

Judges Chapter 5 Part 4

“The world is upside down and backwards.” Thank you Captain Obvious. Tell me something I don’t know.

At times, it seems the Devil is working overtime to get the Tribulation started. When his lies hit reality, many people will get hurt for all eternity. The only defense is to teach the Truth. Hence, Bible class.

Judges is a book for our times. Due to unbelief, lack of faith by believers, the world seems upside down and backwards. But God is waiting to bless those who trust in Him.

The book of Judges is a challenge to study. It is one of the most difficult books to study. Chapter 5, The Song of Deborah is the most difficult chapter.

Let me start by reading a translation you will not see on-line. It is from a Master’s Thesis entitled, “An Exegesis of the Song of Deborah,” by James Loeffel. This serves as a review of what we have already covered and a step into what we will cover tonight.

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

Judges 5:2 When the warriors showed no restraint in Israel, When the people volunteered—Bless YHWH!

Judges 5:3 Listen, O Kings! Give ear, O rulers! I—I will sing unto YHWH! I will make music unto YHWH, the God of Israel!

Judges 5:4 YHWH, When you came up from Seir, When you marched out from the country of Edom—The Earth shook! Yes, the heavens dripped! Yes, the clouds dripped—water!

Judges 5:5 Mountains shook, Before YHWH, The One of Sinai! Before YHWH, The God of Israel!

Judges 5:6 During the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, During the days of Jael The highways ceased And travellers went on circuitous by-paths.

Judges 5:7 They ceased outside the walls, In Israel they ceased. Until you arose, Deborah! Until you arose as mother in Israel!

Judges 5:8 Israel chose new gods—Then war at the gates! A Shield, was it seen? A spear among forty thousand in Israel?

I have included this translation for a couple of reasons. In some portions, the translation is different than the ones I have presented so far. That is partly a reflection of the difficulty with the Hebrew. This translation also is an attempt to understand the flexibility of the author of this hymn in the Hebrew. In some cases, it may be more readable than the NASB.

Now let's return to where we left off last week. I had a chance to go to the Dallas Theological (DTS) Library this past week and gleaned some new information about the "Song of Deborah."

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All the commentators I have looked at complain about the condition of the Hebrew text and the Hebrew used in the Song of Deborah. Here is a comment by R.K. Harrison: “The Hebrew text of Judges has been preserved and transmitted remarkably well, and aside from corruptions in the Song of Deborah it is among the best of the non-Pentateuchal writings in regards purity.” Somewhere I saw a comment that essentially said that the Song of Deborah was written down many times for liturgical use. As a result, there were variations introduced into the copies. Add to that the flexibility of language available to a poet and some commentators just use the Passover rule. Others make up stories. A part of this problem involves the Septuagint (LXX) translation which itself seemed to have difficulty with the Hebrew text.*

But we have eyesight aided by the Holy Spirit, if we will only trust Him. As Jesus said in the upper room discourse:

John 16:12 “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them at the present time.

John 16:13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

John 16:14 He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose it to you.

John 16:15 All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose it to you.

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You heard L.S. Chafer reference those verses last week.

Let us return to the text of Judges where we left off last week.

Judges 5:6 (NASB) “In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the roads were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways.

Here is Chisholm’s translation, which I prefer:

Judges 5:6 (Chisholm) In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael caravans disappeared; travelers had to go on winding side roads.

Roads were deserted. The Hebrew word for “deserted” actually means “to cease.” Obviously, there is some figure of speech involved here.

I am surprised at the insight of a Master of Theology thesis from 1981 by James Loeffel. Entitled “An Exegesis of the Song of Deborah,” it explains many details that are merely summarized or glossed over by commentators. For instance, in this case, the Hebrew word translated as “roads” in the NASB may actually be “roads.” Others go with “caravans” as does Chisholm and the TDOT. How can this be explained? Loeffel explains, this is likely a metonym. Huh? I had to practice saying that word just to get the pronunciation down. What does this mean? In speech, someone might use one word instead of another to spice up the wording or to highlight something. That is a metonym. This word, according to Merriam-Webster online, comes from the Greek “meta” (change) + “-ōnymon” (name), literally “change the name.” One website used the term “silver screen” as such a term in English. An actor makes the switch from the stage to the silver screen. In other words, the movies. The term silver screen is used instead of the movies to highlight the

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glamor of the movies. Here is an excerpt from Wikipedia: “A silver screen, also known as a silver lenticular screen, is a type of projection screen that was popular in the early years of the motion picture industry and passed into popular usage as a metonym for the cinema industry. The term silver screen comes from the actual silver (or similarly reflective aluminium) content embedded in the material that made up the screen's highly reflective surface.”

So, here in Judges, a word for road is used to highlight where caravans traveled. The caravans ceased traveling on the road because of the lawlessness in the land. Both translations are correct if you understand that one is a literal translation (road) and the second one (caravan) is picking up the Hebrew metonym.

As I mentioned last time, caravan trade was important economically, wherever it went.

Roundabout ways/winding roads. As a result of lawlessness, people used roundabout ways of traveling because bad people with bad intentions frequented the main highways. In some cases, that is happening today. How many car jackings do we hear about, almost daily. If you know of a bad area in Dallas, do you use a roundabout way to get somewhere rather than chance a car jacking? Where the police are being defunded, crime, like murders and even car jackings is increasing.

Let's proceed to verses seven and eight.

Judges 5:7 (NASB) The peasantry came to an end, they came to an end in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel.

I had trouble reading this in the English NASB. “The peasantry came to an end...” What does that mean?

Here is the translation from Robert Chisholm:

Judges 5:7 (Chisholm) Warriors were scarce, they were scarce in Israel; until you arose, Deborah, until you arose as a motherly protector in Israel.

Here is Loeffel's translation:

Judges 5:7 (Loeffel) They ceased outside the walls, In Israel they ceased. Until you arose, Deborah! Until you arose as mother in Israel!

Do you notice some differences?

Is it “peasantry” or “warriors?” Per Chisholm, the meaning of the word is “uncertain.” He continues, “Some understand the meaning as “leaders” or “those living in rural areas.” The subject, the uncertain word is in the singular but the verb is in the plural suggesting the noun is a “collective.”

The verb for ceased/come to an end used by NASB & Loeffel and “scarce” by Chisholm is the same word used in verse 6, “to cease.” It is often used of some human activity that is ceasing.

Here is Loeffel's take on this: “The poetess takes the perspective of those of Israel who were shut up in their cities as she laments over Israel's sad condition.”

This gives the impression that there was no escape from their situation. When you abandon your relationship with God, there is only one escape: trust the Plan of God your Father. He wants to bless you. But apart from faith dependence on the Holy Spirit, there is no benefit.

On a tangential note, remember the book of Ruth. How does it start?

Ruth 1:1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to reside in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

This is set in the time of the judges. A father and his sons thought they could escape the discipline of God by moving to another land and marrying foreign women and continuing to worship other gods. Even for this man and his sons, there was no escape other than dying. But out of that situation came Ruth. She was an unbeliever from the land of Moab who became a believer. It is a beautiful story. And remember Jonah. He tried to escape the will of God by jumping on a ship to Tarshish.

Until you/I arose, Deborah. Another Hebrew problem. Chisholm says the word for arose is an archaic 2nd feminine singular form and not first person feminine. Others that agree with Chisholm refer to Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. When I read "I Deborah arose," in the NASB, I wondered that it sounded rather arrogant. I actually expected something like a hiphil stem or causative because God caused her to arise.

So much for the conjugation. Now for the meaning. The word for "arose" has many meanings. It can mean to stand up or get up like Eglon in chapter 3. But other uses in the book of Judges that we have encountered include God raising up deliverers—appointment or commissioning. In chapter 2, God laid out the pattern of apostasy, repentance, God raising up or commissioning a deliverer who delivered Israel. God raised up Othniel (Judges 3:9) and Ehud (Judges 3:15).

As I said when teaching chapter 4, God raised up Deborah as a judge. She was not the deliverer. Deborah gave Barak the message from God to lead the troops. "Get up," she said. And she echoes that in Judges chapter 5:12.

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To repeat what I said in another lesson. In chapters 4 and 5, the functions of judge, deliverer and king killer are assigned to different people. In chapter 3 Ehud does all this on his own. In chapter 4 we see these functions accomplished by different people. Apparently, Barak was not able on his own to accomplish all these tasks. Deborah and Jael, being women could not lead the farmer army into war. Deborah was judging; Barak delivered by leading the troops; and Jael killed the representative of the king, the enemy troop commander.

Please excuse me for making a comment on a recent event that is tangential to what is going on in the book of judges.

Pregnant women flying? Really? Yes, this was going on before President Joe Biden mentioned it

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw_CHcKyRDE).

I flew with women as early as 1990. But typically, pregnant women did not fly. Pregnant women needed a waiver to fly. That may not be the case now for women in the first trimester of pregnancy.

See Air Force website for some additional details:

<https://www.552acw.acc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2466999/new-maternity-options-for-aviators/>

Many years ago, Muammar Al Gaddafi, perhaps jokingly then, said, “All right, then nobody can complain if we ask pregnant women to make parachute jumps.”

**Judges 5:8 (NASB) New gods were chosen;
Then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a
spear was seen Among forty thousand in
Israel.**

**Judges 5:8 (Chisholm) God chose new
leaders, then fighters appeared in the city**

gates; but, I swear, not a shield or spear could be found, among forty thousand in Israel.

**Judges 5:8 (Loeffel) Israel chose new gods—
Then war at the gates! A shield, was it seen? A
spear among forty thousand in Israel?**

Do you see what I mean? Very different in places. Similar overall meaning. For now, I'll go with professor Chisholm's translation.

The word translated as "fighters" by Chisholm is translated as "war" by Loeffel. Part of the problem is that the vowel points, are different in many different manuscripts. Remember, vowel points are not inspired. Loeffel suggests that there is a pun intended. The consonants could be pointed with vowels different ways. One of those ways has barley bread instead of war. Here is a helpful comment:

"Perhaps what is found in the text is the result of confusion over a deliberate pun intended by the author. As a result of Israel's religious adventurism they fell under the discipline of their God. War was at the very gates of the cities, because their new gods were powerless. As a result of lessened travel outside the walls all that was available to eat was barley bread, a grain fit only for animals."

Again and again, we are dealing with ancient Hebrew poetry which is using puns and plays on words that we in the West are unfamiliar with.

Although the wordings of the translations is different, the basic idea of shields and spears is clear. The Israelites were not well armed; they were not well trained. It was a "farmer army."

**Judges 5:9 (NASB) My heart goes out to the
commanders of Israel, The volunteers among
the people; Bless the Lord!**

Judges 5:9 (Chisholm) My heart went out to Israel's leaders, to the people who answered the call to war. Praise the Lord!

Judges 5:9 (Loeffel) My heart belongs to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people! Bless YHWH!

The comment from Loeffel is appropriate here:

“From the bleak picture of Israel before YHWH's intervention now Deborah's thought races forward to speak of the situation after the battle and she expresses her praise to the victorious warriors. This creates tension as it leaves the details of the battle yet unsung. These will be filled in later but the effect of this foretaste of the praise of victory underscores that all Israel needed to do to fulfill its destiny was to obediently let YHWH fight for them by volunteering for His cause. If such a victory could be won from such bleak beginnings how much more in the future from a position of the strength of wholeheartedness.”

Judges 5:10 (NASB) You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who travel on the road—shout in praise!

Judges 5:10 (Chisholm) You who ride on light-colored female donkeys, who sit on saddle cloths, you who walk on the road, pay attention!

Judges 5:10 (Loeffel) Let riders of white donkeys, Those who sit on saddles, And those who walk along the way Sing contemplatively!

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Loeffel gives a nice description of this verse:

“Deborah now returns to the "highway" theme she began in verse 6. There she looked at them before YHWH's intervention and they were deserted. Now they are filled with travellers. She speaks to Israel by dividing them into three classes. The "riders of white donkeys" refer to the elite aristocracy (2 Kings 4:8, 24; Judg. 10:4). The "saddle sitters" probably are the wealthy merchants who also can afford to ride, but not in the style of those who have white donkeys. The rest of the people can afford neither white donkeys nor saddles, so they just shuffle down the road on foot. Every person no matter his status has benefited from YHWH's intervention. He is faithful to all, no matter the class distinctions, therefore all owe their survival to Him. The highest honor they could perform is to worship YHWH in gratitude. The picture perhaps is that while they are on the roads and using them, they are to sing praises thoughtfully to themselves. This way praise becomes a normal part of their lives just as walking or riding down the road. Then as they approach a watering place and begin to hear the everyday noises of people dividing up the water, right there they are to give praise to YHWH for His great deliverance.”