

• Deborah's concerns

**1. About involvement in worship**

• The shepherds praise God at their watering places

One major concern of Deborah's song is to note who did and who did not get involved in zeal for the kingdom of God.

1. **Deborah is concerned about involvement in worship.** She summons everyone to praise God, including the rich ('You who ride on white donkeys. ..') and the common people ('you who walk along the roads'). The next lines refer to the shepherds.

*<sup>11</sup>Listen to the sound of the singers at the watering places. There they tell about the victories of Yahweh. They tell about the victories of Yahweh's warriors in Israel. There was a time when Yahweh's people went down to the city gates.*

When Sisera's invaders had attacked the land, life had become difficult for the shepherds. They had been forced to shelter inside the towns with walls and gates around them. Now at the various watering places where the shepherds take their sheep, musicians should assemble to lead the shepherds in praising God.

Deborah knows that she too must praise God. Worship of Yahweh is not just for shepherds.

• Deborah

*<sup>12</sup>Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, sing a song!*

*And she calls upon her friend Barak.*

• Barak

*'Get up, Barak! Son of Abinoam, lead away your captives!'*

**2. About involvement in exertion and struggle**

• Leaders and people

2. **Deborah is concerned about involvement in exertion and struggle.** She records those who were and those who were not involved in rescuing the nation.

*<sup>13</sup>Then a remnant of the nobles went down<sup>1</sup> The people of Yahweh went down as mighty warriors).*

She notes again that both high-born leaders ('a remnant of the nobles') and the common people ('the people of Yahweh') were working together.

Then she notes which tribes got involved and which did not.

**Supportive tribes named**

*<sup>14</sup>Some came from Ephraim, whose home is in Amalek After you, Benjamin, with your people! From the family group of Makir, the commanders came down. And from Zebulun came men who lead with an officer's staff.*

• Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh and Zebulun

First, four tribes are mentioned which helped in the battle, Ephraim who occupied territory once occupied by Amalekites <sup>14</sup>, Benjamin who had a position of leadership, Makir which was part of the tribe of Manasseh, and Zebulun.

<sup>14</sup> Judges 12:15

Another supportive and loyal tribe is mentioned.

• Issachar

*<sup>15a</sup>The princes of Issachar were with Deborah. The people of Issachar were loyal to Barak. They followed him into the valley).*

**Unsupportive tribes named**

But next is mentioned a tribe which refused to come to the aid of the whole nations.

• Reuben

*<sup>15b</sup>The sections of Reubenites thought hard about what they would do.*

*16 Why did you stay by the sheepfold?  
Was it to hear the music played for your sheep?  
The Reubenites thought hard about what they would do'.*

Deborah is being sarcastic! Three other unsupportive sections of the people were the inhabitants of Gilead, the people of Dan, and the people of Asher.

• Gilead who lived on the east bank

• Dan occupied with its ships

• Asher unwilling to leave home

**Tribes who risked their lives**

• Zebulun and Naphtali

• Their deeds in song

• The involved and the neglectful – a permanent record of both

*17 'The people of Gilead stayed east of the Jordan River. People of Dan, why did you stay by the ships?  
The people of Asher stayed at the seashore  
They stayed at their safe harbours'.*

The people of Gilead thought they need not join in the conflict since they live on the other side of the Jordan river. The people of Dan were too busy doing business with Phoenicians and their ships. The people of Asher were unwilling to leave their homes by the Mediterranean sea.

*18 Two peoples who were very different were Zebulun and Naphtali.  
'But the people of Zebulun risked their lives.  
So did the people of Naphtali on the battlefield'.*

Deborah puts their deeds into song. These tribes will have their successes named wherever this song is sung.

God is looking for involvement in God's kingdom, and that includes support of His leaders. Deborah has mentioned, in one way or another, all of the tribes of Israel except the Levites. She has recorded forever those who will receive honour for what they did, and all of those who deserve a reputation for neglect of God's kingdom, laziness, preoccupation with their own business – even enjoyment of the Mediterranean seaside!

**3. The matter of involvement brings cursing for some and honour for others.** The battle was intense, but the kings of Canaan were thoroughly defeated.

*19 'The kings came, and they fought.  
At that time the kings of Canaan fought  
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.  
But they took away no silver or possessions of Israel'.*

But God was in control of what happened and even the stars and the rivers were against His enemies. Deborah envisages the stars watching the battle and giving their encouragement. Torrential rain helped Israel and the floodwaters of the rivers hindered Sisera's men.

*20 'The stars fought from heaven.  
From their paths, they fought Sisera.  
21 The Kishon river swept Sisera's men away,  
that old river, the Kishon River.  
March on, my soul, with strength!  
Then Sisera's forces tried to escape.  
22 'They the horses' hoofs beat the ground  
Galloping, galloping to Sisera's mighty horses'.*

It was at this time that one town refused to give any help to Israel.

*23 "May the town of Meroz be cursed" said the angel of the Lord.  
"Bitterly curse its people,  
because they did not come to help the Lord.  
They did not fight the strong enemy".*

• Meroz cursed for not coming to help the Lord

• Jael remembered for giving support

But Jael is ever to be remembered as a woman who supported the people of God.

*24 'May Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite,  
be blessed above all women who live in tents.  
25 Sisera asked for water  
but Jael gave him milk.  
In a bowl fit for a ruler*

she brought him cream.

<sup>26</sup> Jael reached out and took the tent peg.

Her right hand reached for the workman's hammer. And she hit Sisera! She smashed his head!

She crushed and pierced the side of his head!

<sup>27</sup> At Jael's feet he sank.

He fell, and he lay there.

At her feet he sank. He fell.

Where Sisera sank, there he fell, dead!

• By the end of the battle all expectations have been reversed

At the end of the battle, all expectations have been reversed. The people of Jabin were confident of victory. Sisera's mother takes it for granted that her son will return victorious.

<sup>28</sup> Sisera's mother looked out through the window. She looked through the curtains.

She asked, "Why is Sisera's chariot so late in coming?"

Why are the sounds of his chariot's horses delayed?"

<sup>29</sup> The wisest of her servant ladies answer her.

And Sisera's mother says to herself,

<sup>30</sup> "Surely they are taking the possessions of the people they defeated!

Surely they are dividing those things among themselves! A girl or two is being given to each soldier.

Maybe Sisera is taking pieces of dyed cloth.

Maybe they are even taking

pieces of dyed, embroidered cloth for my neck,<sup>2</sup>

as plunder"

• Joy for Israel but tragedy for the wicked

There has been joy for Israel but tragedy for Sisera's mother. This is the way it will be for the future of the kingdom of God. The expectations of the wicked will be entirely reversed.

Deborah's conclusion follows.

• Deborah's conclusion

<sup>31</sup> "Let all your enemies die this way, Lord!

But let all the people who love you

be powerful like the rising sun!"

• Peace in the land for 40 years

And a final comment on the story of Deborah and Barak tells of the result of their work. <sup>1</sup> "So there was peace in the land for forty years'.

<sup>1</sup> 5:31

**Notes**

1 This translation reads yarad instead of yerad and ignores the Hebrew accents which puts 'people' in the previous line.

2 This translation slightly emends the Hebrew.

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