one who chastises Israel by delivering them to the enemy (4:2), hears their cry (4:3), and summons a deliverer (4:6), but this time he is himself the central deliverer. We expect to read “Barak went down ... and discomfited Sisera,” but instead we read, “Barak went down, and the LORD discomfited Sisera.” This is the first indication we have that the writer wants us to see the Lord himself as the deliverer in this cycle.

so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. 16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles:—v. 15 is disjunctive, “but as for Barak,” emphasizing the contrast between Sisera and Barak. Sisera, the general of the army, the most important target of the Israelite attack, abandons his chariot and flees on foot to the northeast, toward the sea of Galilee (the most direct route back to Hazor). He has abandoned his advantage, and Barak could easily subdue him. But Barak charges off after the chariots toward the southwest, toward their base at Harosheth of the Gentiles.⁶

Did Barak not see Sisera leaving the field of battle? Or did he decide to pursue the more showy opportunity rather than the more important one? Sometimes the Lord directs us to a labor that seems less dramatic, like the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to seek one. Man judges by numbers, but the Lord knows what is really important, and we must lean on him to choose aright.

and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.—We expect to read, “Barak pursued ... and slew all the host of Sisera with the edge of the sword.” By making the host the subject, the narrator further diminishes Barak's contribution.

⁶ Heber's encampment, where Sisera ends up, is north of the field of battle, near the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, but if Rainey's analysis (*Sacred Bridge*, Excursus 10, pp. 150ff) is correct, the chariot base is in the Jezreel valley between Taanach and Megiddo, sending Barak scampering west and south.

In the next scene, yet another potential deliverer arises.

17 Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet—We are reminded again that Sisera has abandoned his chariots, his main advantage, and is now on foot.

to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite:—The writer introduced Heber in v. 11, and now his family joins the action.

In a nomadic encampment, the wife had her own tent. Recall the account in Genesis,

Gen 24:67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

It is curious that Sisera comes to her tent, rather than that of her husband, which must have been in the encampment. Or did he simply approach the tent that lay nearest his direction of approach? We will learn the answer in the next verse.

for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.—

The Kenites are nomadic shepherds, and this peace is not so much a diplomatic liason as an agreement that Heber's family may graze their flocks in the area. To this day, the Bedouin often encamp near villages, and in fact the farmers in the villages welcome them after the harvest, so that the sheep can graze over the stubble and fertilize the fields with their droppings.

Sisera will have encountered these nomads during his patrols, and now seeks refuge with them. But he may not know, as we do (1:16; 4:11), that these nomads are related to the Israelites.

18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not.—Now we see why Sisera comes to Jael's tent. She is aware of his approach, and invites him in.

The invitation appears compromising, to say the least. Her quarters ought to be off-limits to any man except her husband. The invitation appears almost seductive. And her subsequent action appears to violate the state of peace between Heber and Jabin. What will Heber say when he learns of what has happened?

Recall the proximity of the encampment to Kedesh-Naphthali. When Barak mustered the troops in 4:10, surely Heber knew what was going on. It's very likely that his family is on the lookout for ways to help the Israelites, and that Heber will be proud when he learns what Jael has done.

And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. 19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.—She goes out of her way to put him at ease, making him warm and giving him a soothing drink.

20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.—He asks her to stand guard, then falls asleep.

21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.—The verb describing her action with the nail (תקע H8628) is the same that describes Ehud's action with the dagger in 3:21. In both cases Israel's enemy is killed by a deceptive action that leads to a thrust. She also resembles Shamgar in her use of an unconventional weapon.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera,—When we left Barak, he was chasing the chariots toward their base at Harosheth of the Gentiles. After defeating them, he would have realized that Sisera, the most strategic adversary, was not there, so he goes off seeking him.

Jael came out to meet him,—Just as she came out to meet Sisera in v. 18. The family is aware of what is going on, and seeks to play their part.

and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.—As Deborah predicted in v. 9, the honor of destroying Israel’s foe goes not to Barak, but to a woman—not even an Israelite woman, but a sympathetic Gentile.

So who is the deliverer? Deborah the administrative judge? or Barak the reluctant warrior? Now it looks like Jael the Kenite. But recall 4:15, “The Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host.” The story concludes reminding us of this:

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.— Elsewhere in Judges, when an episode concludes with the subduing כָּנַע H3665 of the enemy, the verb is always passive: 3:30 “Moab was subdued,” 8:28 “Midian was subdued,” 11:33 “the children of Ammon were subdued” (cf. 1 Sam 7:13 “the Philistines were subdued,” 8:1 “David . . . subdued them [the Philistines]”). So introducing God explicitly as the subject here confirms the point of the episode: the real deliverer in the history of Deborah and Barak is the Lord .

Deborah, Barak, and Jael all had their roles in the story, but at the end of the day, God subdued Jabin. In a period when there were no Othniels or Ehuds willing to hear the Lord’s voice and deliver the nation, the Lord himself steps in.

We should be comforted to see the Lord’s action. When God’s people prove too weak to overcome the adversary, the Lord steps in. Isaiah predicts the ultimate example of this provision, in the incarnation of God the Son to bring the salvation that we could not earn on our own:

Is. 59:16 And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.—As the death of Eglon allowed the armies of Israel to destroy the Moabites and end their dominion, so the death of Sisera and the destruction of his chariots leaves Hazor undefended, and the Israelites are able to subdue it.

5:1, Hymns and History

5:1 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,—The prose description of the battle against Sisera in ch. 4 is followed by a poem celebrating the victory. Like Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, both participate in the celebration, though v. 7 “I Deborah” suggests that she is the main author.

This is one of several places in the OT when a historical description of God’s mighty acts is followed by a hymn of praise to God, invariably the performed by women.⁷ For example:

⁷ Contrast 2 Samuel 1; when the history records a defeat of God’s people (the death of Saul and Jonathan), it falls to a man, David, to compose a lament mourning the tragedy.

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- In Exodus 14, God opens the Red Sea for Israel, then closes it on the Egyptians to destroy them. In the next chapter, Moses and Miriam lead the nation in a hymn of praise.
- In 1 Samuel 1, Hannah asks the Lord for a son, and he graciously gives her Samuel. In the next chapter, she sings a hymn of praise celebrating his goodness to her.
- In 1 Sam 18:6-7, when Saul and David return from routing the Philistines (including Goliath), the women lead the celebration:

1Sa 18:6 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. 7 And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

- When Jephthah returns from his victory over Ammon, his daughter greets him with victory music (a custom that unfortunately collides with his rash vow):

Jdg 11:34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

- In Psalm 68, David reflects on the victory of Deborah and Barak and other Israelite victories, and notes:

Ps. 68:11, The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those [feminine] that published it.

Our translation obscures the fact that “those that published it” is feminine, המבשרות H1319, describing the women who customarily celebrated God’s victories.

In fact, the hymn of Judges 5 itself bears witness to this difference in gender roles\:

Judg. 5:12 Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Ideally, Barak is occupied with taking captives and other acts of war, while Deborah focuses on celebrating and memorializing those victories.

So the point of the hymn is to commemorate the victory over Jabin and Sisera. It focuses our attention on the Lord as the true deliverer, in contrast to people, whose contributions were varied and not always dependable

5:2-31a, Song of Deborah

The structure is ABC-ABC-DE-DE.

The ABC sections bless the Lord for the willing participation of the people (A), call rulers to praise the Lord (B), and describe the mixed involvement of the people (C) (Table 1, chart).

A: Bless the Lord for Patriots	v.2 Willing people Bless בָּרַךְ H1288 the Lord	v.9 Willing people Bless בָּרַךְ the Lord
B: Celebrate the Victory	3-5 Hear, Kings, the works of the Lord	10-13 Speak, rulers, the works of the Lord
C: Mixed Involvement	6-8 Reticent villages vs. Deborah	14-18 Absent tribes vs. Active ones

Table 1: The Structure of Judges 5:2-18

The DE sections describe the outcome of the battle (D) and describe its consequences (E), first on Israel and its allies, then on future adversaries (Table 2).

D: Outcome of the Battle	19-22 Canaanite kings defeated by heavenly foes	28-30 False optimism of their women
E: Consequences	On expected allies: 23 Cursed be Meroz 24-27 Blessed be Jael	On other nations re. the Lord: 31a Let enemies perish 31b Let those who love him prosper

Table 2: Structure of Judges 5:19-31

2-18, Focus on Israel's Participation

The first part of the poem (ABC-ABC, Table 1) highlights the mixed participation of Israel, and the Lord's gracious deliverance.

2, 9, A: Bless the Lord

2 Praise [bless] ye the LORD.—The expression ברכו יהוה is identical with v.9, introducing the second panel and repeating the conclusion of ch. 4, that God is the ultimate deliverer.

for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.—The verb translated “avenging” (פָּרַעַ H6544) means literally “letting go, releasing.” Elsewhere this word family refers to locks of hair. The noun describes the free-flowing hair of the Nazirite (chart):

Num. 6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the **locks פָּרַעַ H6545** of the hair of his head grow.

The expression likely refers to a Nazirite vow by the warriors: compare Samson (the last of the Judges, and contemporary with this episode), and Absalom in battle with David's men. It is thus parallel with the willingness of the people. We might translate, preserving the order,

That the locks grew long in Israel,
that the people willingly offered themselves,
praise ye the Lord.

This statement is a fitting opening to the song, which celebrates the tribes who supported the war against Sisera (vv. 14-18), and curses one place that did not (v. 23).

9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people.—The next panel also begins celebrating the people who supported the battle. Deborah singles out the governors הַקִּיקִים H2710 G ptc “inscribers,” educated and respected leaders⁸ who did not hide behind their office to stay at home, but (like Deborah) led their people into battle.

Bless ye the LORD.—The end of v. 9 is identical to the end of v. 2.

3-5, B1: Invitation to Hear God's Praises

In the first B section of Table 1, Deborah offers praise to the Lord, and commands foreign kings and princes to hear. In the corresponding member in the second panel, she will invite local governors to go one step further and speak the praises of the Lord.

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.—“Kings” throughout the book refers to the enemies of

⁸ Perhaps resident Levites, custodians of God's הַקִּיקִים H2706. Cf. the מַחֲקִיקִים from Machir, 5:14.

Israel, for as we will be repeatedly reminded, “there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). All who (like Jabin) would rise up against the nation must hear how the Lord has defended them and recognize the fate that awaits them at his hands.

4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,— Seir is “the country of Edom” (Gen 32:3). It lies between Sinai and Kadesh Barnea (Dt 1:2), and the 40 years of wandering is described as “going around Mount Seir” (Dt 2:1). So it is clearly in the south of the land. This is the region from which Israel entered the Promised Land, with the Lord at their head. Now the Lord comes again from the south to deliver his people.

The dominant Canaanite deity is Baal, whose sanctuary was a mountain in the far north. Behind every human battle is a conflict between spiritual forces. At this battle “in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo,” Israel’s Lord marches from the south to confront the northern gods of Canaan.

the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. 5 The mountains melted [flowed] from before the LORD, even that the one of Sinai, from before the LORD God of Israel.—The verse is describing the events of ch. 4, not the Exodus, which included no massive rainstorms. Sinai here is presented as a title of the Lord (“the one of Sinai”), not as one of the mountains that flowed. The Lord entered the battle by bringing torrential rain, which poured from the clouds and cascading down the slopes of the mountains. In doing so, he is usurping the prerogative of Baal, the storm god (recall Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, when the Lord, not Baal, was able to end the drought and send rain).

This important detail clarifies how Barak’s infantry could overcome the chariots of Sisera. A heavy rain saturated the ground along the banks of the Kishon, so that the chariots were bogged down. Later (v. 21), we will read how the river then “swept them away.”

6-8, C1: Mixed Involvement

The C element in each panel (Table 1) contrasts two kinds of people in Israel: those who were unwilling to join in the battle, and those who did participate. The first element is at the level of individuals and villages, while the second one (14-18), summarizes the attitudes of the tribes.

6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael,—We read about Shamgar at the end of ch. 3, and Jael is the wife of Heber, the woman who slays Sisera in ch. 4. The distinctive thing about both people is that they are not Israelites, though both are clearly sympathetic with the nation and act in its support. They emerge because, as we saw in chapter 4 and as this chapter will emphasize, the men of Israel did not step up to the task.

the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.—The lack of leaders had domestic as well as international consequences. The highways were impassible, whether because of Canaanite tolls or because of general lawlessness allowing robberies.

7 The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.—The verb “ceased” הָרַחֵק H2308 probably refers to their reticence to go to battle. The verb appears twice in this sense later in Judges. Samson uses it:

Jdg 15:6 And the Philistines came up, and burnt [Samson’s wife] and her father with fire. 7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will **cease**. 8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter:

And in the war with Benjamin,

Judg. 20:27 the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, ... 28 ... saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I **cease**? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

So until Deborah arose to encourage the men to their duty, everyone was sitting on their hands.

v. 8 summarizes the problem.

8 They chose new gods;—Here is the cause of the trouble: Israel has turned away from the Lord to serve other gods.

then was war in the gates:—In response to Rebellion, the Lord brings unrest as Retribution.

was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?—Yet Israel is unresponsive, her men unwilling to respond to the call of God to defend the land.

10-13, B2: Summary of Victory

Corresponding to 3-5 (Table 1 B), we have a celebration of the Lord's victory. That element was addressed to foreign kings, who were invited to hear. Now Deborah speaks to local rulers within Israel, and urges them as "the people of the Lord" to participate in the worship.

10 Speak,—The verb שִׁירָה H7878 implies not just verbal utterance, but speech with meditation and emotional involvement. Three categories of people are enjoined to engage themselves in this way, calling the entire population to celebrate the Lord's word. The three categories are distinguished by their activity: riding, sitting, walking. Recalling Psalm 1 (walk, stand, sit).

ye that ride on white asses,—Being able to ride on asses rather than walking was a mark of wealth and prestige (chart):

Jdg 10:3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. .. 4 And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. (cf. Abdon, 12:14)

ye that sit in judgment,⁹—The next category, which may include many of those in the first, designates those who decide cases. "Judgment" here is derived from the Hebrew root דִּין for deciding cases, not the more general שָׁפַט meaning "to govern."

and walk by the way.—The third category are the common people, who now can now travel freely, in contrast to their experience in v. 6.

11 They that are delivered from the noise of archers voice of dividers, in the places of drawing water,—Throughout the grazing areas, people dug cisterns to store water for their flocks. The shepherds would bring their flocks for water (Figure 6, chart), which is probably in view in this verse.

The extensive italics in the AV show the translators' uncertainty. The word מִחֲצִיִּים appears only here, but the most direct derivation is from חָצַץ "to divide" rather than חָץ "arrow." It probably refers to the division of flocks after watering, when individual shepherds would call their sheep to separate them after they had drunk together around the well. Sheep recognize the voice of their own shepherd and follow him:

9 While most commentators take מִדֵּיָן as a poetic form of מֵדָה "garments," Boling (AB), following a verbal suggestion by Freedman based on Prov 20:8, understands the word as a מָדָה noun from דִּין meaning the place of judgment, which appears to have been the understanding of the AV.

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

John 10:4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

there shall they [let them] rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel:—The imperfect verbs are probably to be read as volitional, continuing the exhortation of v. 10. When the shepherds call to their flocks, they should recount the Lord’s righteous deeds.



Figure 6: Sheep gathered at a "place of drawing water"
Van and Anita Parunak, June 1975, coordinates 175 095

Two words in this exhortation merit attention.

First, “there,” by the places of drawing water, in the course of their daily lives. This instruction is an extension of Moses’ exhortation in Deuteronomy,

Deut. 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

The first half of the verse urges the shepherds to recite the works of the Lord when they call their sheep to themselves. Our daily speech should be preoccupied with the Lord’s commands to us, and with recalling his righteous acts. Thoughts and speech about the Lord are not to be reserved for times when God’s people are gathered, but should be part of the fabric of our daily lives.

Second, what does it mean for God’s acts to be “righteous”? As we saw in Ps 119:121-144, this word refers to conformity to a standard. In God’s case, the standard is his own word, and in the Psalms is used preeminently of his gracious character as revealed in Ex 34:6. Recall in particular,

Psa. 145:7 They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. 8 The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. 9 The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

In Psalm 145, the song about God’s righteousness is the recitation of Exodus 34.

So “the righteous acts of the LORD” show his loyal love and grace in restoring his people.

then shall (or “let”) the people of the LORD go down to the gates.—As the warriors return home, the people are to go out to meet them.

12 Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.—For the occasion, Deborah composes a hymn, while Barak brings in a parade of captives. The next verse repeats these heroes in inverse order.

13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion¹⁰ over the nobles among the people:¹¹—Barak was previously part of the remnant who survived Sisera’s depredations, but now he rules over the oppressors.

the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.—Deborah, in carrying out the work the Lord had for her, shares in this victorious dominion.

14-18, C2: Role Call of the Tribes

Table 1 C describes the mixed participation of Israel in the battle. In the first panel, in vv. 6-8, the villagers held back from battle and Deborah had to arise to coax them to action. Now in her song she recounts the tribes who were, or who ought to have been, involved, mentioning them chiasmically. Vv. 14-15a praise those who were involved, while 15b-17 describe those who held back for various reasons, and 18 highlights the two tribes who joined Barak in the initial attack.

Before we go through the list in detail, we should make two general observations.

First, Deborah lists ten tribes: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun, Issachar, Reuben, Gad, Dan, Asher, and Naphthali. Judah and Simeon are missing, perhaps because, in the far south of the country, they were not directly affected by Jabin’s dominion.

Second, the first five tribes mentioned (in 14-15a) and the last one (Naphthali, 18) are praised for their role in the war, but in the prose account (4:6), God commands Barak to take only Zebulun and Naphthali into battle. And even this list singles these two tribes out for special bravery (v. 18). What did the other four tribes do to merit praise?

The death of Sisera was followed by a more general clean-up operation of the entire country:

Judg. 4:24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Deborah’s praise for the other four tribes probably reflects their support of this activity.

14-15a, The Heroes

Consider first the tribes who contributed positively to the campaign. They are contiguous to one another and are closest to the Valley of Jezreel, the heart of the conflict (Figure 7, chart).

14 Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek;—Or, “Some from Ephraim, whose root is in Amalek.” Amalek often opposed Israel, attacking them

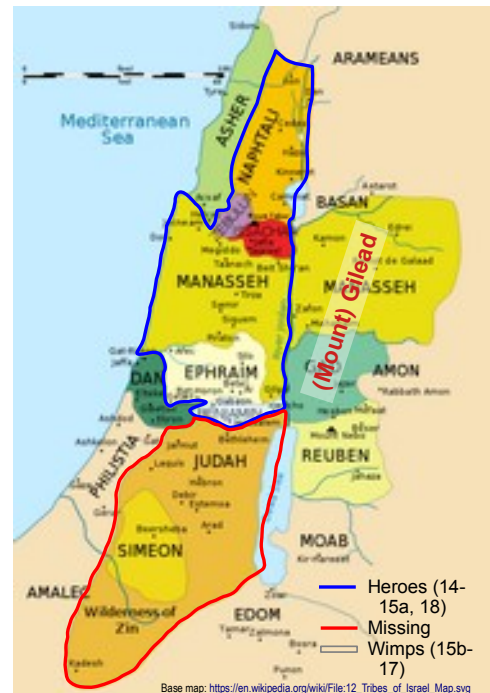


Figure 7: Division of tribes in the war of Deborah. Blue boundary encloses participating tribes; red shows those not named. Others are criticized.

10 The Massoretic pointing takes the verb as apocopated D impf from רדה H7287. All modern commentators except Hervey (Pulpit Commentary) emend the pointing to G pf from ירד H3381, cf. 5:11. See GKC §69g.

11 The syntax is difficult. AV stays with Massoretic accents, associating “people” with the first clause, but then we would expect “nobles” to be in construct. Most move it to the second, “people of the Lord.”

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

during the Exodus and most recently as part of Eglon's coalition against Jericho (3:13). Though Amalek's home territory was in the south, they controlled more northern areas as well. In 6:3, their oppression (with the Midianites) motivates the rise of Gideon, who fights them in the Valley of Jezreel (6:33; 7:12), and their name is attached to part of Ephraim's tribal territory:

Judg. 12:15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, **in the mount of the Amalekites**.

It is in keeping with the spirit of the age, but not to Ephraim's credit, that they allowed pagans to live among them. Nevertheless, some of them (מני אפרים) supported the war against Jabin.

The map suggests another reason that their participation is less vigorous than the other tribes: they are far from the conflict.

after thee, Benjamin, among thy people;—"Thee" must refer to Barak. Benjamin follows after Barak, among his army. Perhaps Deborah brought some of her neighbors to support the effort. Again, as a tribe remote from the battleground, their participation is limited.

Two of the names in the list, Machir and "Gilead . . . beyond Jordan" (5:17), are not traditional names of tribes. Why are they used, and to what do they refer?

out of Machir came down governors,—Machir was the only son of Manasseh, and the name sometimes describes the tribe. But why use this name instead of simply "Manasseh"? The answer has two parts.

The first part is that Manasseh is not a single entity. Half of Manasseh settled with Reuben and Gad on the east bank of Jordan (Num 32:33), while the other half occupied the northern part of the central mountain range up to the Jezreel valley, including Mount Carmel, Megiddo, Taanach, and Beth Shean.

The second part of the answer is an ambiguity in the name "Gilead." As a personal name, Gilead is one of the sons of Machir (Num 26:29), but it is also a geographical region to the east of Jordan, "Mount Gilead," where Laban and Jacob parted company (Gen 31:21, 23, 25). When Moses authorized the transjordanian tribes to occupy the land of Sihon and Og, he assigned half of Mount Gilead to Gad, and half to the eastern part of Manasseh:

Josh 13:24 And Moses gave inheritance unto the tribe of Gad, . . . 25 And their coast was Jazer, and **all the cities of Gilead**, and half the land of the children of Ammon, **unto Aroer that is before Rabbah**; . . . 29 And Moses gave inheritance unto the half tribe of Manasseh: . . . 31 And half Gilead, and Ashtaroth, and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan, were pertaining unto the children of Machir the son of Manasseh, even to the one half of the children of Machir by their families.

The natural dividing line is the river Jabbok, recognized in Josh 12:2 as the division between the portions of Mount Gilead under Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan.

So "Manasseh" refers to two different areas. One of these shares its name and transjordanian location with Gad. We should understand "Gilead" as the entire region of Mount Gilead, that is, Gad and the eastern half of Manasseh, while Machir refers to the western part of Manasseh.¹² Western Manasseh bordered on the Valley of Jezreel and its territory included Harosheth of the Gentiles, so they would have a strong interest in overthrowing Jabin's rule. In the list of tribes in

12 Thus K&D, Cassels, Block, Boling, against Butler, Webb.

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this chapter, all of transjordan, including eastern Manasseh, ignores the conflict, but Machir, which is western Manasseh, sends troops.

In fact, Machir sends not just troops, but also “governors” (chart). The title here (מחקקים, Polel ptc from H2710 “inscribers,” cognate to חוקקים in 5:9) is related to the word חק H2706 for “statute,” an important law that is written down, and in particular, God’s statutes. מחקק is a title for Judah, the royal tribe:

Gen. 49:10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a **lawgiver** from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Psa. 60:7 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my **lawgiver**; (= 108:8)

Isaiah uses it in the context of other titles to describe the Lord:

Is. 33:22 For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our **lawgiver**, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

In Isaiah, the title is intermediate between a local judge and a national king.

So the title refers to some people in Manasseh who are involved with law. In the OT, חק is preeminently God’s statutes, which were preserved at the tabernacle and later the temple, and the people most closely associated with them would be the priests and Levites. God assigned Levitical cities to Manasseh, as to the other tribes, so that people throughout the land could easily consult those with knowledge of the law. Interestingly, the two Levitical cities in Manasseh bordered on the Valley of Jezreel, which was most immediately affected by Sisera’s troops (Figure 8). Perhaps the “governors” here, and those described by the related word in 5:9, are Levites, the custodians of God’s statutes חק H2706.



Figure 8: Levitical cities in western Manasseh (red)

In fact, they send not only troops, but (as Deborah notes in 5:9) governors,¹³ upper-class people willing to expose themselves in battle (chart).

and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen staff of the writer.—שבט H7626 is not the usual word for pen (עט H5842), but is usually translated “staff,” a symbol of authority. These scribes had special authority, perhaps in mustering the troops for battle.

15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;—Mount Tabor lay in Zebulun (1 Chr 6:77 [MT v. 62]), on the northern border of Issachar (Josh 19:22), and the latter tribe could provide valuable intelligence about the terrain below.¹⁴

13 מחקקים Polel ptc from H2710 “inscribers,” cognate to חוקקים in 5:9. Cf. Gn 49:10; Ps 60:9; used in Isa 33:22 to describe the Lord, there translated “lawgiver” and intermediate between the informal leadership of a judge and the role of a king. Are these perhaps Levites, the custodians of God’s statutes חק H2706?

14 In the presentation, I erroneously state that Tabor is in Issachar. (added 25 Nov 2020)

even Issachar, and also Barak:—The word rendered “even” should probably be understood¹⁵ as a homograph that means “foot, base” as in Ex 30:18 (the foot of the laver in the tabernacle, Figure 9, chart).

Ex. 30:18 Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his **foot** also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein.

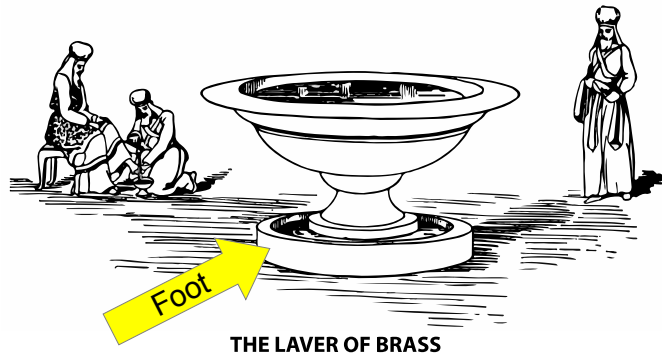


Figure 9: The foot כַּף of the brazen laver

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mcgee_j_vernon/eBooks/tabernacle/chapter-iii-the-laver-of-brass.cfm

Then we would translate, “Issachar was Barak’s base, his support.” Compare Moses on the mountain, upholding Joshua in the valley in the battle against Amalek (Ex 17).

Ex. 17:10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

This meaning also fits with the first half of the verse: they and Deborah remained on Tabor.

he was sent on foot into the valley.—This verse recalls 4:14, when Deborah (as we now see, supported by Issachar) sends Barak down to the attack.

15b-17, The Wimps

At this point we move from the tribes who supported the campaign to those who did not.

Reuben’s refusal is of special interest to the writer, forming a chiasmic stanza. There may be two reasons for this special focus.

1. He is the eldest son, and in a multi-tribe action, might be expected to take part.
2. His full brothers (sons of Jacob by Leah) were Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Simeon and Judah are not named at all, probably because they are so far south, and Levi had no territory and so would not muster troops under its own name. But Issachar and Zebulun both supported the battle, and you would think he might feel an obligation to join them.

For the divisions [clans, streams] of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.—

“Thoughts” חַק H2711 is literally “statues,” the same root that described the lawgivers from Machir. The word indicates strong resolve. The different parts of the family were of one mind, almost as though it were a law. On what did they agree?

16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?—

“Bleatings” שְׂרִיקוֹת H8322 is literally “hissing” or “whistling,” and probably refers to the songs piped by the shepherd (Figure 10, chart). They were quite happy with their pastoral lifestyle, following the flocks and spending their days playing little melodies on their pipes. They agreed

¹⁵ With Cassel, taking כַּף as the noun H3653 “base, support” rather than the particle H3651.

to stay where they were, and not join the conflict.

For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.—In spite of their agreement, some of them privately wondered whether they were doing the right thing in abandoning their close relatives.

17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan:

—As we have seen, Gilead here must refer to the two tribes that occupied Mount Gilead, Gad and half of Manasseh. The verb “abode” שָׁכַן H7931 is used elsewhere of how the tribes occupy their inheritances. Gad’s excuse seems to be that their allotted territory is east of Jordan, so they have no concern with what happens on the west bank—a very different attitude than that which characterized the transjordanian tribes at the time of the conquest:

Num. 32:17 But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land. Num. 32:18 We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance.

Now they cannot be bothered with affairs on the other side of the Jordan valley.

and why did Dan remain in ships?—Later (Judg 17-18), the tribe of Dan migrates to the far north and inland. But at the time of the battle with Sisera, Dan still occupies its original allotment, the seacoast south of Manasseh (Figure 7), including the ancient port of Joppa (Figure 11, Figure 12, chart, from which Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish, Jon 1:3, and the port of entry for cedar logs for both the first [2 Chr 2:16] and second [Ezra 3:7] temples). They no doubt enjoyed a prosperous trade, and preferred to tolerate the growing Philistine presence rather



Figure 10: Shepherd playing flute to flocks, near Kfar Etzion above Elah Valley, between Bethlehem and Hebron
Van and Anita Parunak, June 1975



Figure 11: Joppa (hill) from Tel Aviv.
Van and Anita Parunak Sept 1974



Figure 12: Port of Joppa
Van and Anita Parunak Sept 1974

than support their northern brethren in repelling the Canaanite threat.

But accommodation with the enemy never leads to victory. Their unwillingness to engage in combat means that ultimately they must surrender their own land to the Philistines. The writer is very kind to them, in writing later,

Jdg 18:1 ... the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

It “had not fallen unto them” because they had not obeyed the Lord and taken it. And their complacent attitude manifests itself in their refusal to participate in opposing Sisera.

Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.—Asher occupied Mount Carmel and the coastal plain to the north (Figure 13 chart). The “breaches” are openings in the coastline, which we would call harbors. The major harbor lies between Acco and Mount Carmel, where modern Haifa lies (Figure 14, looking from slopes of Carmel to the highlands of Galilee in the distance), while numerous coves along the shore, like Achzib (Figure 15), offer shelter for smaller craft. Like Dan, Asher didn’t care if Jabin was in control, as long as he could pursue his profitable shipping trade. In fact, we know from 1:31 that he did not control these harbors (Accho and Achzib), so it would be politically foolish for him to oppose Jabin.

18, The Medal of Honor

The roster closes with a chiasmic return to the heroes, featuring Zebulun and Naphthali, the two tribes whom the Lord sent to lead the attack, and who bore the brunt of the conflict:

Jdg 4:6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of **Naphthali** and of the children of **Zebulun**?



Figure 13: Plain of Asher.



Figure 14: Harbor at Haifa, from Mt Carmel to highlands of Galilee
Van and Anita Parunak, February 1975



Figure 15: From Achzib to Rosh Hanikra
Van and Anita Parunak, April 1975

18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.—Barak’s tribe and their southern neighbor Zebulun formed the army that mustered on Tabor and routed Sisera’s chariots.

19-31, Outcome and Prospects

Now we move to the second part of the chapter (Table 2), which alternates between the outcome of the battle (D, 19-22, 28-30) and the twofold consequence of curse and blessing (E, 23-27, 31).

19-22, D1: Outcome on the Battlefield

The first summary of the outcome focuses on the battlefield. Like an announcer in a prizefight, the poet directs our attention to the combatants.

In one corner is the Canaanite coalition around Jabin and led by Sisera. How did they do?

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.—A major motive for ancient wars was money. Kings wanted to ensure that subject nations paid their tribute, while soldiers were motivated by the opportunity to plunder the people whom they overcame. In this case, they were disappointed—there was “no violent gain of silver.”

In the other corner, we expect to see Deborah, Barak, and Jael. But we have learned from chapter 5 that the true victor is the Lord, and now we see his armies:

20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.—Stars in Scripture are often emblematic of angelic hosts (chart):

Deu 4:19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest **the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host [army] of heaven**, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

Job 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ... 7 When **the morning stars sang together**, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Sisera thought he was putting down a local uprising of a subjected nation. But conflict among nations really reflects angelic conflict in the heavens.

In Daniel 10, Daniel prays the restoration of Jerusalem that was promised him in Daniel 9. He confesses his sin and the sin of the nation, and pleads with the Lord to restore his people, over a period of three weeks:

Dan. 10:2 In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Then a heavenly being appears to him, whose description is echoed by John in describing the ascended Lord Jesus in Revelation 1, and who may be the pre-incarnate Messiah. He speaks to Daniel, explaining his tardiness:

Dan. 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for **from the first day** that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. 13 But **the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me** one and

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the **kings of Persia**. ... 20 Then said he, ... and now will I return to fight with the **prince of Persia**: and when I am gone forth, lo, the **prince of Grecia** shall come. 21 But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but **Michael your prince**.

The heavenly messenger, supported by “Michael your prince,” has been involved in heavenly conflict with “the prince of Persia” and “the prince of Grecia [Greece]. A human noble could not withstand angelic warriors for three weeks. We see here a glimpse of the angelic combat that lies behind geopolitical affairs on earth.

So at the time of the battle with Sisera, the real combat was in heaven, and God’s angels, described metaphorically as the stars, intervened to bring victory.

Here is a great encouragement for us in times of trouble (chart). David testified, when the Lord delivered him from Abimelech,

Psa 34:7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

We learned in Hebrews that this is still the role of the angels:

Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? 14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

We see them in this role throughout the NT. When the disciples tried to defend the Lord in the Garden of Gethesemane, he rebuked them,

Matt. 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of **angels**?

Those same angelic hosts are now watching over us. When the priests arrested the apostles,

Acts 5:19 But the **angel** of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

An angel delivered Peter from prison, as the church prayed for him:

Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. 6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. 7 And, behold, the **angel** of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

In the storm on his way to Rome, Paul reported to the sailors,

Acts 27:23 For there stood by me this night the **angel** of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

We can love our enemies and turn the other cheek, even when they threaten us with bodily harm. As long as the Lord has work for us to do, his angels will protect us here, and when our work is done, it is far better to depart and be with Christ (Php 1:23).

21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon.—We learned in 5:4-5 that the Lord sent a massive rainstorm. The Kishon, which drains the entire Jezreel Valley, traverses through a narrow pass between Mount Carmel and the highlands of Zebulun on its way to the Mediterranean (Figure 16, chart). At the narrowest, it is less than 400 yards wide, making it vulnerable to flooding during a heavy rainstorm. It mired the chariots and swept many of them away.



Figure 16: Kishon pass from 1605-231, looking west toward the Mediterranean. Kishon converges from the right, marked by line of trees. Carmel on left, Galilee on right.

Van and Anita Parunak, April 1975

O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.—Or (K&D), “march on strongly,” taking the verb as jussive and “strength” as adverbial accusative. Deborah envisions the battle so realistically that she imagines herself there in the midst of the conflict, triumphing over the foe.

22 Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.¹⁶—The vocabulary is rare and difficult. Most commentators take the first clause as intransitive, “The horses’ hooves pounded, the galloping, galloping of their mighty ones.” The chariot horses are either running away or panicking in the midst of the tumult.

23-27, E1: Curse and Blessing

Each panel of the second alternation ends with a contrast between the misfortune of those who oppose the Lord and the blessing enjoyed by those who serve him.

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.--We don’t know exactly where Meroz is. Because it has inhabitants, it is probably the name of a village, and several candidates in the Jezreel Valley are available. We do, however, know who the angel of the Lord is. He appeared at the beginning of Judges 2 to rebuke the nation for their failure to cast out the inhabitants of the land:

Jdg 2:1 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

The angel of the Lord accompanied Israel from Egypt into the land, repeatedly promising to drive out the local inhabitants and exhorting Israel against alliances with them (Ex 23:20-24; 32:34-33:2.¹⁷ It is likely that Meroz was an Israelite settlement that, in violation of those instructions, was in league with Hazor, and supported Sisera’s troops in their flight from Barak

¹⁶ Mighty ones אַבִּירִי is used of horses in Jr 8:16; 47:3; 50:11.

¹⁷ Neef (ZAW 107 (1995) 118-122)

and his army. The angel calls on those who sing this song to curse Meroz for its lack of support in the battle,¹⁸ in contrast to Deborah's blessing in 5:2, 9 on those who gave themselves willingly to the battle. The complete disappearance of the place reflects the fulfillment of the curse.

24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.--In contrast with the treason of Meroz, Jael, a Gentile, receives blessing for supporting the people of Israel.

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.--With graphic detail, Deborah celebrates Jael's clever deception of Sisera and her destruction of Israel's foe.

The contrast between Meroz the compromising Israelite town and Jael the God-fearing Gentile reinforces the mixed character of Israel's commitment that we have seen, starting with Barak's timidity in ch. 4 and continuing through the role call of the tribes. Israel cannot claim credit for this victory. They triumphed only because "God subdued Jabin" (4:23).

28-30, D2, Outcome at Home

Corresponding to 5:19-22, the disastrous experience of the Canaanite kings on the battlefield, Deborah now envisions the situation back at home, where news of the defeat has not yet arrived.

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?--Sisera's mother is waiting for his return, and worried that he has not come back from what should have been an overwhelming defeat for Israel.

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 colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?--She and her companions comfort themselves with the thought that the spoil is so great that it is taking longer to divide it among the warriors. But we already know that "they took no gain of money" (5:19), and the hope of the women will soon turn into bitter sorrow.

31, E2, Curse and Blessing

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.--Again, we have a curse on the Lord's enemies (like Meroz and Sisera), but a blessing on those who love him (like Deborah, Barak, and Jael).

31b, Conclusion to the Cycle

And the land had rest forty years.—The last clause finishes the cycle with the expected reference to rest.

18 The verse does not use the standard curse formula, the Qal passive participle אָרַר "cursed be ...," but the imperative plural. The angel is not himself declaring the curse, but enjoining others to

Echoes in Later Scripture

Three later texts echo Judges 4-5: Psalm 68, Eph 4:8, and Heb 11:12.

Psalm 68

Background and Structure

In our study of this Psalm,¹⁹ we suggested that David wrote it to celebrate the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, his newly captured capital (2 Samuel 6), where he wanted to build a temple (2 Samuel 7). Figure 17 (chart) shows the overall structure. Sections that contain allusions to Judges 5 are bold.

The outer verses (1-4, 32-35) are a hymn of praise to God, starting with his ride through the desert ערבֹות H6160 (v. 4) during the Exodus, and closing with his triumphant ride through the heavens (v. 33).

Vv. 5-10 recount his approach to the land. The first two recall the Exodus, how God was kind to the fatherless (Joseph), and brought out those who dwelt in chains. 68:7-8 quote Judg 5:4-5, describing the Lord's approach from the south to meet the Canaanites, whose god Baal dwelt in the north. 68:9-10 describe the thunderstorm that destroyed Sisera's army.

Vv. 11-23 are a chiasm focused on the defeat of God's enemies and centered on the preparation of the sanctuary, which was David's theme for the Psalm. This section contains many more allusions to the battle against Sisera.

Then vv. 24-31 describe worship in this sanctuary, including not only Israelites, but also Gentiles. The Lord is clearly moving David to look beyond Israel's Old Testament history to the future kingdom of God.

Echoes of Judges 4-5

Throughout the Psalm, David draws heavily on Judges 4-5, and particularly on the Song in Judges 5. His purpose is not to recount the specific battle with Sisera, but to use it as a prototype for all the wars of the Lord, notably those that he himself has led. He modifies the details to anticipate an even greater conquest at the end of time. Let's note first how closely he echoes Judges, then ask why he chose this particular prototype.

Note the close parallels (Table 3, charts), and how David modifies some of them.

68:7-8: The description of the Lord leading his people is almost identical with the description of his approach from the south to the battle in 5:4-5.²⁰ David adapts it to describe the Exodus as

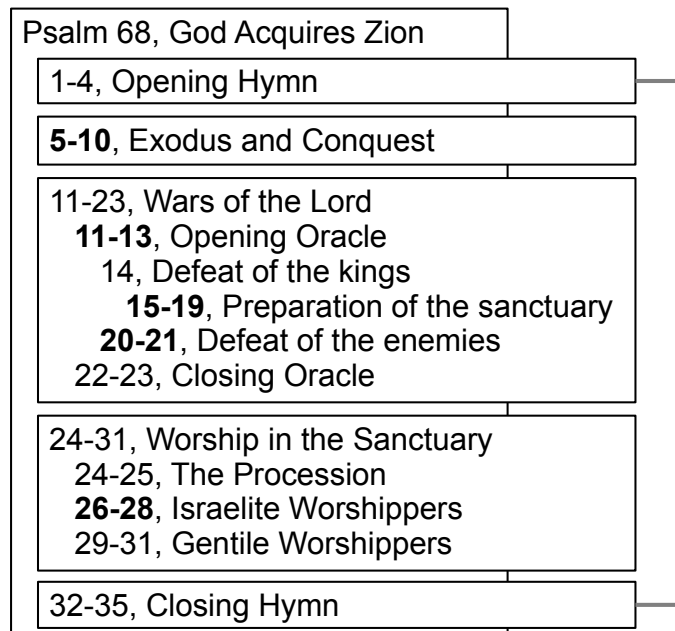


Figure 17: Structure of Psalm 68 (bold sections have allusions to Judges 5)

19 https://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/psalms/notes/Ps_61thru72.pdf

20 The lack of "LORD" in the Psalm reflects its position in the second (Elohistic) book of Psalms.

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

Psalm 68	Judges 5
7 O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people , when thou didst march through the wilderness ; Selah: 8 The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God, the One of Sinai, at the presence of God, the 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, the One of Sinai, from before the LORD God of Israel.
12 Kings of armies will flee apace: and she that tarried at home will divide the spoil .	30 Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey ; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?
13 Though ye have lien among the pots שפתיים	16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds מִשְׁפָּתַיִם, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?
18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive : ... yea, the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them	4:12 And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. 12 Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive , thou son of Abinoam.
19 Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us <i>with benefits</i> , even the God of our salvation.	13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.
21 But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.	26 with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head , when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.
27 There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun , and the princes of Naphtali .	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:

Table 3: Parallels between Psalm 68 and Judges 5

well as the battle with Sisera by having the people follow the Lord from the south in 68:7 (“before thy people”), adding “through the wilderness,” and omitting the reference to the clouds dropping water and the mountains flowing. But the heavens still “drop” or drip, and 68:9 has a heavy rainstorm in view, something not attested during the Exodus. Thus the Psalm collapses the wilderness wanderings and the conquest up to the time of the Judges into a single block.

68:12 recalls the contrast between the defeat of 5:19-20 and the hopes of Sisera’s mother in 5:30. But Sisera’s mother was disappointed. David here recalls that in his wars, the Lord did grant spoil to be divided among the israelite women and others:

1Sam. 30:26 And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD;

68:13: “Pots” is extremely rare, appearing only here and in Ezek 40:43 “hooks,” having something to do with sacrifice, but is cognate with “sheepfolds” in 5:16, equally rare (elsewhere

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

only Gen 49:14). The root appears to refer to setting something down (HALOT), which might be a pot on the fire (as in 2 K 4:38; Ezek 24:3) or laying someone down in death (Ps 22:16), and could certainly refer to causing sheep to repose. “Sheepfolds” would fit all three passages. In the battle with Sisera, Reuben among its sheepfolds did not share in the spoil. But David envisions a far greater conquest under a greater king, when Reuben will share in the blessings.

68:18: The conqueror ascends and leads captivity captive, just as Barak does. Note three points.

- To “lead captivity captive” both here and in Judges (as often elsewhere) means simply “to take captives,” and 68:18 goes on to define these as “the rebellious” (omit the italicized “for”). This expression is a common description of a victorious warrior.
- In the context in Psalm 68, the victor is not David, because he addresses the conqueror as “thou.” It is also not God, whom David everywhere in this Psalm addresses as “O God” (7, 9, 10, 24, 28, 35), because he distinguishes it from “the Lord God” at the end of the verse. Rather, it is someone whom he anticipates, whom we recognize as the promised Messiah.
- The outcome is different here than in Judges. There, the objective was the complete destruction of Sisera and his host, because it was sin for Barak and his contemporaries to dwell among the Canaanites. Here, a greater king than Barak subdues his enemies, not to destroy them, but so that God may dwell among them. The verb שָׁכַן H7931 (literally, “tabernacle”) is the same one used when God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle:

Ex. 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may **dwell** among them.

Here, it reflects David’s purpose to construct the temple, successor to the tabernacle.

68:19: The blessing of the Lord generalizes his provision of Barak and Deborah in 5:13 to deliver the nation.²¹

68:21: The injury to the head of the enemy matches what Jael did to Sisera in 5:26.

68:27: The attention given to individual tribes, and the prominence of Zebulun and Naphthali, reflects the role call of the tribes in 5:14-18. But David adds Judah, absent in the Judges account but central in his plans for the temple.

Unquestionably, David has Judges 5 in mind as he writes. But why would he select this battle, of all the battles recorded in Joshua and Judges, as a prototype of the wars of the Lord?

The answer may lie in the puzzle that we encountered as we worked through Judges 4. Joshua’s battles feature Joshua as the wise, successful commander. The other judges are clearly the heroes of the conflicts in which they feature. The battle with Sisera is different. The author of Judges deliberately teases us with the question, “Who is the deliverer?” At first it seems to be Deborah, then Barak, then Deborah again, and then Jael, but at the end we are led to the conclusion, “The LORD discomfited Sisera and all his chariots and all his host” (4:15), and “God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan” (4:23).

When David and Saul returned to Jerusalem, the women sang their praises:

1Sa 18:7 And the women answered one another as they played, and said, **Saul** hath slain his thousands, and **David** his ten thousands.

But Deborah’s memorial hymn exhorts us, “Bless ye the **Lord**” (5:2, 9).

²¹ I am indebted to A. Parunak for this observation, and its subsequent realization in Eph 4:8.

David was no wimp like Barak, but he declines to take credit for the subjection of Israel’s enemies. He builds his Psalm on an earlier poem that focuses attention on the frailty and mixed loyalty of human forces, and the Lord’s ultimate place as the deliverer of Israel.

The Psalm offers us another lesson. David saw his life through the lens of Scripture. He sought to understand his experiences, and the visions of the future that God showed him, in terms of Israel’s history. So we should prayerfully seek to guide our lives from what we see in Scripture.

Ephesians 4:8

Just as David builds Psalm 68 on Judges 5, so Paul builds Eph 4:8 on Psalm 68.²² The passages are tied together by the expression “lead captivity captive,” that is, take captives.

Table 4 (chart) shows the citation in context. The context is Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts in the church (4:7). This is one of the two central passages teaching that the church, the body of Christ, is made up of individual believers, each with a distinctive endowment by the Spirit. (The other is 1 Corinthians 12.)

Like David in using Judges 5 in Psalm 68, Paul shows a careful attention to the details of his source, but also is led by other Scripture and the Spirit to extend what is there.

Eph 4:7 closely follows Ps 68:18 in describing the conqueror’s ascent on high and the host of captives that he has won. But in the Psalm, the conqueror receives gifts, that is, tribute, from his captives, while in Ephesians he is the one who gives gifts to his people.

This change continues a progression that the Psalm began (chart). Barak showed no mercy:

Judg. 4:16 But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left.

Psalm 68	Ephesians 4
	7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith,
18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for among men;	When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
19 Blessed be the Lord אֲדֹנָי,	9 (Now that he ascended , what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)
who daily loadeth us with benefits	11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for unto the work of the ministry, for unto the edifying of the body of Christ:

Table 4: Paul's Citation of Psalm 68 in Eph 4:8

²² The parallel goes beyond this verse. See Timothy Gombis, *The Triumph of God in Christ : Divine Warfare in the Argument of Ephesians*. PhD Dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2005, and Todd Scacewater, *The Divine Builder: Psalm 68 in Jewish and Pauline Tradition*. PhD Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2017.

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

In the Psalm, right after the reference to ascending and taking captives, we read of a very different treatment of the prisoners:

Psa. 68:18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts ~~for~~ among men; yea, ~~for~~ the rebellious also, **that the LORD God might dwell among them.**

The conqueror in the Psalm seeks not to destroy his captives, as Barak did (Judg 5:15), but to dwell among them (Ps 68:18). Now Paul, in a yet further expansion of grace, claims that the conqueror not only spares those who submit to him, but instead of receiving tribute from them (Ps 68:18), actually endows them with gifts (Eph 4:8).

To understand how Paul makes this leap from receiving tribute to giving gifts, we should consider two other passages that he probably has in mind.

The next verse in the Psalm offers blessing to “the Lord.” The name here is not the sacred name יהוה (which appears in abbreviated form יה in v. 18, “the LORD God”), but אֲדֹנָי, literally “my Lord.” The concurrence of these two names brings to mind Psalm 110:

Psa. 110:1 The LORD יהוה said unto my Lord אֲדֹנָי, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

So when David in Psalm 68 moves from his vision of the residence of יהוה among men to the blessings bestowed by אֲדֹנָי, and speaks of someone “ascending,” Paul is led to Psalm 110, and its vision of the ascended Christ. That lends further meaning to “ascend” in Ps 68:18, as referring not simply to Barak climbing Mount Tabor, but to the Lord Jesus ascending to heaven.

The other source²³ for Paul’s shift from “receive” to “give” is the words of our Lord to his disciples. In the upper room, he promised them,

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

And after his resurrection, he describes this “going away” with the same word “ascend”²⁴ used in Judg 4:12 of Barak and of the messianic conqueror in Ps 68:18,

John 20:17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

The gifts of which he wishes to speak are gifts of the Spirit, as he has already written to the Corinthians:

1 Cor 12:4 there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit ... 11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Under the direction of the Spirit, Paul pulls all these strands together (Table 5, chart). The Lord who gave Barak victory over the Canaanites and revealed to David the coming victor on Mt Zion has come as the Lord Jesus, who has conquered principalities and powers. Paul elsewhere describes the captives whom the Lord Jesus has taken:

23 The book of John was almost certainly not written at the time Paul writes to the Ephesians, but he would have known of these sayings of the Lord by his conversations with the other apostles.

24 ἀναβαίνω G305, also of the ascension in Acts 2:34

Judges 4-5: Deborah and Barak

Col. 2:15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

The spoil in our Lord's conquest is not what he receives from us. We are the spoil which he has taken from the hosts of evil of us, their subjects. He ascends, not to Tabor or Zion, but to the Father's right hand in heaven, from where he now bestows rich gifts on his former enemies.

The chain that extends from Judges 4-5 through Psalm 68 to Ephesians 4 is thus an instance of manifold fulfillment²⁵ (Figure 18, chart), the phenomenon we saw often in Matthew, where an original prophecy is repeated, either in word or by prophetic action, until its final fulfillment.

- The ultimate fulfillment is the conquest of our Savior over principalities and powers, achieved on the cross.
- The initial prophecy must then be the promise in Gen 3:15 that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head.
- The battle with Sisera is an enactment of how God achieves this work, with emphasis that though he uses human means, he himself is the victor.
- And Psalm 68 is a refined prophecy of that coming victory.

	Judges 4-5	Psalm 68	Ephesians 4
Ascending Warrior	Barak	Messiah	Lord Jesus
Destination	Mt Tabor	Mt Zion	Right hand of the LORD
Adversary	Canaanites	Kings	Principalities and Powers (1:21; 6:12; cf. Col 2:15)
Disposition of Captives	Slain	Subdued	Endowed
Gifts	(none)	Received (tribute)	Gave (spiritual gifts)

Table 5: A Progression of Grace

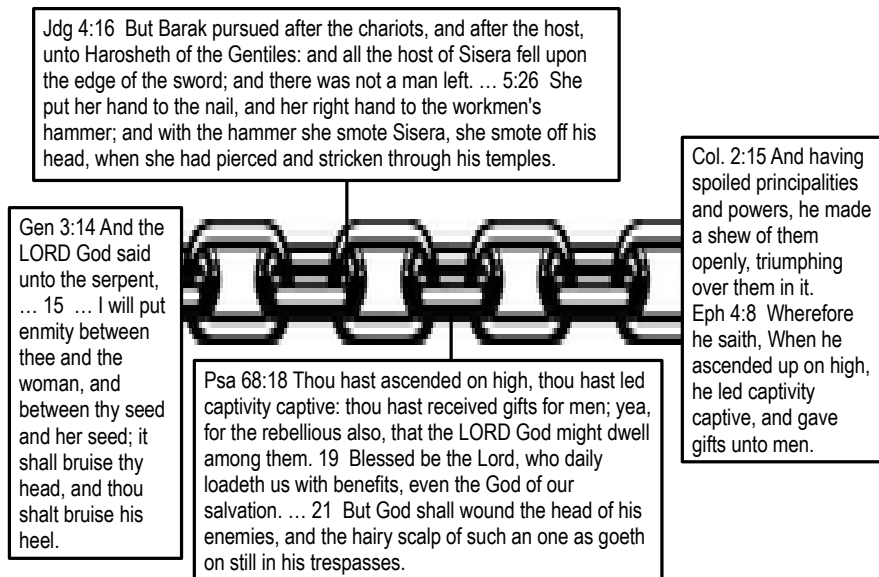


Figure 18: Manifold Fulfillment in Judges 4-5, Psalm 68, and Ephesians 4

²⁵ The mechanism is discussed at length by Willis Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*. Crowell: New York, 1905. Available online at http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/23a-prophets/beecher-prophets-promise/beecher-prophetspromise.htm

Hebrews 11:32

Before we leave Deborah and Barak, we should comment on one final allusion, one that suggested to us that we ought to study Judges. In spite of his cowardice, Barak is one of the four judges cited by Heb 11:32 (the others being Gideon, Samson, and Jephtha) (chart).

Heb. 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of **Barak**, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: 33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight**, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Barak is one of the least impressive of the judges. He does not hear the Lord's initial call, and when Deborah reminds him of it, he insists that she come with him and hold his hand. Why choose him?

The clue may come in Heb 11:34. The writer to the Hebrews is encouraging a congregation that is fearful of coming persecution, and tempted to melt into the Jewish background rather than speak out for Christ. They need to understand that their predecessors in the OT didn't all start off as bold heroes. Some of them began weak and fearful, until God made them strong. They were not always strong, but became strong in the battle. Barak is an excellent example of one who, tempted to ignore his duty, rose up to meet it. And he reminds us that such a spiritual transformation does not happen in solitude. It took Deborah to turn Barak from a wimp to a hero of faith. Perhaps that is why the writer to Hebrews urges his readers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (10:25), and it's why we must take very seriously our regular association with one another in the local church.

Notes

סנך G in Ps 68:20 (ET 19)

The verb is uncommon (9x in the MT), and elsewhere refers to the act of loading a burden (Gen 44:13). The verb is commonly explained in Ps 68:20 as meaning “to carry a burden,” on the basis of Zech 12:3 and the passive in Isa 46:1, 3, and sometimes Neh 4:11.

- Neh 4:11 is obscure; the form is עמש, not עמס, and the syntax is difficult.
- Zech 12:3 could just as well describe those who try to pick up Jerusalem (to load it on an ass) as to those who carry it.
- Isa 46:1, 3 are passive, describing someone who has been loaded with something, preserving the base meaning of the root as “load a burden.”

It appears there is no clear instance of the Qal root in the sense “to carry a burden.” In the context, we must assume that the verb can have a good sense (“heap up with good things, overwhelm with blessing”), as understood by the KJV and LXX, which translates the word with καταυδοῶ “grant prosperity, prosper.”