

## Judges Chapter 5 Part 1

Tonight, we start a trek through the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges.

When I first looked at chapter 5, I was convinced that there wasn't any way I was going to be able to teach much from this chapter. It is Hebrew poetry. It is a difficult passage in Judges. As I have read and reread this chapter, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I may be able to illuminate some parts. There are some important lessons to be learned from this poem. Even so, I will likely only scratch the surface of this beautiful psalm.

Let me start by quoting Robbie Dean on Hebrew poetry and Judges chapter 5.

“This is Hebrew poetry and Hebrew poetry is a challenge to translate.”

“...poetic language makes use of a lot of idioms, it makes use of a lot of imagery, a lot of similes and metaphors that do not necessarily carry over from one language to another. So, it involves a tremendous amount of skill in order to not only translate it, you can translate it word for word but then you end up with somewhat of a wooden translation that may not make a lot of sense when it comes over into the English and then you have to start working on your English to try to make it read well as beautiful poetry in English. So it stretches the skill of the translator.”

Dr. Dean explained that there are different kinds of psalms. Obviously, we are dealing with praise in chapter 5. Within that category you can have a declarative praise which is based upon a specific act of God. There is also a descriptive praise about which Dr. Dean says, “In a descriptive praise psalm the writer is giving general praise to God, focusing on perhaps some attribute of God and talking about how great and wonderful and extolling the benefits and the blessings of God.”

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“So what we have here when we come to Judges 5 is a declarative praise psalm. The main idea of a psalm comes from the Hebrew word which means to remember and it has the idea of reminding us about the attributes of God, His person, who He is and what He has done in human history.”

A word of caution and emphasis. Robbie Dean is not saying the Hebrew word for psalm came from “remember” but that the central idea of a psalm is to recall or to remember something, especially what God has done.

Several times in the past several weeks, I mentioned that memory is important to God. He wants us to remember who He is and what He has done for us.

I have also alluded to faith-rest which should cause us to focus on the essence of God and our relationship to God the Father. Remember that we walk by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit who takes us to fellowship with Jesus Christ in whom we are located positionally. Our position in Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit takes us to God the Father, the omnipotent, omniscient God.

Here, specific acts of God are enshrined in poetry to be repeated as memory. Apparently, Israel had forgotten the great deliverance from Egypt. So, God has repeated His deliverance from the Canaanites in a way that is reminiscent of the deliverance from Egypt. There are parallels.

From Robert Chisholm:

“The juxtaposition of narrative and poetic accounts of the victory reminds us of Exodus 14:1-15:21, which reports and celebrates the Lord’s defeat of Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. The similarity may be more than coincidental, for there are other literary and thematic parallels between Exodus 14-15 and Judges 4-5, suggesting the narrator of Judges

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viewed the Lord's defeat of Sisera as a reactualization of his mighty victory over Pharaoh. The parallels include:

- (1) "Both accounts emphasize the strength of the enemy's horses and chariotry (Judg. 4:3, 7, 13, 15-16, 5:22, 28; cf. Exod 14:9, 17-18, 23, 28; 15:1, 4, 19)
- (2) "The waters of the Kishon River, like those of the Red Sea, are the Lord's instrument of destruction (Judg. 5:21; cf. Exod. 15:6, 10).
- (3) "In both instances the Lord confused/routed (Hebrew word) the enemy (Judg. 4:15; cf Exod. 14:24)
- (4) "In both instances the enemy was totally destroyed, as the language of Judges 4:16 (Hebrew), "not even one was left," and Exodus 14:28 (Hebrew) "not even one of them remained," makes clear."

"There are also parallels between Judges 4-5 and other parts of Exodus. Judges 4-5 views the Lord's battle with the enemy as a struggle for kingship over his people (note especially Judg. 5:3, 19), as does the Exodus account (Exod. 5:1-2, cf. 14:5, 8; 15:18). The same Hebrew word (Hebrew) describes the oppressive deeds of both Jabin and Pharaoh (cf. Judg. 4:3 with Exod. 3:9)."

Robbie Dean provides the following outline of chapter 5:

"The first major division is just the first verse which gives us the title of the psalm in verse 1. Then the second section which gets into the praise section [which] is a proclamation to praise Yahweh, and this is Judges 5:2-8. Then there is a report or description of the deliverance, this is in Judges 5:9-30. So the report of the deliverance, verses 9-30 and we will break that down a bit as we get into it."

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Outline of chapter 5:

- I. Title (verse 1)
- II. Proclamation to Praise Yahweh (verses 2-8)
- III. Description of the Deliverance (verses 9-30)

Before delving into Judges chapter 5, let us go down memory lane and read Exodus 14-15. Yes, this is a little long. But, since Exodus 14-15 has been compared to Judges 4-5, this should help us understand the Judges psalm. Then, read Judges 4-5. Again, this is long, but this will give us a bird's eye view of the passage and show us the character of God in once again repeating his spectacular deliverance from Israel's enemies. Note the similarities and the parallels.

As Robbie Dean said, the first verse functions as a title or introduction to the psalm. This may have been a spontaneous outburst of joyous memories.

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

**And sang.** This word for singing is often used of people who recognize what God has done. It reminds me of that song, "Count Your Blessing." It is used in our parallel passage in Exodus chapter 15:

**Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted;**

**The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.**

Exodus 15:1 has a similar function to Judges 5:1. The actual song starts within Exodus 15:1 unlike Judges 5:1. But the verse breaks are not inspired.

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The word is used twice at the beginning of the song of Moses and Miriam (NIV) or song of Moses and Israel (NASB). Right off the bat, these two songs are tied together. Deborah and Barak; Moses and Miriam/Israel.

Let me go off on a tangent here. An important tangent: appreciation for what “God has done.” Have you ever been so overwhelmed by a sudden appreciation for what God just did in your life? A blessing? A deliverance? And in your mind, you want to fall down on your knees and give thanks to God. I didn’t think I would ever say this, but if I fell down on my knees, I might have trouble getting back up. My knees are not what they used to be. But there have been times when an answer to prayer has brought tears to my wife’s and my eyes. God has allowed us to continue living after we believe in Jesus as savior. We participate in His plan. We benefit by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. We share in the outworking of His plan. We will share in His glory, being positionally in Jesus Christ having been imputed with His Righteousness. There are times when the memories cause us to be overwhelmed with emotion. So, yes. There are times we also will want to sing in our souls, glorifying God for who He is and what He does in history.

Don’t get me wrong. Spirituality is not about emotional experiences. But, there are times when you are spiritual that you may become vary emotional, remembering what God has done for you and others.

**On that day.** Which day is this? In context, it would have to follow whatever happened just prior to this:

**Judges 4:23 So God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan on that day before the sons of Israel.**

**Judges 4:24 And the hand of the sons of Israel pressed harder and harder upon Jabin the**

## **king of Canaan, until they had eliminated Jabin the king of Canaan.**

From the English translation, it suggests that when Sisera was killed, Jabin was subdued. On that day they composed and sang this song. The point is that God had completed the defeat of Jabin. This song expresses with emotion, gratitude and thanksgiving to God for what they have seen Him do.

There are songs in English that were recorded from similar upwellings of emotion based upon appreciation for God. One that comes to mind is “It is Well With My Soul.

**Saying.** This is an ordinary word for speaking. Here it is the content of the song.

### **Judges 5:2 “For the leaders leading in Israel, For the people volunteering, Bless the Lord!**

**For the leaders leading.** This is a difficult phrase. Robert Chisholm says “Miller argues that this is a reference to the Egyptian (sic) pharaohs who exercised authority in Canaan during the twelfth century BC. He translates the expression literally, “when the Pharaohs pharaohed,” (this is, “ruled”) and suggests that the narrator coined the verb.” In the Hebrew it does indeed look like the “Pharaohs pharaohed.”

The NIV says “**“When the princes in Israel take the lead,””**

The TDOT starts the entry on this word with, “The etymological questions associated with Heb. Pr’ are too complicated to be discussed satisfactorily here.” The TDOT is a 15 volume lexicon devoted to in-depth studies of individual words. And this is how they start the entry on this word.

Sometimes I think commentators or students of Hebrew may miss the mark on what Deborah was doing here. They get all formal and miss that

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this is poetry with literary license in which the author is allowed to stretch language almost to the breaking point. We need to laugh with God at divine humor.

May I suggest that Deborah, assuming for a minute that she was the author, used literary license here. She is having fun with the Hebrew language. She connected the deliverance from Canaan to the deliverance from Egypt. But she did it by saying the Israelite leaders led like pharaohs. They planned based upon God's command to Barak, they commanded, they led. Deborah links the two deliverances at the same time using how the pharaoh's ruled to show the resolve resulting in faith in God. And perhaps the leaders thought of themselves as important and wanted to impose their authority. We can step back and laugh at how they acted like pharaohs when in actuality it was God that solved the problem and they got a front row seat.

And there may be some divine humor here. Throughout the Bible, the writers of Scripture have fun with words and situations. You can read John chapter 9 to see the humor of the Pharisees interrogating the once blind man about Jesus. The once blind man says, “..You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?” The irony is overwhelming. The Pharisees are asking so many questions about Jesus that the once blind man asks if they want to become His disciples. So, perhaps, here. Deborah is poking fun at the leaders who previously were hesitant to trust God now volunteering and commanding their tribal farmers to the front lines like Pharaoh might have. Deborah is laughing and praising God and singing full of joy at what God did. Let us at least smile along with her.

**For the people volunteering.** Stop! Don't miss this phrase. Don't just read on by. Here is positive volition. Here is faith. We saw in chapter 4 the ferocious enemy arraigned against them: 900 **iron** chariots and a whole host of infantry and horsemen who have been highly trained. Now

they are volunteering to go to battle because God said so. No, you don't see the word "faith" in the text. You see faith in action. Just what James wanted to see in his New Testament book, "show me your faith." So they did. They volunteered, because... they... trusted... God.

In David's final days, he asked for volunteers to build the temple in Jerusalem.

**1 Chronicles 29:5 Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?"**

**1 Chronicles 29:6 Then the rulers of the fathers' households, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of thousands and hundreds, with the supervisors of the king's work, offered willingly;...**

The underlined words is the word we are dealing with.

There are other examples of people offering themselves in the service of God's work. So, we too should be everyday offering ourselves to God by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

**Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will**



## **of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

At the risk of overextending my explanation of free will/positive volition, let me pull some quotes from the TDOT:

“For all occurrences of the word group in the OT, as well as in Postbiblical Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic, the element of free will is determinative. The act of giving, the gift, and the decision are all free and voluntary. The basic meaning of the root *ndb* can therefore be defined as “prove oneself freely willing.”

Concerning the verb and noun, “In the majority of its occurrences, it means “freewill offering” and refers to the offerings of private individuals outside the regular sacrificial system.”

There is a difference between *ndb* and other synonyms. “Nonetheless, this very difference made it an especially appropriate vehicle for expressing praise, joy, and thanksgiving to Yahweh freely and unconditionally.”

“In some cases, the hithpael or hithpaal (Aramaic) of the verb *ndb* suggests a free decision or choice of a particular action. Examples include the willingness to go into battle expressed in the Song of Deborah (Jgs. 5:2,9)...”

**Bless the Lord.** There is possibly a play on the name Barak (Baraq) and bless (barak). They sound similar. And in this psalm, Barak blesses the Lord Yahweh. Baraq baraks the Lord.

**Judges 5:3 Hear, you kings; listen, you dignitaries! I myself—to the Lord, I myself will sing, I will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel!**

## **Hear you kings; listen, you dignitaries!**

From Robert Chisholm: “The address to kings and rulers (v. 3) sets the tone for the entire poem. Yahweh’s battle with the Canaanites was a test of power to determine whether King Jabin of Canaan or Yahweh would rule over Israel (see v. 19). This song of victory was appropriate because all kings needed to know of the royal splendor and power of victorious Yahweh, the God of Israel.”

But this address to kings and dignitaries has a wider application than just to the battle in Israel. Are the physical kings and dignitaries present to hear this psalm? No. But the “dignitaries” in Heaven are present and are listening to the psalm. So perhaps this is a tacit indication of the angelic conflict. We know in the Church Age that angels are watching us and learning about the character of God through His actions.

**Hear.** This is the standard Hebrew word for hearing. Like the “Shema” in

## **Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!**

Except, here in Judges the “hear” is in the plural.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also include:

## **Deuteronomy 6:5 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

**Give ear.** This word is often used in the Psalms and other poetry like in the Psalm of Moses:

## **Deuteronomy 32:1 “Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth!**