

# Judges

## Lesson 9

Under the direction of Deborah, Barak's army has defeated the army of Jabin and won Israel's freedom from its twenty years of foreign oppression. With the victory, a song was written and recorded in the ledger of the Scripture. Such songs were not uncommon. Moses gave a song to the nation in Exodus 15 following the Red Sea crossing and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. In that same passage, Miriam led the women to sing a song too. On the last day of Moses' life, he gave the nation a song recorded in Deuteronomy 32 that contained prophecy concerning the future of Israel's people. As we come to chapter 5, Deborah writes and sings a song to Israel with the help of Barak.

## Chapter 5

### (1) The Song of Deborah and Barak

#### (a) The Explanation of Deborah's Song (5:1)

The song of Deborah and Barak is no doubt Deborah's creation. Barak will participate in the singing of the song. In that day, new songs were sung in an antiphonal mode. What does that mean? It means that a person would sing a short line or verse. Then another person would lead the congregation in repeating that line or verse just sung. I remember as a child singing in this mode. For example: The leader would sing "Old Hiram's goat," and we would repeat the words and melody exactly as it was sung, "Old Hiram's goat." The same method would have been used with Deborah's song as she taught it to the nation.

The text begins with the explanation of Deborah's song. This explanation was not part of the song. Rather, it was the writer's introduction to the song in chapter 5, verse 1. "*Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying...*" (5:1)

The creative intellect and divine leadership of Deborah will soon be evident. According to this verse the following song was written and delivered to the people on the same day as the defeat of Commander Sisera and King Jabin, on the day of the victory.

#### (b) The Prelude of Deborah's Song (5:2)

Next comes the prelude of Deborah's song to introduce the reason for the song. Verse 2. "*That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD!*" (5:2)

The reason for the song is found in the words, "*the leaders led*" and "*the people volunteered.*" While these two statements seem simple and innocent, they are not. They are actually statements of condemnation of the leaders and people in Israel over for more than twenty years of rebellion against the LORD. Had the leaders and people remained in obedience to Him, they would not have been under the oppression of King Jabin for all those years. Deborah's statements are also a praise for those currently in leadership and the willingness of the people to follow the leaders. It is amazing how such statements can be both a condemnation and a praise at the same time, but that seems to always be the case. When praise is given to one group or another, it is usually done because of personal unhappiness with the previous state of things. Nevertheless, under Deborah's strong leadership, even facing the threat of death for rebellion against King Jabin, the people mustered the strength to volunteer to put their lives on the line for the freedom of Israel to be a free and sovereign nation. Therefore, the strong leaders and people of Israel showed themselves to be strong after more than twenty years of weakness.

The prelude ends with “*Bless the LORD!*” Other English versions use the better wording of “Praise Ye the LORD” or “Praise Ye Jehovah.” All three are correct. The words *bless* and *praise* are almost interchangeable, but not quite. The word *bless* in Scripture means *the bestowing of some temporal gift*. The word *praise* means *admiration or gratitude for something received*. Both words have something to do with something received, but one is an action, the other is an attitude. Both are about the gift. Which is the correct word that we should use? Perhaps both are correct. It is possible that with Deborah, her words were to convey both an action and an attitude toward the LORD and let the action and attitude be united without any possibility of separation.

#### (c) The Audience of Deborah’s Song (5:3)

After the prelude, Deborah announces the audience of her song in verse 3. “*Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I—to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel.*” (5:3)

This song was to be sung by the Nation of Israel, but the audience was all the kings and rulers in nations surrounding the Nation of Israel. Deborah wants the surrounding rulers to learn from the mistakes of King Jabin and not think that Israel can be oppressed again. In conveying this message, Deborah directs their attention to the One Who caused it all to happen; to the One Who orchestrated the victory; “*to the LORD, the God of Israel.*” How would she do this? She would “*sing.*” She would make a melody with her voice. She would let her voice ring with praise to the LORD for what He had done for Israel and all the kings of the surrounding nations would hear it.

#### (d) The Praise of Deborah’s Song (5:4-5)

The praise of Deborah’s song is directed to the LORD and she confirms that by turning the surrounding ruler’s attention to the power of the LORD as displayed in previous days. Verse 4.

“*LORD, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water.*” “*The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.*” (5:4-5)

To explain Deborah’s thoughts, we need to know that *Seir* is a mountain range in the land of the *Edomites*. Both times when Israel left Mount Sinai, the nation had to traverse Edom’s land and cross the *Seir* mountains. No other path was possible. Deborah knew Israel’s history in the writings of Moses very well. She summed up in these few words the power of the LORD and gave Him praise for it. Israel’s ability to successfully march through Edom’s land was in large part due to the testimony of the people of the Gentile nations about the LORD’s mighty protection of Israel. If you will remember from our study of the crossing of the Red Sea, the news of Pharaoh’s loss spread quickly to the surrounding nations and struck fear in their hearts. Who would want to go against a nation protected by such a powerful God? Consider the ability of the masses of the nation of Israel, under Moses’ leadership, to survive those months in the Edomite land, all bunched together in one massive camp. Edom is not a well-watered land. It is dry and parched with little water available. By the time of Moses, the Jordan River no longer flowed through the land. The creation of the Dead Sea at the time of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah stopped the river. The old river valley was still there, but no water. How would Israel survive? How would the animals drink? Only by the dripping of the rains from heaven. Only by the water springing from the rock. All were signs of the presence of the LORD. But for the Israelites, while they were camped at Mount Sinai, the people were constantly reminded of the LORD’s presence by the quaking of the Sinai Mountain range. Quakes are felt for miles. No doubt, the nations living around Israel, while camped at Mount Sinai, felt the quakes and spread the word. Because of the LORD, Israel was blessed.

## (e) The Background of Deborah's Song (5:6-9)

We know the background of Deborah's song. Nevertheless, she included a short synopsis of the trouble Israel had been in for the last twenty years. It included names to indicate when the trouble began. Verse 6. *"In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways."*<sup>7</sup> *"The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel."*<sup>8</sup> *"New gods were chosen; Then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel."*<sup>9</sup> *"My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!"* (5:6-9)

Deborah mentions Shamgar and Jael. Shamgar was mentioned at the end of chapter 3 for the purpose of telling us that Shamgar served as a judge in some capacity after the death of Ehud. Jael was introduced to us in the middle of chapter 4. She was the woman who drove the tent peg through the temples of Sisera's head. Sisera was the commander of the defeated army of Jabin. With that background on these two individuals, Deborah stated the sad state of life during the days when Shamgar and Jael were living following the death of Ehud. First, the oppression of Israel by Jabin was so terrible in the land that no one dared take to the streets and highways to travel and enjoy life. We know, because of chapter 4, that this was the case for twenty years while Israel was under the thumb of Jabin. Second, visitors did not come through Israel on their way to Egypt or from Egypt to Mesopotamia. The visitors took the long roads out of the way to circumvent the nation. Third, all the nice things about life ended in Israel while it was under Jabin's oppression.

But all of that was corrected with the rise of Deborah. The people of Israel cried out to the LORD and He heard them and chose Deborah. In order for the LORD to answer the people, they had to give up the new gods they had worshipped. For twenty years, the people of Israel were afraid of the army of Jabin that was constantly at their city gates. They had to hide their own swords and spears. The forty thousand people of Israel dared not show their weapons. Deborah was broken hearted for the commanders of Israel's armies. She was also broken hearted for the people of Israel who made up the armies of Israel. All of them were volunteers. All of them were paid nothing to serve. All of them were not really soldiers. But they were the army of Israel. And then Deborah ends with words, *"Bless the LORD!"* Remember, the word *"bless"* means *to bestow some temporal gift*. It seems that this is a request from Deborah for the benefit of the people of Israel. At the end of twenty years of oppression, they needed a temporal, earthly, gift from the LORD. I do not believe Deborah was offering a temporal gift to the LORD in these three words.

## (f) The Memory of Deborah's Song (5:10-12)

After establishing the background of Deborah's Song, she includes the memory of Deborah's song. Verse 10. *"You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who travel on the road—sing!"*<sup>11</sup> *"At the sound of those who divide flocks among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates."*<sup>12</sup> *"Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam."* (5:10-12)

In this passage, Deborah recounts the memory of how things were before the oppression of Jabin. Israel's people rode on white donkeys, sat on rich carpets, traveled the roads in safety. With the defeat of Jabin, Israel could once again see those kinds of days again. It was worth singing about. Furthermore, they could remember all the LORD had done for the nation of Israel, all the great things Israel could experience under His direction. In addition, Israel could return to the gates of the cities for the LORD's guidance, and that is what they would do with Jabin gone. It was worth singing about. It was worth Deborah singing about. It was worth Barak singing about. But more than that, under the direction of Deborah, Barak had freed the Israelites from their oppression.

Working her way through the details to set the scene, it is now time to sing about the war she led. We come to the people of Deborah's song. We start with those who came to fight. Verse 13. *"Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors."*<sup>14</sup> *"From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office."*<sup>15a</sup> *"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels...."* (5:13-15a)

We will continue with this story in the next lesson.