

THE SONG OF DEBORAH:
POETRY IN DIALECT

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RECONSTRUCTED HEBREW
TEXT AND TRANSLATION

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TEXT AND TRANSLATION

In this chapter, the Song of Deborah is reconstructed according to the changes proposed in Chapter One and the outline presented at the end of Chapter Two. Changes made to the MT are marked by the customary sigla:

() explanatory additions in English translation

[] editorial deletion from the Hebrew text

< > editorial addition to the Hebrew text.

Italicized words in the English indicate translations which are new with this study of the Song of Deborah. Meter and syllable count are listed at the left of the Hebrew text. Metrical balance in the poem is discussed in Chapter VII. Changes in the consonantal MT and vocalization, listed above in Chapter I, are discussed in the commentary in Chapter Six.

There has been no attempt to make the Hebrew text fit a historiographic agendum (as did Cheyne [see Appendix], who forced the text to support his “Jerahmeelite theory”). Were this poem a legendary *ballad* completely outside the sphere of *history* (דברי הימים), and were the words of *Pesahim* 6b also true for the Deborah–Barak–Yael tradition in Judges 5, that אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה “there is no chronological order [of events] in the Torah,” the Hebrew text of Ju 4:23–5:31 and the translation of the “Song of Deborah” would still read as follows.

I. Prose prologue: 4:23–24

4:23 God subdued in that day Jabin, King of Canaan, before the Israelites. 4:24 Yea, the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on Jabin, King of Canaan, until they finally destroyed Jabin, King of Canaan.

II. Poetic prologue: 3:31; 5:6–7, 5:1–2b

3:31 Then later Shamgar ben-Anat appeared on the scene!

He smote with a mattock *two marauding bands*;

he *plundered* hundreds of men with a(n) (ox)goad.

He was *appointed overseer*, and gained victories

by himself for Israel!

5:6 From the days of Shamgar ben-Anat,

from the days he *used to attack (covertly)*, caravans ceased

and *caravaneers* had to travel roundabout routes.

Warriors *deserted*, in Israel they *failed to assist*,

until the arising of Deborah, the arising of a Mother in Israel!

5:1 Then Deborah made Barak ben-Abinoam

march forth on that day

when the *heroine called for heroism* in Israel,

when the militia was summoned,

(by her) saying:

I. Prose prologue 4:23–24

ויכנע אלהים ביום ההוא את יבין מלך כנען
 לפני בני ישראל:
 ותלך יד בני ישראל הלוך וקשה על יבין מלך כנען
 עד אשר הכריתו את יבין מלך כנען:

II. Poetic Prologue 3:31; 5:6–7, 5:1–2b

3+2	12	ואחר <ה>יו היה שמגר בן ענת
3+3	15	וַיִּכְּ אֶת פְּלִשְׁתִּים שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בַּמִּלְחָמָה
2+2+2	12	הבקר וישע גם הוא את ישראל.
2+3		בימי שמגר בן ענת
	16	בימי יע<י>ל חדלו ארחות
3+2	17	והלכי נתיבות ילכו ארחות עקלקלות
2+2	13	חדלו פרזון בישראל חדלו
3+3	15	עד שקמתי דבורה שקמתי אם בישראל.
2+2+2		ות<א>שר דבורה
	17	ברק בן אבינעם ביום ההוא
3+3	18	בפרע פרעות בישראל בהתנדב עם
		לאמר:

III. Deborah's exhortation: 5:2c-4, 5:8-9

5:2c "PRAISE YAHWEH!

Hear, O kings! Listen, O princes! I am for Yahweh!

I, yes I, *I will attack, I will fight* for Yahweh, the God of Israel.

5:4 O Yahweh, when you went out from Seir,

when you marched from the plain of Edom,

the earth trembled *noisily*, the heavens dropped open,

the clouds dropped *torrentially*.

The waters of the mountains flowed from the presence of Yahweh,

the One of Sinai,

from the presence of Yahweh, my God.

God will provide strength.

5:8 God will muster the *recruits*. When *the brave ones* battle,

shield, *moreover*, and spear

will appear among the forty thousand in Israel.

Respond to the call, O leaders of Israel!

O you who are summoned for the militia!

5:9c PRAISE YAHWEH!"

III. Deborah's exhortation: 5:2c-4, 5:8-9

ברכו יהוה:

2+2+2	18	שמעו מלכים האזינו רזנים אנכי ליהוה
2+2+2	18	אנכי אשירה אזמר ליהוה אלהי ישראל.
3+3	18	יהוה בצאתך משעיר בצעדך משדה אדום
3+2+3	18	ארץ רעשה גם שמים נטפו גם עבים נטפו.
3+3+3		מִיַּם הַרִים נָזְלוּ
		מפני יהוה זה סיני
	22	מפני יהוה אלהי.
2+3	11	ישר אל יבחר אלהים חדשים.
3+4+3		אז ילחמנו <ו> שערים
		מגן אם יראה ורמח
	26	בארבעים אלף בישראל.
3+2	17	לבי <ו> לחוקקי ישראל המתנדבים בעם.
		ברכו יהוה.
<u>55</u>	<u>148</u>	

IV. Mustering the troops: 5:10–13

5:10 Riders on young donkeys,
those sitting on *mules*,
and those walking along the way
5:11 *hastened on mountain-roads*,
hurrying between the mountain-passes,
where the victories of Yahweh would be given—
the victories of his two warriors in Israel,
when the *very storms* would descend from Yahweh.
5:12 The *troops* of Deborah roused themselves
to rout the troops of the pursuer.
Barak *made preparations to attack*,
ben-Abinoam to take prisoners.
5:13 When the *caravan-leader* went forth against the nobles,
(when) the militia of Yahweh descended,
they were accompanied by (heavenly) warriors.

IV. Mustering the troops: 5:10–13

2+3+3	רכבי אתנות צחרות
	ישבי על כדים
22	והלכי על דרך
2+3+3	שיחו מק[ן]ים
	חצצים בין משאבים
20	שם יתנו צדקות יהוה
3+2+3	צדק[ו]ת פרזנו בישראל
21	אז ירדו לשערי מעם יהוה.
3+3	עורי עורי דבוקה
14	עורני עורי דבר.
3+3	ישיר קום ברק
14	ושבה שבים בן אבינעם.
4+4	אז ירד שריד לאדירים
	עם יהוה ירד
21	לי[ו] בנבורים.
$\overline{44}$	$\overline{112}$

V. Strategy of the forces: 5:14–16

5:14 Some from Ephraim, *hastening* through Amalek,
would strike at the rear;

Benjamin from *concealment* would attack.

5:15 From Machir commanders would go down.

Yea, from Zebulun, (those) brandishing the marshal's mace,
and officers from Issachar along with Deborah.

That *he might inflict defeat*, Barak was *concealed* in the plain.

Dispatched with his footmen along the tributaries was Reuben.

Gad had *joined* them.

5:16 Those of *true courage circled about*

to wait between the *ravines*,

to listen, *to look for stragglers* along the tributaries,

to triumph over the cowardly chieftains.

V. Strategy of the forces: 5:14–16

3+3+3		מני אפרים שרש>י<ם
		בעמלק אחר יכ>ו<
	24	בנימין בעמם יכ>ה<
2+2	11	מני מכיר ירדו מחקקים
3+3		ומזובולן משכים בשבט ספר
	24	ושרי ביששכר עם דברה.
2+2	10	ויששכר כ>י<ן ברק בעמק.
2+2+2	14	שלח ברגליו בפלגות ראובן.
		גד לים.
2+3	14	חקקי לב למזה ישבת בין משפתים
2+2+3		לשמע שרקנ[ן]ת עדרים לפלגות
	21	ראו ב[ן] גדולים חקרי לב.
$\overline{41}$	$\overline{118}$	

VI. Israelite attack: 5:17–18

5:17 Gilead in Trans-Jordan went on *alert*.

then Dan *boldly attacked* ships;

Asher *assailed* along the water's edge

and *struck* against its *harbors*.

5:18 Zebulon *swam (underwater)*, risking his life;

Naphtali *attacked* Merom.

VII. Canaanite counterattack: 5:19

5:19 The kings were forced to come. They fought.

(But) when the kings of Canaan fought,

from Taanach along the waters of Megiddo,

silver spoils they did not take.

VI. Israelite attack: 5:17–18

3+2+2	גלעד בעבר הירדן שכן.
19	ודן למה יגור אניות
2+2+3	אשר ישב לחוף ימים
17	ועל מפרציו ישכון.
2+3+3	זבלון עם חרף נפשו למות
19	ונפתלי על מרום ישד.

VII. Canaanite counterattack: 5:19

3+3	הבאו מלכים נלחמו
18	אז נלחמו מלכי כנען
3+3	בתענך על מי מגדו
16	בצע כסף לא לקחו.
$\overline{34}$	$\overline{89}$

VIII. The defeat of the Canaanites: 5:20–23

5:20 From the heavens fought the stars,
from their stations they fought against Sisera.

5:21 The Wadi Kishon swept them [the chariots] away,
the Wadi *surged seaward*.

The Wadi Kishon *overtook* (them), *it overflowed*, *they sought refuge*.

5:22 Then *retreated up the slopes* their horses (and their) *chariots* —
his chariot, his stallions.

5:23 *Doomed to die*, *they panicked*—Yahweh had *sent a cloudburst!*
Their riders *were in total panic!*

Truly victorious were the ones going forth for the *Warrior* Yahweh,
for the *Warrior* Yahweh, with the (heavenly) heroes!

VIII. The defeat of the Canaanites: 5:20–23

3+3		מִן שָׁמַיִם נִלְחָמוּ הַכּוֹכָבִים
	22	מִמְסֻלוֹתָם נִלְחָמוּ עִם סִיסְרָא.
3+3	12	נָחַל קִישׁוֹן גִּרְפָּם נָחַל קָדוּם יָם
3+2	11	נָחַל קִישׁוֹן תִּדְרֹךְ יִנְפֹשׁ יַעֲזֹוּ.
3+2+2		אִז הִלְמוּ עֲקְבוֹ סוֹסִימֹו <ו> דְּהָרוֹת
	20	דְּהָרַת אַבִּירִיו
2+3+3		אִוֹ <ו> רֹו מְרוֹזֵא <י> ׀ רִים לֹאךְ יִהוּה.
	18	אָרוֹ אָרוֹר יִשְׁבִּיהֵן <ן>.
2+3+3		כִּי לֹא <ו> בְּאִי לַעֲזֹרַת יִהוּה
	19	לַעֲזֹרַת יִהוּה בְּנִבְוֵרִים.

IX. Assassination of Sisera: 5:24–25, 5:27a, 5:26, 5:27b

5:24 Most blessed among women is Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite,
among women in tents she is most blessed.

5:25 Water he requested, milk she gave,
in a *truly magnificent goblet* she brought cream.

5:27a Between her legs *he drank*, he fell to sleep.

5:26 She stretched her hand to the tent-pin,
her right hand to the workmen's hammer.
She hammered Sisera, battered his head,
shattered and pierced his neck.

5:27b Between her legs *half-conscious* he fell;
motionless, powerless, there he fell slain.

IX. Assassination of Sisera: 5:24–25, 5:27a, 5:26, 5:27b

3+3+3		תברך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקיני
	24	מנשים באהל תברך.
2+2	9	מים שאל חלב נתנה
2+2	11	בסף לאדירים הקריבה חמאה.
2+3	12	בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב.
3+3		ידה ליתר תשלחנה
	17	וימינה להלמות עמלים
2+2+3		והלמה סיסרא מחקה ראשו
	22	ומחצה וחלפה רקתו.
2+2		בין רגליה כרע נפל
3+2	17	באש הכרע שם נפל שדוד.
$\overline{44}$	$\overline{112}$	

X. Anxiety in Sisera's court: 5:28–30

5:28 Through the window she peered—but (only) *emptiness!*

The mother of Sisera *inquired* (at) the lattice:

“Why tarries his chariot's arrival?

Why so late the sound of his chariotry?”

5:29 *The clairvoyants among her damsels divined.*

Indeed, *her soothsayer reported* to her:

5:30 “*The victors have forded (the water);*

they are dividing the spoil—

a wench or two for the head of the hero—

spoil of dyed cloth for Sisera, spoil of the best cloth,

an embroidered cloth or two for the spoiler's neckerchiefs.”

XI. Poetic conclusion: 5:31a

5:31a Thus may all the enemies of Yahweh perish.

(May) His lovers (be) like the rising of the sun

because of His power.

XII. Prose epilogue: 5:31b

5:31b And the land was at peace for forty years.

X. Anxiety in Sisera's court: 5:28–30

2+2	11	בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב.
3+2+2		אם סיסרא בעתה אשנב
	17	מדוע בשש רכבו לבוא
2+2	13	מדוע אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו.
3+2+2		חכמות שרותיה תענינה.
	19	אף היא תשיב אמריה לה
2+2	11	הלאים צאו יחלקו שלל
2+2	11	רחם רחמתים לראש גבר
2+2	16	שלל צבעים לסיסרא שלל צבע צבעים
2+2	12	רקמה רקמתים לצוארי שלל:

XI. Poetic conclusion 5:31a

2+2	11	כן יאבדו כל אויבי־ים יהוה
2+2	13	ואהביו כצאת השמש בגברתו.

XII. Prose epilogue 5:31b

ותשקט הארץ ארבעים שנה.